Disorganizing Schools: A Radical Pragmatist's Approach to

Schooling, or Why Fixing People is Not Enough

BY

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For Elizabeth, Charles, and Theodore.

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Introduction: What's my job, again?

There is an old joke that teachers like to tell about teaching. It goes something like this: I signed up to be a science (or math, or English) teacher, but instead I became a psychologist, a nurse, a disciplinarian, a parent, a social worker, a referee, a confidante, a role model, a guidance counselor, a life coach, etc. This joke interests me for two reasons. First, it says something important about what many people think the job of teaching is all about. Secondly, this anecdote makes clear that a lot of people (some teachers, too) believe that teaching should not really be about any of the things listed above. It seems that for many people, teaching is simple enough: it is about giving something (our knowledge) to someone else (our students). Perhaps more interestingly, though, the joke suggests that despite what many people think teaching is supposed to be about, it turns out that in practice it is already about something else.

This dissertation is about that something else. More specifically, it is about examining what teaching could be about and why. It tries to respond to the questions that the anecdote above only hints at: How should we define the role of the teacher? Where should the job of the teacher begin and end? Given the often impossible odds that teachers and students face in many urban schools, what should teachers do and why? If we take these questions seriously, it means examining what we believe about the purposes of schooling and the role of teachers in schools and communities. More importantly, perhaps, it would mean asking questions about the three decades of failed education reform in urban areas (Payne). It would mean asking what possible reason for staying in school a teacher could give to a low-income student of color who knows that

when she graduates there will be no living-wage job for her and she will not have the skills or supports to complete college (Marsh).

When thinking about our work in schools, then, we might begin by asking ourselves what our most important concerns should be and how we should go about addressing them. Should we consider questions about inequity and economic opportunity in urban spaces when we design schools and curricula? Or, as many have suggested, perhaps we should focus on raising standards and developing a uniform curriculum for all students, no matter where they live or how few (or how many) resources their school and community might have. But, other questions remain. For example, should we consider student circumstances and community contexts when we think about the purpose and design of schools? Or, should we ignore social context and focus on a set of best practices in our classrooms? This is, in fact, what many school reform advocates argue today, pinning all their hopes on improving teachers and schools (i.e., raising standardized test scores). But what about the individual and collective needs and concerns of local communities? And, what happens when these needs and concerns conflict with official pronouncements on what schools and teachers should be doing?

Working as a high school teacher on the South Side of Chicago, I began to ask myself some of these questions. What was I attempting to do with my time in schools and why? What did my students think we should be doing? And, what would best prepare my students for the life they wanted to live? The more I looked into these questions, the more difficult they seemed to answer. Oftentimes, I felt that I was simply asking the wrong questions. Given the circumstances in our school, I thought, maybe sticking to the official curriculum and trying to get it right was the best that my students and I could hope for.

Like any teacher, I had access to official job descriptions, state and local standards, and curriculum plans, all of which were supposed to help me figure out what I was supposed to be doing and why. But, very few of the answers I gleaned from these official sources seemed to address the concerns that were seeping into our school from the community outside (concerns like unemployment, crime, gun violence, pollution, incarceration, poor nutrition, health, etc.). In fact, none of the answers that I was offered through official channels seemed to show any understanding of or have any connection with the realities that students, teachers, parents, and administrators faced on the South Side of Chicago where I taught.

During my time as a high school teacher we had two shootings take place in front of our school and two students were murdered in broad daylight, just blocks away. I had the police visit my classroom one morning to arrest a student on a parole violation; the situation ended with the student trying to make a run for it and the police violently tackling the young man to the floor, knocking over desks and frightening many of the others students in the process. I watched my principal get punched in the mouth while trying to break up a fight. On another day, I listened in horror when a woman working in the main office made an announcement over the public address system requesting additional security—we could all hear the fight breaking out in the background. These are just a few of the things I saw or heard about while I was teaching.

I wondered how we could imagine schools as spaces that were so disconnected from place. It took great imaginative effort to do this, as the realities of the neighborhood were all around us. I also wondered if I were really doing my students a favor by simply sticking to the college-prep curriculum, when for so many of them, college was anything

but a sure thing. How, I wondered, had we come to understand schools as disconnected from the communities they were meant to serve? Or, perhaps, more accurately, I wanted to know why we thought we could teach our students without first considering the life they were living and the spaces they called home.

How could we realistically expect students and teachers to work as disinterested scholars, ignoring the world around them, when that world seemed to affect everything we did or tried to do? I wondered what it really meant (and what we missed) when we (i.e., teachers) said that we were there to simply teach our subjects. In this project I explore what I learned when I started asking some of these questions about the relationship between my work in schools, the students I taught, and the community where they lived.

The Project

In this dissertation, I attempt to tell a story and then analyze the ways in which neoliberalism defines and delimits education policy and practice in this country. Specifically, I critique how free market values and policies fail to address the educational needs and democratic potential of urban working class students. I produce an alternative view of education—one grounded in long-standing traditions of civic engagement and political activism (Anyon; Dewey; Freire; Giroux; McLaren). I see this counternarrative as a more legitimate and effective model for reform than current efforts that address the crises in public education through market-based mandates. Thus, my work enters a conversation with other progressive educators and seeks to build on or extend the work of these teachers, scholars, and activists by proposing strategies for how to link our schools

more directly with the concerns of the surrounding communities.

This project explores the rise in popularity of discourses of engagement—service learning and civic engagement, in particular—in both schools and teacher education programs in order to reveal how they are linked to neoliberal policies in contradictory ways. I then suggest some alternative approaches to teacher engagement with communities and community-based groups—ways that leverage community-organizing strategies, yet still honor and incorporate the knowledge and experience of community members (DeStigter). Such approaches seek to connect schools and communities in ways that see the success of one being directly linked to the success of the other.

I attempt to ground this project in the work of actual teachers, activists, and community members, so that I might better understand the relationship between schools and communities as it unfolds in the messy and often complicated spaces where this work takes place. I talked with many teachers, activists, and community organizers in order to get a sense of how people were thinking about this type of work, and I have focused this dissertation on several stories that illustrate this difficult, frustrating, but often rewarding effort.

I understand the spaces where communities and schools intersect as sites of "emergent culture" (Williams), where neoliberal education policy is mediated, performed, and resisted by educators, students, and engaged community members. While the stories of teachers, community organizers, and teacher educators provide me with a rich text for analyzing the ways in which dominant public discourses about teachers, schools, and students attempt to constitute and constrain their subjects (Foucault), these stories also illustrate how working class models of community organizing and activism

provide a potential resource for teachers and students seeking to resist such constraints (Schutz).

As Helen Jun concisely summarizes it in *Race for Citizenship*, the cornerstone of neoliberal ideology is a commitment to dismantling state supported public goods like schools: "Formed in opposition to Keynesian economic theory, the key tenets of neoliberalism are deregulation, privatization, and the dismantling of social services—or what is now commonly referred to as 'getting government out of the way'"(125). This reorientation toward the state, she argues, has had a profound impact on how we have traditionally understood the rights and entitlements of citizenship. In other words, what used to count as basic services available to all citizens—education, social security, housing, etc.—have now been transformed (or are in the process of being transformed) into private commodities available only to those who can afford them. Neoliberalism can be understood, then, as the idea that market values and imperatives should be applied to all aspects of human life, including schools and education.

My work builds on theories of citizenship education, civic engagement, and service learning, and draws from the educational theories of American pragmatists, popular education advocates, community organizers, and proponents of culturally relevant pedagogy in order to frame the work of teachers in schools and communities in ways that significantly differ from how this work is currently understood through the neoliberal lens—a lens that tends to ignore situational constraints on achievement and hold poor people responsible for their poverty. Theorizing an ecological understanding of teaching and schooling that involves educators in the life of the communities where they work, I explore narratives of community development and organizing that stress

intentional relationship building in the service of collective action (Alinsky; Anyon; Ayers; Chambers; Hong; hooks; Payne). My hope is to expand current ideas about teaching and curriculum at a time when most reform measures attempt to do the opposite (i.e., constrain and restrict what teachers can do).

Discourses of citizenship, service, the public sphere, and character education have helped to institutionalize certain ways to participate in community-based work while marginalizing other forms of community engagement. This "public turn" in education, however, has helped make clear some of the limitations and possibilities inherent in mainstream ideas about service learning and civic engagement. In the stories I relate here, I try to call attention to and critique the ways in which neoliberal economic and social policies have coopted and perverted popular discourses about the civic and moral obligations of citizens, individual responsibility and achievement (Anyon; Cruikshank; Fraser; Lipman; Rose; Schutz). The purpose for doing so is to frame the conversation about schools and teachers in ways that emphasize what people can do (and are doing) to resist the mandates of the marketplace, rather than, say, how individuals fail to meet certain standards foisted upon them by institutions.

This project comes at a moment of several crises in public education that can be linked to neoliberal education policies: the privatization and militarization of schools, the dismantling of unions, and the deskilling of teachers, to name a few (Anyon; Ayers; Lipman). These crises help create popular narratives about teaching and education that demonize teachers and devalue their work, which I work to deconstruct in order to show how these discourses function in service of a neoliberal agenda. I then articulate a counternarrative in order to rehabilitate the public discourse on education and promote a

much broader view of the work teachers can do in schools and communities.

My response to the current predicament in public education is both theoretical and contextually grounded in the realities of the teacher recruitment and retention crisis. Salaries, pensions, and benefits are being cut, unions are under attack, and attempts to abolish collective bargaining rights are underway in several states (Anyon; Payne). Nationally, about 30 percent of teachers leave during their first two years (McCann 55). In Chicago, 40 percent of teachers leave within their first four years of teaching (Payne 72). This is a problem that goes far beyond individual schools, affecting larger communities in myriad ways (Ingersoll and Smith).

Many beginning teachers cite "concerns about having the freedom to put into practice the concepts and beliefs about teaching they have embraced during their college and university training" as a major reason for leaving the profession (6). Teachers note that a "lack of teacher influence over schoolwide and classroom decision making" is another reason they no longer wish to teach (32). At a moment when we hear loud public cries for better teachers, the job of teaching has become so unappealing that it is incredibly difficult to recruit, retain, and support good teachers in urban schools.

The crisis in teacher retention and recruitment has been exacerbated by education policies that seek to define success and link funding to individual performance on standardized tests. Lipman notes: Neoliberal restructuring of education has given new authority to standardization and quantification of learning ("High Stakes" 81). Failure on standardized tests now provides a "scientific" rationale for further intervention and control in urban schools by policy makers who champion charter schools, back-to-basics curriculum, "merit-based" pay, and more test preparation and teacher accountability. Yet,

the economic and political forces that are tied up in governing public education serve very narrow interests—ones that include corporations who publish standardized tests and politically conservative groups who seek to dismantle public education—and have helped to redefine the role of the teacher in terms of these interests (Lipman; Payne; Simon).

In what ways might teachers resist the neoliberal discourses of regulation and control in schools? Williams suggests that we look to the work of emergent culture as a kind of action that "depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of forms" (126). The kinds of forms that Williams describes evolve from, but are not limited to, Do-it-Yourself (DIY) subcultures and publications as well as direct assertions of new possibilities like reclaiming public spaces, buildings, and monuments for arts, protests, public theater and art, marches, demonstrations, or something else entirely.

Teachers, then, in collaboration with community-based organizations, activists, students, parents and administrators might find similar or related ways of knowing and doing that challenge dominant discourses by reappropriating and reinventing symbols, spaces, and cultural forms. Such intentional collaborations around shared concerns can elicit the forms of emergent culture Williams suggests above. These types of cultural forms, then, can create ways of seeing and participating in community life that evolve from particular circumstances and help us to resist, alter, or augment current practices. Cultural productions that emerge from forms of community engagement might then take us closer to effectively challenging dominant ways of doing and knowing (Fleischer and Schaafsma).

I look to urban schools and communities to reveal challenges to dominant paradigms about what we can do in schools, because so often urban schools bear the

brunt of neoliberal reforms in ways that may not be apparent in their suburban counterparts. Narratives from urban schools, then, open alternative avenues for investigation into the ways dominant discourses of schooling, knowledge, and standardization limit, control, and dominate what and how students are taught. Examining some of these narratives provides a framework for different forms of political action enacted by real people in real situations. In other words, listening to the stories of others can help us as we attempt to reshape public spaces like schools. Such public actions (attempts to reshape our schools) might be what Saul Alinsky, a community organizer and political agitator in Chicago in the 1930s, called a form of "radical pragmatism," or a belief that "different people, in different situations, and different times will construct their own solutions" (4) to the unique challenges they face in their communities.

Radical pragmatism, then, can be understood as a way toward resisting the types of thinking and schooling that support neoliberal logic and mandates. Radical pragmatism's emphasis on organic, community-based cooperation and solutions relies on forms of conversation and communication that are connected to community priorities, concerns, and experience. This emphasis on community-based cooperation and concerns through direct communication and collaboration with community members is what Jay Robinson has called a type of "civic literacy" (14-15). Articulating ways in which school-based activism might work in urban areas could then help teachers and students develop Robinson's notion of civic literacy in their own schools and communities.

An emphasis in schools on civic literacies, as well as how politics, culture, and economics function in specific locations, could promote different ways of knowing and doing in schools around what Alinsky calls "communities of interest." A community of

interest can be understood in its simplest form as a group of people coming together around an issue or concern that matters to them. More importantly, perhaps, radical pragmatism can help us reclaim schools as spaces where teachers and students can explore important questions about what it means to live in the world with others and determine for themselves how to do it rather than conform to the status quo. As Alinsky reminds us, "the first step in community organization is community disorganization…Present arrangements must be disorganized if they are to be displaced by new patterns that provide the opportunities and means for citizen participation" (116).

Thus, in this study I examine different attempts toward the kind of disorganization that Alinsky calls for above. With an eye toward that end, I explore the relationship between neoliberal education policies and the stories of individuals who are shaped by and yet resist dominant narratives about education in Chicago: members of community-based organizations and activists working in Chicago; a high school teacher using community-organizing strategies in her work; and myself, a teacher educator, and former high school teacher, using organizing strategies in an urban teacher preparation program.

This multilayered approach to analyzing the effects of neoliberal education policies allows me to show schools as paradoxical sites where efforts to regulate and control are contested and mediated by local contexts that can give rise to public action. Exploring the role of community-organizing work in these counternarratives will help me highlight ways of thinking about schools and teachers that produce alternative visions to the ways in which current reform efforts narrate and organize what we do in schools today.

The first chapter, which outlines the theoretical framework for the dissertation—

theories of neoliberal discourse and its relationship to current education reforms—sets up the context and the stakes of this project. In particular, this chapter examines how education and economic policies linked to a neoliberal agenda have transformed our public schools and changed the role of the teacher and school. I suggest that these policies lead to the colonization of urban spaces where local communities have little say over the injection (or extraction) of resources and investments.

The second chapter will explore theories and ideas about civic engagement from the American pragmatism of John Dewey and Jane Addams to the community organizing strategies pioneered by Saul Alinsky and further developed by Ed Chambers and Mike Gecan of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). This chapter examines the possibilities and limitations of the popular discourses of engagement in schools like volunteerism, service learning, and civic action in order to suggest some alternatives for addressing the needs of urban schools and communities.

The third chapter, a sketch of my personal story as a high school teacher attempting to integrate community-organizing strategies into my work as a teacher and service-learning coach on the far South Side of Chicago, will show how these theories function—the work they might actually do—in an urban school context. This chapter tells the story about our campaign to develop a relationship with our local alderman and defines some of the limits of as well as the possibilities for collective school-based action.

Chapters 4 will highlight the stories of several key participants in different education-related sites and examine the work that these individuals do trying to shape schools and communities. This chapter will outline how these individuals use

community-organizing and development strategies to impact schools and redefine the roles of teacher and students in relation to their communities.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, will build on these stories to suggest what teacher educators and policy makers can learn from these attempts to resist dominant narratives about deficiency and failure in urban schools. In particular, I examine how teacher educators can encourage and support the development of what Todd DeStigter calls "citizen teachers." What does it mean to reclaim teaching from the logic of neoliberalism and return it to the messy and dynamic contexts of local schools and communities? I hope this work will move us toward an answer to this question and contribute to a substantial change in the current conversation regarding schools, students, and teachers. Specifically, I aim to reinvigorate conversations that describe schools as sites for the preparation of an active citizenry aspiring to progressive goals that go beyond the imperatives of the marketplace.

1. **The Way It's Going: Neoliberalism and the Colonization of Urban Schools**

"As another has well said, to handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst kind of lynching. It kills one's aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime." –Carter G. Woodson

"It is mere pretense, then, to suppose that we can stick by the de facto, and not raise at some points the question of de jure: the question of by what right, the question of legitimacy." –John Dewey

In a talk given in Dakar some years ago and reprinted under the title, *Recapturing*, Paulin Hountondji, the Beninese philosopher and politician, challenged the African scientific community by asking the assembled researchers and economists the deceptively simple question: "Are we satisfied or not with the way it is going?" (238). Hountondji followed up his question by saying, "As long as we look upon the problems of scientific research only from the angle of the individual performance and career, we have almost nothing to criticize" (238). As his talk continued, however, it became clear that Hountondji had something besides individual careers in mind: he wanted his audience to examine the value and purpose of their work; he wanted them to look closely at the relationship between what they did and its effects on local communities; he wanted them to examine their connections to the industries and economies in wealthy Northern countries—particularly those of former colonial powers.

Hountondji invited his audience to carefully consider the ways in which their scientific research and the development of individual careers had been used to advance certain economic and political goals. Who had benefited (and who had not), both economically and politically, from the results? What changes are needed, he asked, when we consider the social and political context, the consequences of our work for local communities, and the destination and uses of the results of our research?

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These questions led Hountondji to explore how research and economic development had helped redefine the value of certain types of knowledge in society. He wanted to know how the results of these activities could embed themselves in the society that produced them. How did society manage to appropriate the results and to what end? Each of these questions, Hountondji explained, would require researchers to reassess the social and political context of science and its relationship to society by interrogating itself (238). Doing so, though, would require widening the scope of inquiry to include the collective benefits (or costs) to the larger community. And, it would require a new understanding and acknowledgement of the way in which "disinterested" scholarship was complicit in reproducing a system of exploitation and inequality, even when certain individuals clearly seemed to benefit.

Those of us concerned with "the way it's going" in public education and policy today have much to learn from Hountondji's questions and the post-colonial context. I suggest here that there is more than a coincidental similarity between urban education policy and research in the post-colonial Africa of which Hountondji speaks. In fact, what Hountondji criticizes here—namely, that the research is done largely to benefit the researcher or the country or company that the researcher works for—is precisely how education research, policymaking and reform have often been conceived of and enacted here in the United States. That is, education research and policy that affects urban schools is often no different than the kind of research Hountondji criticizes (Anyon; Lipman). Too often our work ignores the ways in which the research and policy paradigms largely benefit the researchers and policy makers while ignoring the effects on local communities. Such practices, I suggest, are rooted in a type of colonial thinking and

acting that have been rearticulated through a neoliberal logic.

How does this work, exactly? According to Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mingolo there are four interconnected spheres of power and control that characterize colonialization:

1) economic control (i.e., what Hountondji calls the "problem of dependence")

2) control of authority (e.g., forms of government, financial, and legal systems)

3) control of the public sphere (e.g., gender and sexuality)

4) control of knowledge and subjectivity (i.e., education)

Tlostanova and Mingolo's formulation is useful for educators and education researchers because it shows us how our work is linked to the larger projects of economic development, subject formation, control, and regulation. In particular, Tlostanova and Mingolo note that control of knowledge and subjectivity happens "through education and colonizing the existing knowledges, which is the key and fundamental sphere of control that makes domination possible" (135). This means that outside authorities, like university researchers working for large publishing companies, define, package, and disseminate only certain types of knowledge while ignoring others (Simon).

Schools and university researchers legitimize only certain ways of being and understanding in the world that benefit only certain groups. What's more, Tlostanova and Mingolo show that these colonial practices operate in conjunction with neoliberal mandates. He notes: "The neoliberal agenda translated the previous mission of development and modernization, into the Washington Consensus of granting the market economy priority over social regulation" (136). This is just to say that what was once a public good (i.e., education and the production of knowledge) has largely been turned

over to logic of the marketplace (Marsh).

One example of this phenomenon in education is the move to privatize public education. The neoliberal agenda that has largely structured the reform movement of the last decade has used the rhetoric of "experimentation," "change," "efficiency," and "alternative" approaches to teaching and schooling to create more and better opportunities for private investment in the $500 billion market we once called public education. Such changes (i.e., fusing state and market concerns) are what prompted John Katzman, founder of the Princeton Review test-prep company, to suggest to would-be education investors at an investors conference that they should "look for companies developing software that can replace teachers for segments of the school day, driving down labor costs" (Simon).

The research, development, and production of "educational" products for these companies take place within a neoliberal framework that sees more and better curriculum as the best way to train and control subjects in so-called failing schools, while the larger socioeconomic and political concerns for communities most affected by such changes can go unmentioned. Communities most impacted by such proposals, of course, have almost no say in how and why this knowledge is produced or enacted in their communities. And, education "entrepreneurs" like Katzman often do not discuss who will pay for the research and development of these new education solutions. In other words, as we have already seen with charter schools, what we are told at the outset will be increased efficiency and savings for the public, ends up being an excuse to dismantle unions, fire teachers, and redirect tax dollars into the hands of private companies (Lipman).

Education researchers, policy makers, teacher educators, and teachers are

compelled by the colonial analogy to question the value of their own work and examine the impact of this work on students and the communities in which these students live. Education researchers, teachers, and university educators might begin by asking themselves what's working and what's not, and why; answers to these questions, if thoroughly examined, can point us, possibly, in different directions, directions that might lead us toward what Jean Anyon describes as a "politically radical research paradigm" that involves movement building and organizing to change the material conditions in urban communities (25). Similarly, Tlostanova and Mignolo, echoing Williams' ideas about emergent culture, argue for what they describe as the "de-colonial option" where "knowledge is no longer or necessarily produced in the academy. Living experiences generate knowledge to solve problems presented in everyday living" (144).

      As education professionals, it is important that we ask questions about the kind of work we engage in, the knowledge we produce, and our ongoing relationships to corporations, urban schools, and communities (Giroux, "Teachers" 39), much like the questions that Hountondji asks about the purpose and value of scientific research in post-colonial Africa. Why ask these questions about our work? If we begin by recognizing the connections (or lack of connections) between education research and policy, economic policy and opportunity for students, and the effects (both intended and unintended) that school reforms have on local communities and teacher training, recruitment, and retention, we better position ourselves to articulate different ways forward. Researchers, policy makers, teachers, and teacher educators interested in lasting education reforms would do well to begin with research that attempts to unravel the way in which colonial practices—e.g., knowing what is best for others, extracting and exploiting resources,

setting up systems of dependence—and neoliberal mandates have carried over into our own work.

The first step in this project requires a careful examination of how research in urban schools resembles a colonial practice in that it has been coopted by a neoliberal policy agenda, often with dire consequences for local populations. By taking this first step, a more honest examination of the role of education researchers, teachers, and public policies in reproducing poverty and increasing inequality becomes possible (Anyon; Lipman; Marsh). Doing so might also help us change current trends in urban education policy by adopting more action-oriented research and teacher preparation paradigms that acknowledge that what goes on (and what does not go on) inside urban schools is inextricably linked to what happens (and what does not happen) outside of them in the surrounding communities (Anyon; Lipman; Marsh; Rose). To put the problem another way, research that tells us how to teach Shakespeare (or math, or biology, etc.) better, while perhaps interesting and useful in many ways, will never help us address the problems of poverty and inequality that create the most significant barriers to learning and opportunity for most low-income students (Marsh). Not, that is, if we continue to organize and structure our schools in traditional ways.

Echoing Hountondji's concerns about the relationship between scientific research and the local community, education researcher Pauline Lipman notes the importance of exploring the link between education research and policy as well as the people affected by neoliberal policy mandates. She notes:

> There is little critical examination of the genesis of these policies, of whose interests they serve, of their social implications, or of their meanings for teachers, communities, and most of all the nearly one-half million students in Chicago

Public Schools, 90 percent of whom are students of color and 84 percent of whom are classified as low income. (Lipman, "Making the Global City" 380)

Lipman makes it clear that as researchers, teachers, and administrators, we need to interrogate our role (or lack of a role) in developing, implementing and reshaping education and economic policies that impact urban schools.

In order to do this, as Jean Anyon notes, we will need to take a careful look at the links between neoliberal economic policies and the maintenance of poverty in urban communities (29). In other words, we must continue to ask whom our economic policies benefit and how they are being used, if we are to determine just how unhappy (or happy) we are with "the way it's going" in urban schooling; doing so, will help us better situate ourselves to develop effective ways to challenge unjust policies that serve to reproduce inequality in our cities.

Looking only at what we do in schools (fixing teachers, students, and curriculum), while ignoring what happens outside of them (the social, political, and economic forces that influence them), is to legitimize the view that poverty and inequality are problems outside the purview of education. Or, as Jean Claude Brizzard, the former CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, said during a recent visit to my university, "We can't fix poverty. What we can fix, are people" (Brizzard). Brizzard's comments crystalize the neoliberal logic that emphasizes an assumed link between individual responsibility and merit, while simultaneously legitimizing inequality in schools and society.

According to folks like Brizzard, if you happen to be young person who is poor and lives in a violent and underresourced community they understand this to be your own fault. Don't come looking for help from your schools or your government. The reasons

that you are still living there in that neighborhood and attending a school that won't prepare you to study at Harvard, have to do with your own abilities, intelligence, and resourcefulness, rather than, say, the connections between your school, your community, and the larger economic and political context (Anyon).

I propose a view of research, teaching, and learning that sees the concerns of education (what we do in schools) as being always and already part of what goes on in our communities (what happens outside of school). I look to stories about community engagement as way to articulate what schooling might look like if educators, communities, and students were to take the intersection of community and schools as a starting point for what happens each day in schools.

In order to better understand the challenges we face in urban education, however, it's important, briefly, to examine the recent history of education reform and its effects on urban schools. For the past thirty years, education reform has shifted its focus away from questions of equity in the public school system and moved toward a reliance on data driven systems of accountability, standards, and scientifically "proven" curricula (Lipman "This is America" 100). This push to understand education reform and opportunity exclusively in terms of individual achievement has helped to eliminate broader concerns for the welfare of the larger community. No longer are we concerned with the social movements of the past that coalesced around questions of equity for all and focused on things like affirmative action, social inclusion, racial justice, equal access, and equal rights for women (100). Instead, we fixate on a mechanistic view of education that stresses a narrow understanding of individual compliance and achievement.

Today's education reform environment emphasizes efficacy, freedom, skill proficiency, individual development, a fact-based curriculum, discipline, and a return to back-to-basics teaching—where teaching means that docile students receive official knowledge and teachers are there to deliver it in officially mandated ways. Such reform efforts revolve around state-administered exams and the implementation of a standards-driven curriculum that ensures the same thing is taught to all students in all schools. The aims of such approaches—state-mandated tests based on state-mandated standards that reflect a narrow view of "cultural literacy" championed by E.D. Hirsch and others—have led to research studies and policies that seek to turn entire populations of people into objects (human capital) for scientific examination, development, and classification. These studies aim to produce docile human capital without considering the relationship between individuals, their experiences, knowledges, or socioeconomic context.

Low-income students who can be cultivated into valuable resources (human capital) are extracted from their neighborhoods and encouraged to sell their labor power in order to create wealth for people elsewhere, leaving those who cannot or do not want to participate in the system to live in underdeveloped urban ghettos. The justification for a neoliberal system, one that rewards the few and disregards the many, is characterized by a meritocratic fiction that revolves around a state-mandated examination that is used to legitimize and reproduce individual social positions.

According to education theorist Henry Giroux, "we live at a time when state legislators and federal officials are increasingly calling for the testing of teachers and the implementation of standardized curriculum" (38). The examination has, in many ways, become the single most important determining factor in urban schools today. Not only

does it inform and produce the need for future testing, but it also informs teacher training

and licensing, provides or denies access to further education, and influences instruction

and curriculum development. There is currently a national movement underway (and this

is already happening in many states) to link teacher evaluations to student performance

on these exams, raising the stakes even higher for both teachers and students. Borrowing

a term from the business community, teachers in New York state are to be measured for

their "value-added" to the school (defined almost exclusively by student test scores);

these value-added ratings can comprise up to 40 percent of a teacher's evaluation in some

states and are made public in an attempt to shame teachers into raising student test scores

(Strauss). This scheme to link teacher ratings and salaries to student test scores has been

euphemistically termed "merit-based" pay. The seduction of these common sense reforms

is undeniable, since the logic of these reforms appeal to deeply held beliefs about

rewarding those who work hard to raise test scores (good teachers) and punishing those

who do not (bad teachers) (Kumashiro).

Pauline Lipman, who seeks to unmask the contradictions in the current reform

rhetoric, echoes Giroux's concerns:

> In a system of blatant inequalities, the agenda of standards, tests, and
> accountability is framed in the language of equality and justice. All students and
> schools are evaluated by 'the same test' and 'held to the same standards.'
> ("Making the Global City" 390)

The dishonest rhetoric of the neoliberal reform movement emphasizes equity and access

while neglecting the larger questions of racial segregation and economic and social

inequality; it does so by shifting the focus of education reform to questions of curriculum

content, standards, and accountability—all understood in terms of individual

responsibility. At precisely the moment when justice and equality has been translated to mean access (i.e., access to curriculum, high quality teachers, job and internship opportunities, etc.) we have successfully sidestepped questions about exploitation and inequality. That is, access is always understood as something that is determined by merit, and, therefore, allows us to imagine that all opportunities are always accessible to those who have worked hard enough to deserve them (or so the myth goes).

All of this is to say that when we suggest that the only thing that poor students need is access to a rigorous curriculum and a good teacher (presuming we can provide both) then the future success or failure of that individual can only be understood in these same individualistic terms—terms that effectively deny any connection between success and socioeconomic status. Standardization in this system comes to mean fairness and equity, though, interestingly, these terms are never used in relation to community investment, school funding, or extracurricular or economic opportunities. In the latter realms fairness, equity, and standardization are irrelevant. The neighborhood or community from which a student comes, in fact, becomes irrelevant, too, since what matters here is access to curriculum, a good teacher, and the individual's self-discipline and work ethic. We are made to understand through the logic of neoliberalism that where you are from has nothing to do with where you might go. A great idea in theory, but it's one that doesn't work as well in practice.

To put this yet another way, if you are poor and not doing well in school the reasons you are not doing well in school have to do with personal failures on your part, failures, it's worth noting, that have nothing to do with the problems of poverty, inequality or state interventions on behalf of private enterprise and capital accumulation.

This is to say that if we believe that education alone is the only viable solution to poverty and we provide you with an education, then we can really only blame you for your poverty and lack of success (we gave you access to an education, after all). This is, for all intents and purposes, just another version of blaming poor people for being poor (Marsh).

Such views about education also absolve individuals (e.g., policy makers, students, school administrators, teachers, university educators) from having to widen their disciplinary focus to include the ways in which neoliberal economic policies maintain poverty, and by extension, ghetto schooling (Anyon). Ignoring the linkages (or saying there's nothing we can do about them—which amounts to the same thing) between economic policies, poverty, and schools also frees policy makers to reorganize schools according to market-based mandates that valorize notions of choice and freedom (while providing very little of either in practice), exacerbating an already high stakes environment by turning the right to education funding into a race to the top with clear winners and losers (Lipman).

Neoliberal policies and the powerful discourses they engender have made it increasingly difficult for educators to identify and adopt new ways to address the problems of poverty and inequality that have such profound effects on school performance (Anyon). In order to find a way out of this predicament, educators from across the spectrum will need to understand how these discourses and policies function and then identify new strategies and approaches to teaching and schooling that will help us to change them.

The Rise of Neoliberal School Reforms: The Age of Assessment and the Era of Accountability

The call for an increase in corporate influence in schools came in the 1980s when then President Ronald Regan "spoke out strongly in favor of increased business support to education as a way to compensate for decreased public funding" (Ray and Mickelson 4). With such calls came a new articulation of public school reform and a way of talking about education reform filtered through the lens of neoliberal logic. Of course, the connections between public school and business interests as well as appeals to the cult of efficiency go back much further than this—all the way back to the founding of our first public schools, in fact (Marsh). Horace Mann, arguing for the creation of free public schools for all—in one his twelve reports submitted between 1837-1848 to the Massachusetts Board of Education—appealed to wealthy industrialist for financial support by suggesting that a rudimentary education would produce more compliant and efficient workers as well as better citizens. But, what is important for this discussion is the rise of neoliberalism in the mid-1960s as the dominant set of economic policies that would (and continue to) influence urban school reform in profound ways (Anyon; Harvey; Lipman).

The discourse of neoliberalism is synonymous with a discourse of common sense: it valorizes freedom, choice, efficiency, accountability, character, progress and self-improvement (development) tied to economic incentives and the rule of market forces. All of these ideas, as David Harvey argues in *Neoliberalism*, appeal to our instincts and intuitions, as they build on traditions of individual freedom and dignity (5). Additionally,

these calls, wrapped in the logic and efficiency-speak of science and business, help to mask the problems and contradictions inherent in such policies—ones that decrease funding for social services in urban areas, privatize public schools, and ignore the political, economic, and social conditions that ensure the continued dependency of such schools and the surrounding communities on outside forces in order to function.

With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB), urban schools were made even more reliant on public and private funding partnerships (e.g., Carnegie Corporation, Gates Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, etc.). As a result of the new law, such funding would now largely be determined by a school's performance on the standardized tests that were designed and controlled by those outside of local communities (Lipman 106). As William Ayers and Michael Klonsky have pointed out in their discussion of Chicago Public Schools, the test—administered to all equally—does nothing to address the school funding disparities that currently exist: "Chicago schools are at the lower end of the resource-distribution curve, and they lack the most basic, essential resources needed to do the job they are asked to do" (6).

Yet, despite knowing this, underresourced schools that fail these high-stakes tests are then subjected to even further control from the state or federal government and may be closed or taken over by private organizations while questions regarding the equitable distribution of resources remain unaddressed (Hursh 51). Unfortunately, despite these important insights, the material conditions in many of the Chicago Public Schools remain largely unchanged (Lipman 110). The research cited above is important and necessary for helping us to better understand how our schools function within the larger political and economic contexts so that new research programs that acknowledge these problems will

have a better chance at changing the material conditions in urban schools and communities today.

The consequences of such top-down, or to use Hountondji's term, "extroverted" policies and research programs (e.g., research using standardized test data to make decisions about schools) often play out in classrooms where students and teachers are subjected to the effects of the ongoing debates in policy circles, universities, and research centers. The data that the high-stakes tests provide are used to target schools for additional studies, to test-drive educational programs, to implement private test-taking programs, to test teaching methodologies, or to implement scripted curriculum plans. According to Ayers and Klonsky, Chicago schools continue to fail students because of it:

> Despite decades of research and experience indicating the wrongheadedness of organizing learning as an essentially passive affair, that is exactly what most schools do. The central idea of this typical approach to teaching and learning is that there is some known body of knowledge, some key information and skills, some agreed upon, sanctified "stuff" called the curriculum that youngsters need and teachers have. (Ayers & Klonsky 7)

The "stuff" that Ayers and Klonsky discuss becomes part of the official knowledge that schools are mandated to impart to students.

This important stuff referred to above is developed, produced, and then disseminated by outside officials in a standardized language that may be unfamiliar or irrelevant to local communities. Due in large part to the enactment of the NCLB law in 2000 and Race to the Top 2009, urban schools are now almost entirely dependent on a standardized testing system to receive additional or continued funding (Lipman). The curriculum programs that are created to address the perceived needs of these failing schools are controlled, managed, and implemented by central office employees or boards of education in far away offices; very little decision making power is left in the hands of

the local community or the teachers in these schools. In fact, very few of the key decision makers in the CPS (e.g., CPS board members like billionaire Penny Pritzker; former professor of international affairs, Henry S. Bienen; and former general counsel for Sears Corporation, Andrea Zopp) have any first-hand experience (e.g., living or working in these spaces) with the complex contexts that shape the schools or communities most affected by their decisions.

The standardized test—the individual examination at the center of our current reforms—pays no attention to student progress or the socio-economic conditions of the local school community, but rather reduces the individual to a set of numbers in a case file; these sets of data are used as the basis of a narrative about the individual, the school, and the community, one that has severe consequences and is constructed without any direct input from (or understanding of) those whom such narratives purport to describe. The standardized test has become a way not only to classify students, but also a tool to rate teachers, to judge administrators, to classify entire school districts and neighborhoods, and to silence the voices of those who might dissent. As Foucault puts it, "we are entering the age of the infinite examination and of compulsory objectification" (Foucault 200), where all things are to be weighed and measured against an unproblematized norm.

The biased language of the state-mandated exam provides the state with a self-reinforcing mechanism to justify the implementation of whatever new curriculum they decide to use, to direct funding towards test preparation classes, to close schools, to dismantle unions, or to enforce strict control over the operation of the school. According to researcher David Hursh, the federal government then, "uses the tests to divert funding

away from public education and toward for-profit and nonprofit corporations to tutor students, administer schools, or convert public schools to charter schools" (51).

The outside control of the testing data and the entire accountability apparatus is often used to prove the "failure" of urban schools and justify the need for even more outside influence over what goes on inside urban schools. Thus, the colonization of the urban school begins with the examination and continues with the importation of textbooks, teachers, administrators, and scripted curricula. To put it another way, the local culture is viewed as a "failure" according to the test data and therefore a culture viewed by those on the outside as containing the ingredients for success must be imported and taught to students in the form of a standardized curriculum using only Standard English. This is done, of course, with no mention of or regard for economic and political conditions that helped shape these schools and communities. The continued "failure" of the school and community can now only be understood to mean that the individuals (students, teachers, administrators) have been unable to capitalize on the solutions (better teachers, test prep programs, scripted curricula, common standards, best practices, etc.) provided for them by outside entities.

As Giroux notes, however, the design of these solutions is not a simple or neutral endeavor; it's rife with challenges and potential pitfalls:

> the language of curriculum, like other discourses, does not merely reflect a pregiven reality; on the contrary, it selectively offers depictions of the larger world through representations that people struggle over to name what counts as knowledge, what counts as communities of learning, what social relationships matter, and what visions of the future can be represented as legitimate. (35)

Thus, the test that informs school curriculum cannot be viewed as a politically neutral text operating in the best interest of all students who are required to take it.

Ngugi wa Ngugi, writing about the situation in Kenya, notes that colonized communities must fight to "liberate their economy, politics, and culture from the Euro-American-based stranglehold to usher a new era of true communal self-regulation and self-determination" (4). In a similar way, neighborhoods that have become internal colonies in urban spaces, controlled by and dependent on outside forces, are involved "in an ever-continuing struggle to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space" (4). Schools in urban areas are locked in a similar political fight for their right to define themselves in their own words and by their own standards. Doing so, of course, means doing more than attempting to live up to market-driven mandates that demand all students perform at or above state norms on standardized examinations. The fight, of course, involves more than doing well in school; it also involves the right to control and determine how best to use the resources of the community in ways that honor the knowledge, diversity, and aspirations of community members.

Schools are now required by NCLB to show adequate yearly progress (AYP) in order to retain current levels of funding and avoid being labeled "failing" schools (Lipman). The schools in question, however, have little or no voice in the production of the data that determine their futures or the curriculum programs that are brought into the schools. The urban school can now be regulated entirely from the outside by forces it depends on for financing and curriculum development in order for it to exist. Funds, of course, can be cut at any time in the name of efficiency, and schools can be taken over by for-profit companies using the now incessant call for narrowing the achievement gap as a way to justify the adoption of a corporate value system in schools.

Hountondji, speaking of the situation in the Third World, puts the problem this way:

> This dependency is of the same nature as that of economic activity, which is to say that, put back in the context of its historical genesis, it obviously appears to be the result of the progressive integration of the Third World into the worldwide process of the production of knowledge, managed and controlled by the Northern countries. (240)

In other words, the official forms of knowledge and economic production in the Third World are always under the direct or indirect control of the colonizer, while the local economy and institutions become dependent on a system that remains in the hands of others.

In a similar way, the official "facts" derived and interpreted from standardized test data—that urban schools fail to meet state standards—overshadow questions regarding the connection between the creation of the test and the system of political, economic, and social forces that determine how the data are used and for what purposes. One result of such a test is that "teachers become wed to curriculum packages and predetermined lesson plans, and are transformed from professionals with any ownership of the content and the conduct of their work into glorified clerks" (Ayers and Klonsky 8). Teachers become machines delivering content to students. The content that teachers deliver, derived from curriculum, textbooks, and other teaching materials "whose origin and mode of 'fabrication' the local population knew nothing about and that, therefore, could only appear to them as surreal and not to be mastered, miraculously placed on top of their daily reality like a veneer" (Hountondji 241).

Teachers and students participate (often unwittingly) in schooling that prevents local participation in the construction of knowledge. These participants often do so

without understanding why or for what purpose they are doing the things they are being

asked to do; the textbooks and mandated tests and the official knowledge they contain

appears "fixed" and uncontestable to those who enter such schools. Teachers are

instructed to impart knowledge to students that will increase student test scores, not to

question the nature or construction of the test or its content. Thus, teachers and students,

to use Maxine Greene's phrase, have a "tendency to accede to the given," as they become

mired in mandated ways of doing and knowing, eventually disengaging from what they

often know to be more authentic approaches to teaching or learning (7). Schools become

places where "messages and announcements fill the air; but there is, because of the

withdrawal, a widespread speechlessness, a silence where there might be—where there

ought to be—an impassioned and significant dialogue" (2).

In urban school districts, teachers and students are not generally consulted (not in

any meaningful way) when it comes to implementing or designing school reforms or

curriculum (Payne). In fact, Giroux notes, "legislators and government officials are

ignoring the most important people in the reform effort, the teachers" ("Teachers" 38).

When discussing standardized testing outside of progressive education circles one rarely

hears questions regarding the equitable distribution of resources, control over the content

of tests, the official language of the test, what and how knowledge is distributed in

schools, or the value of the official knowledge embedded in the tests. According to

Giroux,

> mainstream educational reformers such as William Bennett, Chester Finn, Jr., and
> Diane Ravitch[1] exhibit little understanding of schooling as a site that actively
> produces different histories, social groups, and student identities under profound
> conditions of inequality (Giroux 36).

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[1] It's interesting to note,perhaps, that Diane Ravitch has now changed her position on public schools.

Instead, what we often hear are questions related to discipline, morals, and efficient management in schools.

In fact, William Bennett, former President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Education, argued openly for an increase in moral education saying "that directive moral education need not be condemned as incompatible with pluralism" (Sher and Bennett 675). The argument for more discipline in schools and for a curriculum with a particular moral content continues to grow louder as more schools are seen to be "failing" under the current accountability system. In other words, by directly linking moral uprightness with individual development and success in school, neoliberal discourse successfully pathologizes poverty and any form of state dependence deemed unacceptable.

It is not hard to see, then, how in the current reform climate where a discourse of moral fitness continues to find its place at the education reform table, questions about fixing schools (institutions embedded in a larger social systems) can turn very quickly to questions about fixing people (individual teachers and students). Such discourse moves us away from discussions centered around resource redistribution, economic development, or equity in schools to whether or not certain communities (filled with failing individuals according to state-mandated metrics) deserve additional resources given their perceived inability to conform to state standards. Interestingly, given the overt inequities in many large urban school systems, the character and moral development of those directing the resources and curriculum are almost never called into question.

The logic of our current funding system, a system that asks us to blame poor people for their inadequate progress on state-administered tests, is reminiscent of a similar tactic described by Michel Foucault in *Madness in Civilization* while quoting

from a report of the Board of Trade that sought to label the poor as the reason for

poverty:

> When the Board of Trade published its report on the poor in which it proposed the means 'to render them useful to the public,' it was made quite clear that the origin of poverty was neither scarcity of commodities nor unemployment, but 'the weakening of discipline and the relaxation of morals' (137).

Bennett, and others who initiated the current reform movement, argues for more control

over school curriculum that would see a limiting, rather than expanding, of diverse ways

of knowing and doing. Bennett notes:

> it may appear to follow from a more general requirement that unorthodox views should receive a fair hearing. However, this would imply that we owe fair treatment to values as well as persons; and, as John Rawls has noted, such an obligation is highly unlikely. (Sher and Bennett 675)

 According to Bennett and Sher, then, there appears no reason to expand (or question) the

curriculum, the test, or the current state standards, since any views (or values) outside the

mainstream may appear unorthodox. Thus, that which falls outside the norm is by

definition suspect. Failure, as defined by the test can thus be viewed as resulting from a

form of moral deficiency on the part of an entire school or community; this view ignores

the role of state sanctioned knowledge that the test attempts to measure, the lack of

sufficient funding for many schools, and the construction of the test itself.

Failure on the test becomes the legitimating mechanism necessitating the

privatization of public education where schools are to be organized by market-based

reforms. The test then becomes a rationale for itself by normalizing certain ways of

thinking, acting, and behaving in schools. As Foucault notes, "the Normal is established

as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education

and the establishment of the *école normales* (teacher training colleges)" (Foucault 196).

The standardized test operates in Foucault's terms as a "technology of power" that informs how one teaches and makes the production of teachers subject to the same forces of normalization; the test content provides the curriculum for both schools and teacher training colleges so that each has at its core the test as its guiding principle.

This reproduction of colonial practice in schools—enforcing a state-mandated language through compulsory exams—not only limits opportunities, but it also ensures that only the "right" people make it through the system. According to Ngugi, in Kenya "English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences, and all the other branches of learning. English became the main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education" (12). To put it another way, success in the colonized community means giving up one's ability for self-definition in one's own language and culture.

Hountondji notes that "between the native languages and the imported languages" there was a "relegation of native languages to substandard languages, indeed 'dialects' or 'patois,' barely good enough to express the platitudes of everyday life" (248). What a colonized people needs, according to Hountondji, along with more political and economic control, is "a daring project of generalized literacy and the use of native languages as vehicles for teaching and for research at the highest level, with a real democratization of knowledge as an end" (248).

Jay Robinson, echoing Hountondji's call for a different view of literacy when working with diverse groups of students, notes, "we felt a deeper responsibility to listen to and learn to understand the languages these young authors brought to the tasks of becoming literate—to encourage them to use such language as they had in their attempts

to make meanings for themselves and for the audiences they chose to address" (9). Both Robinson and Hountondji imagine schools as places where the languages, knoweledges, and experiences of local communities are honored and encouraged. These community-based knoweledges and experiences are recognized as an essential resource for solving community problems.

Interestingly, in well-funded schools with high percentages of students at or exceeding state standards, the test data become valuable for the opposite reason; the test affirms the right for these schools to offer more educational experiences and design more flexible curricula (and to justify inequities in funding, since it goes without saying that successful students deserve more opportunities). Test results can then be used as a convincing "scientifically-based" argument for privilege as well as failure and neglect. The test validates the social position and status of the over-achieving school in contrast to and at the expense of their urban, low performing counterparts. Foucault notes that the exam, "establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (197). He also points out that the exam "makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish" (197) individuals through a narrative based on an almost complete reliance on positivism. In successful schools, there is almost never any real question about what the test measures or its ability to do so effectively and equitably, since it almost always produces the expected result.

Ngugi notes that while growing up under colonial rule in Kenya when failing to use the official language in school "the culprit was given corporal punishment—three to five strokes of the of the cane on the bare buttocks—or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY" (11).

Formalized language requirements in school became an easy way to enforce colonial ideology and impose an outside culture through ridicule, punishment, or in cases of compliance, grant access to further opportunity.

In a similar way, testing in Standard English currently functions as both a way to punish and evaluate students in urban American schools in order to reinforce hierarchical notions of language and culture. While students are no longer struck with canes or asked to where metal signs that say I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY, they do receive scores on examinations that legitimate their social position and come wrapped in the scientific validity. Their failures and deficiencies, in other words, are "scientifically" proven.

According to Giroux, once teachers and researchers understand that "language always embodies particular kinds of values then you can raise questions. You can ask: What is the relationship between what is learned and the pedagogies in place? Where does the language they use come from? Whose interests does it promote? What are its value assumptions?" (14). Mikhail Bahktin also reminds us that teaching language as a static form of knowledge "operating from the heights of its own uncontestable authority" ultimately does not succeed because "authoritative unitary language fails to take into account the fact of heteroglossia and multi-languagedness" that exists in any society (368). To put it another way, any state-mandated view of language enforced through examinations and licensing cannot encompass the diversity of languages that operate in a society and therefore such an exam can only reproduce its own logic of domination and silence. Ayers and Klonsky, in their comparison between Chicago schools and those in South Africa, note the way schooling and testing work in Chicago:

if one suspends the rhetoric of democratic participation, fairness, and justice, and acknowledges (even tentatively) that our society, too, is one of privilege and oppression, inequality, and class divisions, and racial and gender stratifications, then one might view the schools as a whole as doing an adequate job both of sorting youngsters for various roles in society and convincing them that they deserve their privileges and failures. (Ayers and Klonsky 9)

The school system prepares one set of individuals (those with money) for college and another (those without money) for service industry jobs; if that is its aim, the district appears rather successful in carrying out its mandate of social reproduction.

The push for more standards and accountability in schools will admittedly be difficult to challenge. Who, after all, would argue for lowering standards in schools? Even Al Shanker, liberal president of the AFT for more than 30 years, promoted standards, saying "there's an external standard that students need to meet, and the teacher is there to help the student make it" (Kahlenberg 62). "Teaching to the test is something positive," said Shanker, "when you have very good tests" (62). It is this perceived scientific neutrality of measuring things by some abstract external standard that makes them so difficult to refute. Without problematizing what the test actually measures (and whether such things are actually measurable) or considering questions of identity, culture, or local knowledge and context, these arguments for state-mandated tests perpetuate a narrow, monolithic view of schooling.

It is important to note, too, that the test almost never disrupts the view that White students in affluent suburban communities will almost always outperform their counterparts in urban schools that are often almost entirely nonwhite (Kozol 3). Furthermore, according to Lipman, there are few education policy makers who will acknowledge the way in which "high-stakes testing is intensifying curriculum

differentiation between high-scoring and low-scoring schools" (103) and turning urban

schools into highly scripted, teach-to-the-test laboratories, while schools doing well on

these tests continue to provide academically challenging courses and increased access to

educational opportunities; as a result, urban public schools are currently under threat of

take over by the military and private for profit, or non-profit, enterprise.

With such a narrow focus on the test, outside school assessors can construct a

justification for school takeovers by effectively ignoring any creative or positive work

done by teachers and students, since so much of this work is seen to be unrelated to the

outcomes on the examination. Chicago, for example, already has four high schools run

jointly with the U.S. military where all students are required to be part of the Junior

Reserve Officer Training Cadets (108).

Discipline, self-improvement, academic rigor, opportunity, and character

development are just a few of the justifications for such takeovers. All of these terms, as

noted above, have a certain appeal or seduction, particularly in urban schools that have

met with very limited success. If our goal, however, is to challenge current neoliberal

trends in education reform (like the militarization of schools), we will need to find a way

to acknowledge the contradictions between what education claims to do (how we think

we are helping solve social problems by improving individuals) and what urban

education actually does (in a real, material sense) for communities most devastated by

systemic inequalities of the neoliberal ideology. As John Marsh notes, "if you want to

increase equality of educational opportunity for low-income children, a good place to

start would be to reduce poverty" (57). In other words, fixing schools, teachers, or

students will not be enough. We will need to look outside of schools and do more to promote school and community building as reciprocal projects.

2. Toward a Theory and Practice of Radical Pragmatism

> "Their fears of action drive them to a refuge in an ethics so divorced from the politics of life that it can apply only to angels, not to men." –Saul Alinsky

> "The one thing to be dreaded in the Settlement is that it lose its flexibility, its power of quick adaptation, its readiness to change its method as its environment may demand." –Jane Addams

One of the problems with our public schools today is that we fundamentally misunderstand their purpose and their promise. According to John Marsh, in his book *Class Dismissed: Why We Cannot Teach or Learn Our Way Out of Inequality*, he argues that our current view of schools is that they should provide individual students with the education they need to succeed in the current economy. We believe that if we can improve teachers and schools enough, then all (or most) students could go on to find successful employment. Most schools are currently organized around this idea. Think about it. Individual schools are measured by their success on standardized tests. Individual teachers are evaluated on how well students do on the tests and individual student success is linked to these same tests. Neoliberal ideas about competition, meritocracy, and individual development shape almost everything we are supposed to do in school, from how we think about curriculum and learning to how we understand the goals of schooling itself.

This view of schooling, however, rests on the assumption that if you get more and better education you can escape poverty. While this may, in fact, be true for some lucky or hard working (or both) students, according to Marsh, it can never solve the problem of poverty for the majority of students (not to mention all of the adults living in low income communities), since what poor people really need are better paying jobs when they leave

school (rather than more and better education). According to Marsh, close to 30 percent of Americans work at jobs that keep them at or near the poverty threshold (86). If the low-wage jobs done by 30 percent of Americans exist, it seems fair to assume that someone will have to do them.

As Marsh makes clear, then, even if you could educate (and find room at colleges) for all the elementary and high school students in South Chicago, Harlem, and every other low-income community in the US, there would never be enough high paying jobs to support them. Marsh puts the problem this way: "For too many Americans, however, working or working more would not solve their poverty problem. Indeed, working *constitutes* their poverty problem" (86). The point of all of this is that if we understand the problems of poverty and inequality in the way Marsh suggests we should (a problem of low-wage employment and tax policy, rather than a problem of fixing individuals through education), then we might also want to reconsider what we are currently trying to do in our public schools. Doing so, of course, means revisiting the purposes for establishing public schools in the first place.

Arguments over the necessity for and the purposes of public schooling have been with us since the founding of our nation. It may come as a surprise to some that many of our ideas about common public education can be traced back to the ideals and aspirations that propelled the American Revolution: equity, justice, and civil rights (Butts 30). The arguments for freedom, equality, and individual rights that helped Americans make a clear distinction between being a subject of the crown or a free citizen of a democratic republic, also helped early proponents of public schooling make the case for organizing schools around citizenship formation and civic engagement. It's also worth noting that

these are the same values that are now being perverted by neoliberalism to justify the freedom to consume and accumulate without regard for or responsibility to the general welfare. Or, as Margaret Thatcher put it so succinctly: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families" (Thatcher). Thus, an important distinction needs to be made between the ways in which neoliberalism frames the role of the state and the ways in which the state was imagined when public education came into being.

Earlier on in the formation of the United States the founders believed that for a democracy to work, citizens needed to understand their obligations (the social contract) to each other and the state and participate in government (the political community). In other words, if citizens were going to participate in government, then they had to have knowledge and experience of governing, and schools would be a place to introduce citizens to these ideas and practices (30).

The idea of free, compulsory, public education, it turns, out has a direct historical connection to our ideas about citizenship in a democratic nation (28). One of the most compelling arguments for public education, then as well as now, emerged from some of our most fundamental beliefs about the kind of government and citizenry we aspire to as a nation. What would happen, then, if we reorganized our schools around ideas of engaged citizenship and public responsibility, rather than, say, individual achievement and advancement? Schools, I believe, would look and function quite differently.

If we were to take seriously the idea that all power and authority in public institutions derived from the consent of the people, our schools would almost certainly be more open and democratic spaces. Here are I draw upon Dewey's conception of

democracy to mean equitable and consequential participation in society (Dewey, *Democracy and Education* 87). Our students, teachers, and engaged community members would also be more likely to see themselves as having a hand in actively shaping their schools and communities for the better. Consider how different this view of schooling is from the current way in which we understand success for low-income students. Instead of leaving one's community to get an education and find a good job, students would be encouraged to see their success as being directly related to the success of the larger community.

In this chapter, I explore some of the possibilities and problems for making citizenship and community engagement central components of our school curriculum. In doing so, I hope to suggest different ways that we might synthesize competing notions of schooling in ways that honor schools as spaces of "real world" preparation, individual growth and development, and participation in the political community. What I offer is not a solution to current problems we face in public education, but rather a way for us to once again consider schools as legitimate sites, as Dewey and others did, for civic learning and engagement, cultural production and analysis, and community development (68). Schools, I suggest, could be places where students, teachers, parents, and community members come together to explore questions and decide what to do about the kind of neighborhood, city, and country they want to live in.

To begin, I want to examine connections between community organizing strategies and popular discourses of community engagement (e.g., service learning, volunteerism, coalition building, civic engagement, etc.) in order to identify what we can learn from existing tactics for connecting schools with communities. I introduce the term

"radical pragmatism" in this chapter and work toward a broad definition of what the term means. I do so in order to develop a framework for understanding ways in which we might connect our schools with the surrounding communities and encourage direct involvement with our most pressing social, political, and economic concerns. I borrow the term "radical pragmatism" from William James, philosopher and American pragmatist, and Saul Alinsky, a Chicago-based community organizer and founder of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), and build toward a theory of schooling that emphasizes civic literacies.

Both James and Alinsky were careful to make clear that they used the term radical pragmatism to describe ways of being and acting in the world that were particular to a certain set of circumstances. This shared concern with the local and particular is what leads me to believe that there is a useful link between pragmatists like James, Dewey, and Addams and the community-organizing tactics and strategies, pioneered by Alinsky and Ed Chambers. It is my contention that pragmatists like James as well as his contemporaries like Dewey and Addams can help us to broaden our understanding of the role of the teacher in reforming schools. In doing so, I suggest that teachers can be an important link in connecting schools and communities in thoughtful and interesting ways—ways that include seeing school sites as legitimate spaces for developing and supporting active citizens who engage in public action.

Radical pragmatism, then, is used here as an umbrella term that incorporates various ways of connecting schools and communities, ways that practitioners and their students find most appropriate to their particular situations. At the heart of radical pragmatism, though, is a commitment to asking questions with our students about what it

means to live a good life with others and about the kind of communities we want for our children and ourselves. From such questions, teachers and students can build a curriculum that examines why things are the way they are and then decide for themselves what they can or should do next.

Discourses of Engagement: Radical Pragmatism, Service Learning, and Civic Engagement

Students, teachers, university instructors as well as community partners, community organizers, and other allies, all talk about and use different terms to describe how and why they do collaborative community-based work and community building. For some, working with the community means providing students "real life" experiences working with community-based partners. This kind of work, often called civic engagement, allows students to see first-hand how community-based groups operate, while also providing invaluable insight into how to work collaboratively in a professional setting. For others, engaging the community might mean organizing a food drive or raising awareness about domestic violence, or what some call service learning. While for others, service learning means something more along the lines of connecting classroom curriculum with a project in the community. Because of the multiplicity of practices and practitioners there are important differences in orientation to public action and community-based work that are worth exploring.

With its rise in popularity in both secondary schools and universities, service learning has become something of a straw man to its critics and a revolutionary practice to its promoters. Critics contend that done badly, service learning reproduces colonial

practices of dependency and reinforces a model that empowers the server while doing the opposite for those being served. In other words, the "service" being provided doesn't actually solve or contend with the root causes of the problem that created the need for the service in the first place. In fact, such service might make the problem worse by reproducing the framework of dependency.

Additionally, "service" in the neoliberal conception often gets rearticulated as an act of consumption, where it is now part of our civic duty to buy things, preferably things that are supposed to help other people. Since neoliberalism tells us that the state no longer has a responsibility to provide things like education, employment, or the most basic needs like food or housing, we leave it to the free market to decide how to (or how not to) deal with these things. In other words, service to others through volunteering and cash donations is something that individuals do as citizens, rather than something that government might do to change a system that produces high unemployment and increasing inequality. The point here is that in the neoliberal model a system that allows for limitless individual accumulation of wealth goes uncontested, since it is understood that poverty is caused by individual choices and responsibility (just like wealth), rather than as an effect of extreme and growing inequalities. Good citizens participate in their communities by volunteering or providing "service" to others, rather than, say, working with others to change a system that produces inequality and poverty in the first place.

These acts of service are almost always understood as applying to some already sanctioned form of community-based work like purchasing the types of commodities that are said to "help" others less fortunate than ourselves (e.g., buying shoes or water from companies that will make in-kind donations to those in need, donating money to a

political group, buying coffee that supports fair trade agreements, etc.) or through volunteering at soup kitchens or other existing programs. In other words, citizenship is reframed as something we do when we purchase certain commodities rather than, say, collectively organize for action. We are invited to swap our social responsibility to our community for a social responsibility to buy the "right" items at Starbucks or Whole Foods. Citizenship, then, is understood as consumption or consumerism; we see ourselves as good citizens when we buy things, since doing so is seen as a way to help stimulate the economy (something the allegedly helps "lift all boats").

So, what types of things could we be doing in schools? And, what do we really mean when we talk about doing service learning in schools? Tania Mitchell in her important review of the service-learning literature puts the problem this way, "Because service-learning as a pedagogy and practice varies greatly across educators and institutions, it is difficult to create a definition that elicits consensus amongst practitioners" (50). And, as Steven Hart tells us, "scholars have noted confusion of what service-learning represents and how it may be enacted" (18). If scholars are confused about what it means to enact a service-learning pedagogy, it seems reasonable to conclude that other practitioners (e.g., elementary and high school teachers) may also be experiencing a sense of uncertainty about how to articulate a vision of what an engaged practice is and can potentially be in different settings.

The fact that service learning resists easy definition, however, may actually be one of its greatest strengths, since by doing so, as Schutz and Gere note, service learning can change and adapt to different needs and disciplines: "Unencumbered by a disciplinary identity, service learning has, for a number of years, moved freely within the

academy, sometimes attaching itself to sociology or psychology, sometimes to education or social work, and, in the past few years, to English" (129). This ability to adjust to the needs of different situations, in my view, points to the potential for service-learning pedagogy to be used by teachers and students as a way to explore, critique, and challenge the policies and practices in schools and communities that promote or reproduce inequalities and oppression.

Such critiques are necessary because, as Kevin Kumashiro reminds us, "many people in society do not acknowledge that everyday practices in schools often comply with or contribute to racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression" (1). On the one hand, some critics argue that service learning has become something of an empty signifier that perpetuates "safe" forms of volunteerism; while on the other hand, it appears that we can also use the term to justify or legitimate a range of community-based projects that might address oppression in schools in radically pragmatic ways.

Radical pragmatism, broadly defined, is a type of inquiry that can help us in making changes to the status quo or in solving problems identified by a group of people in a specific situation. It is a method of inquiry that relies on input from communities of interest (i.e., groups of people coming together around particular questions or issues) about a community's needs and resources. Radical pragmatism relies heavily on what have come to be understood as working-class forms of inquiry and resistance (e.g., organizing for action around issues, reclaiming public spaces, demonstrations, unionizing, public art and activism, etc.) that emerge from a community context. Radical pragmatism, then, is a method of assessing community needs that involves drawing on a

community's resources, encouraging participation, and identifying ways of acting. Any solutions to problems (or naming of problems) emerge from communities of interest and rely heavily on community input and participation.

While putting the terms "radical" and "pragmatism" together may seem like a contradiction in terms (How can you be both pragmatic and radical at the same time?), practitioners who have a deep and thorough understanding of a particular context can identify and ask questions about the most taken-for-granted aspects of schools and communities. Put another way, acting in radically pragmatic ways means acting in ways that question and challenge policies and practices, while still remaining open to the many possible ways of identifying and addressing such questions.

Thus, radical pragmatism embraces other discourses of engagement. Which is just to say that a radical pragmatist ties to identify ways to link the work she does in schools to the desires and concerns of any given community. Such an approach to schooling frees us to synthesize a seemingly disparate set of community engagement orientations and models. Closely and critically examining the ways in which our schools interact (or do not interact) with our communities can help us produce new understandings of what we do in schools and why we do it. Radical pragmatism is about identifying what matters most to those with whom we work and then exploring these things in collaboration.

Aaron Schutz, in his book on social class and social action, reminds us that "this kind of practical integration is extremely difficult to do" (288), and will require a large investment of time and energy by those involved. Despite the obvious challenges, though, schools seem like an important and necessary place to begin this work, precisely because of the current pressures on educators to adhere to narrow definitions of teaching and

learning. In other words, it seems important to begin by imaging schools as places where we can work with others to promote the democratic potential of an active citizenry. That is, putting the goal of developing active citizens at the center of what we do would change both the way we organize our schools and the purposes that drive our collective work in these institutions. If we can take this first step of imagining our schools in different ways, we will have much better chance at implementing a curriculum where students, teachers, and community members work together on the most pressing social, economic and political questions they face.

Schools seem like interesting places for this kind of work precisely because they embody so many of the neoliberal contradictions. I understand schools, urban schools in particular, as sites of multiple contradictions: contradictions that emerge from narratives of freedom, democracy, and equality. Discourses of freedom and equality, for example, circulate in spaces that often lack the most basic resources and where access to opportunity may be systematically inhibited or denied. Policy and procedures (e.g., compulsory attendance, random bag and locker checks, bell schedules, metal detector checks, required courses of study, textbooks, standardized tests, etc.) are foisted on subjects who are also taught about the value and principles of democratic participation in public life.

For these reasons, I believe schools are uniquely positioned for educators to interrogate the confluence of political, economic, and cultural forces that limit educational and economic opportunity in certain areas while purporting to be solutions to those same problems. Such an understanding requires that educators look at current economic and education policy in order to examine the ways in which a combination of

cultural forces reproduces inequities in metropolitan areas (Anyon).

I begin in the context of schools, first and foremost, because this is where I have spent a significant part of my professional life; secondly, because these spaces bring together young children and adolescents for a significant part of their lives; and, lastly, because these public sites can be sites of resistance, they are places where we still might create space for valuing local knowledge, or what Schutz calls "different class-based practices" (288) that can challenge traditional middle-class approaches to the work we do in schools. Such traditional practices include the current hierarchical organization of schools where such schools function as a means to control and regulate individuals and communities along narrow definitions of academic achievement and cultural competence through standardized testing regimes. I suggest that appropriating community organizing tactics and strategies and using them to initiate school-based actions can help us develop our own notions of accountability and alter current conceptions of power and control in such schools.

In my experience as a high school teacher, a service-learning coach, a university writing instructor in a civic engagement program, and an English methods instructor, I've learned that the work we do in these settings requires us to be flexible and to adapt to dynamic circumstances because there is "no way to set aside the histories, needs, abilities, and other particularities…and appeal merely to principles that are untroubled by reality" (DeStigter 129). This is just to say that while I believe schools can be spaces where we develop powerful partnerships with community-based organization— partnerships that can help us to challenge undemocratic policies and practices in schools—our students, colleagues, and allies should be given the chance to work out for

themselves how best to organize and operate their schools and connect with communities.

Working together to make decision about what to teach and how to teach it, no matter how small, might be understood to be what Ellen Cushman describes as "the first steps to social change on micro-levels of interaction" (13). This is a point that is worth considering, since schools are places where advocating for change involves significant risks—losing our jobs, being expelled or arrested, facing other forms of retaliation—and is dependent on the support of our friends and colleagues. Such support for action can be built around relationships and mutual risk taking toward collectively defined ends. In such a scenario, participants understand the stakes and are willing to accept the risks.

It has been my experience with service learning and civic engagement that teachers and students who take steps to act in thoughtful ways are our best allies in doing the work we hope to do that might point us toward a way to "deconstruct systems of power" in real situations. In other words, before we dismiss our colleagues who might want to organize a blood or food drive, a school-wide recycling program, teach a class in a local jail, start a community garden, volunteer at a local community theater, develop a community-based publication, organize a public art project, or tutor as part of a neighborhood arts program, we might consider the consequences of these acts of "service" to the community and the possibilities they show for further collaborative action. Is "service" in this sense always something to be avoided?

I want to suggest here, too, that service can be a powerful learning and movement-building tool for educators. In other words, rather than discouraging service to the political community, we might begin by encouraging teachers in urban settings to get involved with community-based projects through service (or some other type of

community-based work). An important question to ask our selves and our colleagues might be: Who benefits from these actions (or services) and how might these forms of social action be seen as the initial moves toward new forms of collective action around new or different issues? Such a question compels us to examine how we might work together with groups and individuals to build stronger coalitions in our institutions and communities. These questions also require us to confront questions of assimilation, power disparities, and notions of service that perpetuate dependency.

Organizing Orientations: The Social Action Continuum

Cathy Fleischer in her book, *Teachers Organizing for Change*, suggests five orientations for community organizing: education, planning/development, mobilization, advocacy, and social action. In Fleischer's reading of the community organizing landscape, these are the positions that most organizers take up in relation to the work they are attempting to do in communities (84). In my reading, thinking, and participating in the work of service learning and community organizing, as a teacher and service-learning coach, I've found this framework to be helpful in exploring the different ways we might enact change in our particular situations. Fleischer notes, too, that teachers are natural organizers—she uses the term "teacher organizer'' throughout—who organize students, parents, and colleagues all the time, in order to do their jobs. While I agree with Fleischer that teachers do "organize" bodies, often around shared goals or projects, many teachers I have known would not consider themselves "organizers" in the more activist sense of the word.

I would suggest that Fleischer's description of teachers as organizers, as well as

the different orientations that she outlines, could benefit from the additional analysis of how teachers, parents and students see themselves performing the role of both "teacher" and "citizen" in a democracy. In other words, how one understands these terms seems critical for understanding why our colleagues and friends take up the projects they do (and why they don't take up others) in their classrooms and communities. This analysis is necessary if we want to reconsider the role of the teacher in relation to the community. In particular, examining how we understand our responsibility to the larger community seems critical for making the case for schooling centered on the development of civic literacies.

In their article, "What Kind of Citizen?," Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne describe the different beliefs and assumptions that people bring with them to schools and other institutions about what it means to be and act in the community as a citizen. These beliefs about citizenship often translate into different forms of participation or different orientations toward social action (27). Westheimer and Kahne suggest the following three types of citizens: personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented. I want to suggest that these different forms of civic participation, what Westheimer and Kahne call "the spectrum of ideas represented in education programs about what good citizenship is and what good citizens do" (19), occupy different spaces along a continuum of social action. In other words, while Fleischer defines a social action orientation as being largely about the "long term change in the power relations among various groups" (101), many preservice and practicing teachers may not see their work in this way. Thus, how we (teachers and teacher educators) come to think about ourselves as citizens, as Westhiemer and Kahne point out, will play a crucial role in how and where we begin any activity that

involves making changes in a school or community.

While I agree that most service learning work is "inherently connected to concerns of social justice" (Mitchell 50)—however we define a term like "social justice" in our communities—I also think that students who get involved in service-learning projects are more likely to take risks and get involved again when they are called upon by their peers, colleagues, or community to do so. My experience in schools and universities suggests that this initial involvement in civic or service projects—in whatever form these take—helps students and teachers develop a stronger sense of shared responsibility to their community, because it involves them in shared work around a common interest or concern.

Engaging with the community through intentional work can be a powerful experience for teachers who have very little direct experience with the community outside their school. All of this is just to say that a radical pragmatism suggests that classrooms and schools can serve as public spaces where teachers and students build relationships in order to find ways of acting collectively. Acting in radically pragmatic ways, then, means authorizing ourselves to act based on our situated knowledges and understandings, rather than waiting for authorization or instructions from "experts" or "authorities" that would tell us how to act and to what end.

Our Mutual Friends: From Addams to Alinsky

Jane Addams worked for years at Hull House and stood with community members on issues that mattered to them; she used her power and privilege to advocate for and with the people she worked with in the community. In her 1896 speech, titled, *A Modern Lear*,

Addams, speaking about men like the paternalistic industrialist George Pullman,

describes the situation this way:

> In so far as the philanthropists are cut off from the influence of the zeitgeist, from the code of ethics which rule the body of men, from the great moral life springing from our common experiences, so long as they are 'good to people,' rather than 'with them,' they are bound to accomplish a large amount of harm. (qtd. in Elshtain 172)

Addams understood what it meant to work with people rather than for them, and she was

willing to test out her ideas—to pay her dues, so to speak—by advocating, challenging,

collectivizing, and working alongside the people who came to Hull House.

Through her work at Hull House she came to understand that she could not

impose her ideas on others and that the work would need to be of a kind that came about

through partnership and collaboration, rather than force or coercion. She notes:

> The experience of the coffee house taught us not to hold preconceived ideas of what the neighborhood ought to have, but to keep ourselves in readiness to modify and adapt our undertaking as we discovered those things which the neighborhood was ready to accept. (104)

The notion of working with others to solve issues that matter to them in ways that makes

sense to them, is one of the most important lessons that the pragmatists have to teach

those of us who see the potential in service-learning pedagogy. Seeing the work of

teaching as being connected to the goals and aspirations of our students and their

communities will help practitioners move along a spectrum of action to find entry points

along the way that point to more critical forms of engagement. This type of pedagogy

begins in intentional conversation and collaboration with others as we examine our

immediate surroundings and conditions.

While the idea of taking up residence in the neighborhoods where we work and

teach—in the way that Addams did—may seem like a radical proposition to some of us today, the notion that we make efforts to understand the communities where we work and teach is still an important component of much current writing about teaching and learning. Thus, it seems, teachers and teacher educators need to ask, How can we—often, white middle-class educators—work in thoughtful and respectful ways in schools and communities that might seem far removed from the communities where we grew up or where we currently live?

A partial answer to these questions might be to develop and adopt the kind of culturally relevant pedagogy advocated by Gloria Ladson-Billings where teachers begin to "see themselves as part of a community" (41). But in order to see ourselves as members of a community, we will need to begin by taking concrete steps—joining with local community-based organizations, conducting listening campaigns with community members, holding one-to-one meetings with parents and community leaders, teaching courses at adult schools, participating in the organization of community-based activities, helping to form coalitions around local issues, helping to create cooperative community-based businesses and green spaces—all in an effort to develop communities of interest that seek to challenge current understandings of equity, justice, and access to various opportunities.

One model that may help us develop or adapt ways of engaging in communities, is the community organizing model developed by Saul Alinsky in the 1930s. This model, further developed by Ed Chambers and others both inside and outside of the IAF, continues to be used in various forms by grassroots neo-Alinsky organizing groups today. I believe some of the core tactics and strategies pioneered by the IAF offer us some very

practical ways of working intentionally with communities and schools to directly challenge current arrangements.

Drawing on his early experiences as a sociology student at the University of Chicago and later as a community organizer in Chicago, Alinsky would come to a conclusion similar to the one Addams reached about working with communities for important changes: that we should not do for others what they can do for themselves. Alinsky's work in communities also suggests that we seize the opportunity in schools to organize what he calls a "community of interests" around specific questions in order to build power and take action on issues that matter to us (Alinsky 120). Doing so might open up the possibility for people to work together, as Alinsky says, to develop their own solutions to the challenges they identify.

The ability to identify, name, or define problems is a key component of radical pragmatism, since it means reframing important issues in communities. From the neoliberal point of view, the "problem" is that individuals are not taking advantage of educational opportunities to give them the skills and credentials they need to get good jobs and help build the American economy. In other words, if poor people would just work and study harder, we would not have all these social problems. But, if members of low-income communities are able to work together to define the problems they see around them, they are more likely to point to a lack of resources for education and the lack of jobs that pay a living wage.

In his introduction to his primer for organizers, *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky declares, "Let us in the name of radical pragmatism not forget that in our system with all its repressions we can still speak out and denounce the administration, attack its policies,

and work to build an opposition political base" (Alinsky xxi). As Alinsky reminds us

here, we must do more than just speak; we must act, too. According to Alinsky, then, "the

most unethical of all means is the non-use of means" (26). There seems to be a consensus

among these thinkers that thoughtful reflection needs to be coupled with collective action

aimed toward specific goals.

Addams also understood the need for action. In her discussion of Tolstoy's "snare

of preparation" she suggests the need to act in thoughtful and productive ways, lest we

get mired in the intellectual work of finding the "right" way to do something. She writes:

> It is easy to become the dupe of a deferred purpose, of the promise the future can
> never keep, and I had fallen into the meanest type of self-deception in making
> myself believe that all this was in preparation for great things to come (73).

In other words, we can never be fully prepared to act, or teach, or speak on any particular

issue or subject or for any particular cause, because our knowledge will always be partial,

contingent, and incomplete. We will never find a "pure" method (i.e., one free of

contradictions or perfectly democratic) for working democratically in communities. We

cannot know beforehand how or what students will learn or what they will do as a

consequence of their participation with us and our community partners. Our work, then,

is always unfinished and in process.

Of course, this is not to say that attempts at preparation are useless or ill-

conceived, but rather that it seems crucial that we acknowledge the uncertainty— as well

as the intangible and unquantifiable learning that takes place—inherent in the work we

do; we should be prepared to move and act despite knowing that we could be wrong.

Indeed, preparation, strategizing, and debating are all important parts of the process, just

as uncertainty, doubt, fallibility, and revision will be as well. As Addams suggests,

despite our uncertainty, we still need to make space for students and colleagues to act in

meaningful ways. Addams, writing about her own experience with young people, puts it this way:

> We have in America a fast-growing number of cultivated young people who have no recognized outlet for their active faculties. They hear constantly of the great social maladjustment, but no way is provided for them to change it, and their uselessness hangs about them heavily. (92)

It is precisely this sense of uselessness (or helplessness) that so many students and teachers feel, that suggests why a reorientation of schools toward civic issues could be so powerful.

Alinsky and Chambers suggest organizing around a community of interest and using what's called relational meetings to get to know our students, colleagues, and community allies, as a way to find out what can and should be done in any particular context (Chambers 18). This is just one strategy that might help us remedy this sense of uselessness that Addams describes.

Chambers portrays what he calls the "one-to-one" meeting this way: "Properly understood, the relational meeting is an art form in which one spirit goes after another spirit to create connection, confrontation, and exchange talent and energy" (19). Such an approach—sitting down face-to-face with students, colleagues, parents, school employees, community members, leaders, local politicians, etc.—can help us develop the kinds of relationships necessary for meaningful action to take place. It is by taking these types of risks with others and working in and with the communities outside the borders of our universities or schools that we can begin this work in respectful ways.

The relational meeting is an important strategy that we might borrow or adapt to our own purposes (Alinsky; Anyon; Smith; Schutz). But the point of all of this is that we acknowledge the need to do more than simply talk with our colleagues and critique the

problems we see in schools and other institutions. We need to build real relationships in order to develop ways of acting in the world. Alinsky writes: "I start from where the world is, as it is, not as I would like it to be" (xix), and he suggests that we move toward action from where we are and from what we see. In other words, rather than waiting for conditions to improve or for the "right" project or the "right" conditions to present themselves, students, teachers, and local activists or community partners might begin where they are to address the concerns that matter most to them at any given time. Teachers might begin by having the courage to fail. That is, we must try, despite knowing full well that we will always be striving for a more just, a more democratic, a more inclusive, a less oppressive way forward.

Stephen Smith, a former PACT organizer, describing what he learned from working with Ed Chambers, puts it this way, "Chambers taught me that real radicals exist *in between* the world-as-it-is and the world-as-it-could-be. In a group of ideologues and optimists, the radical is a pragmatist" (21). In other words, this in between space—the place where we can acknowledge the materiality of where we are, but also see where we might go—can be the starting point for meaningful action in our different contexts, if we are willing to seek it out and to see the possibilities that might exist there.

If we draw on the ideas, lessons, and examples of a pragmatist like Addams and organizers like Alinsky, Chambers, and Smith, then we might be able to define ways of enacting forms of radical pragmatism. Fleischer describes community organizing as, simply, "people coming together to create change—whether it's getting the stop sign for the bad intersection…or raising awareness about the hazards of the medical waste incinerator " (77). Acting in radically pragmatic ways involves work along the continuum

of civic engagement. Doing this work with others pushes us toward more critical forms of action; it includes everything from volunteer work and public art projects to more direct confrontations with power through collective actions.

Alinsky tells us that radical pragmatism means "different people, in different places, in different situations and different times will construct their own solutions" (4) to the challenges they face, by working and organizing in different ways. In fact, he insists this is the only way toward meaningful change. Addams, echoing these concerns, has this to say about her work,

> The Settlement, then, is an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city….It is an attempt to relieve, at the same time, the overaccumulation at one end of society and the destitution at the other; but it assumes that this overaccumulation and destitution is most sorely felt in the things that pertain to social and educational privilege. (98)

All of these ideas point toward forms of engaged pedagogy in schools that in turn suggest ways we might act more critically in schools settings. Bell hooks summarizes it this way:

> Engaged pedagogy not only compels me to be constantly creative in the classroom, it also sanctions involvement with the students beyond that setting. I journey with students as they progress in their lives beyond our classroom experience. (205).

In other words, our teaching doesn't stop at the classroom door and should not be confined to strict disciplinary ways of knowing and doing. Or, as Smith suggests, "Learning what matters to us, and to each other, means taking risks over and over again" (30).

While radical pragmatism is not a prescription for teaching in a particular way, there are four central features that emerge from the thinkers above and are worth noting here. First, radical pragmatism is grounded in local communities and involves intentional

relating for the purpose of learning about others and identify communities of interest.

Second, radical pragmatism is flexible, adaptable, and involves experimentation and risk

taking. Third, radical pragmatism involves action that links what we do in schools to the

"real world" students experience beyond our classroom walls. And, finally, radical

pragmatism involves embracing forms of emergent culture and kinds of knowledge that

challenge, disrupt, and replace current ways of doing things. Radical pragmatism in

schools, then, means teachers doing these kinds of things—not just facilitating projects—

with students and community partners.

Movement Building: Pragmatic Lessons for the Radical Pragmatist

In my view, teachers acting as radical pragmatists will be willing to reflect, to

revise, to evaluate the value of any idea or belief in connection with its social

consequences, or usefulness in lived situations, and to change their minds. This type of

learning eschews the codified curriculum produced by outside experts because it emerges

from local concerns. More importantly, maybe, is that seeing school as being about the

most difficult and important questions (e.g., What does it mean to live a good life?), will

give teachers and students a platform and a rationale for taking steps to break out of the

constraints foisted upon them by state mandates and perceived disciplinary boundaries.

By making the concerns of students and their community legitimate subjects for inquiry,

teachers can make the work of school useful in different ways.

What the term "usefulness" means, as I understand pragmatists like James and

Dewey to use it, is quite different from the way the term is used when linked to current

notions of standardization, efficiency, and discipline in schools today. That is, something

considered "useful" to a pragmatist needs to be examined within the social context of those who will be most greatly impacted by the particular idea, question, belief, or policy.

The difference is that the radical pragmatist wants to evaluate the consequences of an idea or belief as it relates to a particular social context, while a more limited view of "usefulness" suggests a narrow definition of an idea's utility (e.g., the only "useful" knowledge is that which can be measured on a standardized test). As DeStigter reminds us, there are limits to "literacy," when "we definite it narrowly as a basic 'tool' or 'skill' assumed to be a means of socioeconomic security" (293). Doing so is "not at all empowering; on the contrary, it is to risk sanctioning its use to socialize students to accept present injustices" (293).

In a similar way, I want to differentiate between "being pragmatic" in the popularized sense of doing what is politically expedient and "being a pragmatist" in the way that I understand James and others to have thought about it. In other words, one might consider him or herself "being pragmatic" to participate in the conventions of schooling like standardized testing, tracking based on ability, zero tolerance policies, undemocratic decision making structures, etc. as they exist in a traditional school under a neoliberal policy agenda. Whereas, "being a pragmatist" would encourage an examination of the economic and political structures of schooling to evaluate the actual consequences of certain ideas and beliefs on students, faculty, and other community residents.

Therefore, "usefulness," in the sense that the pragmatists use it, would mean understanding our actions in broad social terms, as well as in particular, contextual terms. Furthermore, whereas "being pragmatic" has a direct connection with accepting a

situation as given or fixed, the notion of "being a pragmatist" that I want to advance, suggests a direct engagement with and disruption of the "given" in schools or communities (Greene).

In my view, in schools and communities we aught to ask: What, then, does this idea (or these ideas or policies or set of values that are currently in place) mean for people when carried out in any particular situation? This would mean answering, or working toward a provisional answer to, a series of questions related to any given activity that we propose for our students or ourselves. Does this particular activity help me develop a better understanding of what it means to be more fully human? Does pursuing this inquiry help me to better understand how the world works? What does this line of inquiry leave out or leave unexplored? Does participating in this activity help me learn to see myself as an active creator of something interesting or important (e.g., music, poetry, paintings, gardens, murals, short stories, political speech, social change in my community, etc.)? Does this activity lead to broader participation by greater number of people in decisions that affect their lives?

The pragmatist acknowledges the contingent, partial, and incomplete nature of knowledge, but also accepts a broad view of what might be termed "useful" for any group of people or individual to do in any context. And, the pragmatist attempts to find ways to respond to changing conditions and remain open to further experimentation, including being open to things that some might consider useless or unimportant. As the literary critic Terry Eagleton reminds us, "The idea of doing something purely for the idea of it has always rattled the grey-bearded guardians of the state. Sheer pointlessness is a deeply subversive affair" (39). In other words, what Eagleton seems to be suggesting here is that

different ways of knowing should not be jettisoned for narrow top-down definitions that emphasize efficiency and productivity above all else. To put this another way, "pointlessness" does not mean that an action is inconsequential, only that it's not committed *a priori* to a given outcome or end: learning can happen for the sake of learning.

Doing things in school (e.g., studying art, music, literature, critiquing school policies, or learning to paint with an airbrush), even when they do not easily translate into notions of "usefulness," or "productivity," for some people, should not be a reason to eliminate them. Doing these things, particularly when they seem pointless to policy and standardized test makers, are precisely why, in some cases, we ought to be doing them.

It is important to acknowledge that whichever strategies we use, these strategies are open to interpretation and adaptation and may be used toward different goals or objectives. We might consider, too, that not all teachers, students, colleagues, or parents will want to take up the same positions as staring points for public engagement. Therefore, in order to remain open to new possibilities, we might begin by honestly contextualizing our knowledge about different forms of civic engagement and examining how such knowledge is being used as well as how it has come to be understood as useful or otherwise by any community of practice.

The point, then, of a radically pragmatic approach to teaching and community engagement is that schools should be places where we challenge assumptions and question where our ideas and beliefs (or anyone else's) come from (Kumashiro 25). Doing so, in my view, would help us call attention to the partial nature of our knowledge and its potentially damaging or empowering effects on ourselves and others. I believe the

radically pragmatic teacher makes explicit the limits of our knowledge in order to discourage dogmatism or fanaticism. In other words, we want to discourage our students from the tendency to take for granted any "truth" about the world. That is, while the pursuit of truth is a legitimate and worthwhile part of learning and schooling, we also want to ground our ideas in the world as we encounter it and take the problems of today head-on.

As Dewey puts it, "No small part of the democratic problem is to achieve associations whose ordering of parts provides the strength that comes from stability, while they promote flexibility of response to change" (127). Pragmatism, then, suggests a form of democracy and, in Dewey's view, it is a democracy based on shared inquiry that remains always open to dissenting views and to the potential for change (87). As Robert Westbrook suggests, Dewey's pragmatism offers us a kind "epistemological justification for democracy" (2005 124) because it requires that we act in concert with others in ways that seem worthwhile to us and to them. That is, we always exist as part of some community, and in order to find out what we might do in any context, we begin by working cooperatively through shared inquiry to determine what steps to take next.

This epistemological justification for democracy speaks to how we think knowledge is or ought to be created. If it's stable, given, and finished, then we don't need democracy to help us identify and solve our problems. But if we believe that knowledge is created socially through people's interactions, then we need democracy to ensure that such knowledge isn't limited to only a few people's perspectives and interests.

Taking this approach means, of course, as Westbrook tells us, that we need to "radically reconceive the prevailing wisdom" (2005 142) that informs so much

bureaucratic thinking in schools. Or, as William Ayers suggests, we might begin by

seeing the world as unfinished and challenging the prevailing orthodoxy in our schools

and universities in order to invent our own approaches to what we do and how we do it

(95). These emergent approaches might allow us to form broad coalitions aimed at

reconceptualizing what something like "school reform" should be about or look like in

practice.

Thus, according to the pragmatists, we ought to submit our beliefs to a kind of

shared judgment based on the practical consequences of our ideas in a given social

context. A radically pragmatic approach gives teachers a way forward toward challenging

and disrupting schooling as it is often practiced, in order to reinvent new ways of doing

things that take into account local knowledges and concerns. As Schutz reminds us,

"community organizing as a model, even in its evolved neo-Alinsky form, is far from

perfect. Nonetheless, currently it represents one of the most effective sets of pragmatic

practices for generating power in impoverished and marginalized communities,

something progressive visions of democracy have failed to provide" (290). The point

here, I think, is that the tactics and strategies of community organizers gives us a place to

begin. Or, as Schutz reminds us, community organizing is about trying to "create

organizations within which participants' ways of thinking would be changed by their

ongoing interactions, by how they were led to *act*" (276).

In Chicago Public Schools, for example, where 40 hours of service-learning are

now a mandated graduation requirement, teachers and students have a unique opportunity

to work together, "to learn to become citizens—active participants of civic projects

intended to improve and enrich collective lived lives" (Robinson 16) and to have a hand

in shaping current school reform efforts. This is an opportunity—officially sanctioned by school administrators—that students and teachers should make good on by beginning to organize around a community of interests in schools in order to take action on issues that matter to them.

As longtime community organizer, Michael Gecan notes, good teachers are already "relational workers" who can, when given the chance, "create the educational and political conditions and institutions that enable most people to express fully their fundamentally affirmative natures" (92). But this will not happen automatically or inevitably; it requires intentional work, both individual and collective. Gecan notes that "Relational work is essentially, almost radically, reciprocal; student and teacher, nurse and patient, cop and citizen—all need one another for long term success and real satisfaction" (94). However, learning how to do the work of relating to our students, colleagues, and community allies in order to build a new social movement will require a radically pragmatic view of what "counts" as teaching and learning. We will need to disorganize our schools to make way for new forms of action.

As Jean Anyon (2005) reminds us, "Middle and high school teachers, in particular, can make a powerful contribution to movement-building by engaging students in civic activism" (188). Building working relationships and identifying common projects will be an important step we will need to take toward building a larger social movement. Building this type of movement, one aimed at reforming education in ways that make sense to the teachers, students, and communities most affected by such changes, will require intentional work to build relationships across communities of interest.

Relational workers who seek broader coalitions could begin by encouraging the development of habits of mind. These habits of mind, described by DeStigter above, can lead us to critically explore policies, standards, textbooks, access to curricular and extracurricular resources, and any other practices that are "given" in schools; we might also enact service learning in ways that help us uncover and explore the cause and consequences of our social, political, and economic concerns. Teachers might draw from a wide range of experiences and resources to examine how different policies, knowledges, and disciplinary frameworks are produced and understood, in order to make explicit dominate ways of knowing and doing. Such critical examinations would be grounded in the lived experience of students, teachers, and other community stakeholders in order to bridge classroom discussions with a particular community.

We might, then, begin to revise what seems useful and worthwhile to teach and do in school, based on these inquiries. What I'm arguing for might be understood as a version of what Arthur Applebee calls "knowledge-in-action" (33). Applebee's conception of knowledge-in-action suggests that what we do with students in our classrooms should have something to do with the world as they encounter it in and out of schools settings. Thus, our projects in and out of school should be reciprocal ones, projects that emerge from particular settings in particular ways.

The process of learning at its most powerful will be recursive and have meaning for those who participate in the projects that they develop together. Exploring different kinds of questions and challenging current arrangements will allow students to research and examine various social movements, authors, texts, as well as create or enact social action projects based on their research. Why shouldn't schools be places where students

and teachers look carefully at the policies and procedures that shape their everyday lives as participants in these institutions? Linking what we do to current social concerns might also help us make the work we do more relevant and consequential for our students and ourselves.

Teachers, then, might begin with a series of questions as they consider what to teach and how to connect it with civic literacy. How is "official" knowledge framed and understood in our disciplines? Our schools? Our communities? Who decides these questions? How are these decisions made? What kinds of things do we need to consider when developing a curriculum that makes room for action-oriented projects that take into account different ways of knowing and doing? What are the issues or concerns that matter most to students and their communities? Can these issues take center stage in our schools and in our classrooms? And, finally, if these questions and issues do become central to what we do, what, if anything, can or should we do about them?

3. Education and Organizing: A Story of School-Based Civic Engagement

> "…no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention."—Raymond Williams from *Marxism and Literature*

> "Let us in the name of radical pragmatism not forget that in our system, with all its repressions, we can still speak out and denounce the administration, attack its policies, work to build an opposition political base.–Saul Alinsky from *Rules for Radicals*

Introduction

The cultural critic Raymond Williams argues in his book *Marxism and Literature* that despite the challenges we face in opposing dominant ways of knowing and doing in our culture, there will always be room for resistance and alternatives. Williams termed this way of understanding evolving forms of resistance as a kind of "emergent culture" (125). According to Williams, emergent culture "is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of forms" (126). This conceptualization of resistance as emergent culture is useful for two reasons: First, it suggests that alternatives emerge from specific sites and take a form based on the particular political, economic, and social circumstances of that site; and, secondly, that within existing institutions, there are always spaces to think and act with others toward the elaboration of new social formations.

In this chapter, I examine the story of teachers, students, and parents working together toward this type of elaboration. While this story remains incomplete—in that it does not offer solutions—it does provide a grounded example of how a community of interest can form around a shared idea and move toward action. It is the forming and coming together that, in effect, begins the process toward new social formations. In other words, the story that follows is really an attempt to articulate the "active and pressing but

 not yet fully articulate, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named" (Williams 126). This caveat is important, I think, as it suggests that narrating events (the active and pressing work of individuals) is always an attempt to make sense out of and bring together a series of disparate threads, many of which resist easy categorization or synthesis. Despite these limitations, the story illustrates what can happen when small groups of people choose to work together.

The Background: Teaching and Learning on the South Side of Chicago

 After working as a teacher and service-learning coach for several years at a high school on Chicago's South Side—a school that had as its stated mission a desire to intentionally connect classroom work inside the school with the surrounding community—I watched in dismay as our school began to move further and further away from its stated objectives. For this reason, I think the mission statement is worth quoting at length. Here is the statement written collaboratively by the faculty:

> By using the city of Chicago as our classroom, CAA opens avenues of investigation using field trips and workshop experiences to expand all students' capacity for innovative thought, including those with special needs, while encouraging all students to become independent learners. Our mission is to provide all students with…unlimited opportunity that gives students the skills necessary to further their education in all areas…CAA challenges and prepares students to succeed in both academic and non-academic settings by exposing them to a variety of academic and social experiences and providing them with…opportunities for success both inside and outside the school system.

The workshops mentioned above were conceived of—by those teachers involved in crafting the proposal for the school—as a way of bringing community members into the school once every two weeks to teach a skill or demonstrate a craft. By doing so, we believed that students would learn skills, crafts, and arts from individuals and groups

operating in the community.

Despite the heavy emphasis in this statement on linking experiences inside the classroom to those outside the school, we only operated using this model for two years before the educational value of such a model was reconsidered and eventually done away with completely. After just two years of this alternative schooling model, our school was transformed back into what it had been in the years before: a traditional school with a back-to-basics curriculum and a focus on test preparation.

One of the main purposes for establishing our small school, one that incorporated a different approach to teaching and learning—different from models of schooling organized around test preparation—was to create the conditions where students could construct new knowledge in connection with the knowledge and understanding they brought with them to school. We wanted to honor what students already knew about the world, in order to help students make connections to the larger community beyond their immediate experiences. We hoped that students might find ways to build on their own experience of their community in ways that led to new opportunities. The idea was that doing this kind of thing would help students to shape both their own futures as well as that of the community where they lived and went to school.

Chicago Community Academy, or CCA (a pseudonym), was one of four small schools in our building that came into existence in the wake of the small schools movement sweeping large urban school districts across the country in the 1990s. We were a part of the school-within-a-school model that had become popular in urban areas, in part, because of the money that districts could save by not having to build new schools. So, instead of building new schools, large, urban public schools would be divided up to

house several individual "new" schools, each with its own mission, principal, and faculty. Despite some of the obvious challenges (sharing lunch rooms, computer rooms, and athletic facilities between four schools), many teachers and students viewed this new model as a promise for increased opportunities, a call for innovation, and as support for experimentation.

It was around this time that Chicago Public Schools saw an infusion of private funds from institutions like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that would be used to change the culture in "low-performing" schools around the city. We would use these funds to create our "new" schools by breaking one large urban school into four smaller ones. The change required that new names, missions, or themes be developed for each of the neighborhood schools. The new funds, coupled with the 2001 appointment of a new CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Arne Duncan, resulted in what many teachers viewed as a chance for some exciting changes to the structure of many of Chicago's schools. The results of these educational experiments, however, were decidedly mixed (Lipman).

The proposal for CCA was developed after several years of what, in Chicago, has been described by teachers that I knew as probation, or "being on intervention." The probation process was part of a number of district-wide school reforms enacted in 1995 that gave more power to the Board of Education—a board that remains to this day unelected, appointed by the mayor, and accountable only to him—to circumvent the remediation process, close schools, and fire teachers, much like the current "turnaround" model developed in conjunction with Renaissance 2010 (Lipman). The official reason behind the intervention process was to put children first, according to Mayor Daley and his school management team at the time. This strategy, of course, pitted teachers and

their unions against the needs of some of the city's most disadvantaged students by rhetorically framing education in terms of a battle between competing interests. The battle, as understood through this frame, was between teachers and the poor students they were supposed to serve.

Intervention, though, was essentially a way for Daley and his team, led by then CEO Paul Vallas, to take over schools they believed were not doing enough to bring up standardized test scores (Lipman). The process of intervention is fairly simple: it calls for schools to be taken over by the Board of Education; a new principal is installed and there is increased accountability and surveillance by outside institutions; punitive measures are taken against teachers who are deemed unfit by the new administration. A teacher I knew who survived the years of intervention before CCA was created described the experience as being "like hell, but worse." Another teacher told me it felt like "you were being watched all the time."

After struggling through several years of intervention my colleagues were given a choice—thanks in large part to the Gates Foundation money—to consult one another, the students, parents, and community members and write a proposal for the kind of small school they thought would best serve the constituents, or risk having the school shut down as a result of their scores on standardized test scores. One teacher I spoke with put it this way: "We were basically told that we could either write the proposal for a small school or they were going to close the whole thing down and fire everyone." Despite the adverse conditions, the mission statement that was eventually written into the proposal called for a school that would "use the city of Chicago as a classroom" so that students might connect their ongoing work in school to authentic work in the community.

The idea driving CCA was that by trying something new in this community, teachers and students might be able to create a community-based school tailored to the needs of those whom the school was supposed to benefit. The proposal called for taking students out of the classroom and into the community so that students could learn from community members and community situations and, in the process, discover what the city had (or did not have) to offer them. The teachers involved in writing the original proposal hoped to bring students into contact with community groups and local issues so that learning could take place in an authentic social context.

Teachers took the lead on creating the mission and vision for the school. While students and parents were surveyed as part of this process, the ideas was to get the school started and then work with community members and students to make adjustments as the school evolved. In my view, this was a missed opportunity, since having more community, parent, and student involvement at the start of the project might have created a greater investment in the school by those who worked or lived or owned businesses in the surrounding area. In other words, while two members of the faculty had grown up in the neighborhood, there was really no visible or sustained community, parent, or student presence during the development of the school.

Ideas among teachers about how the field trips and workshops would be organized once the school was up and running, and there were reportedly some teachers who were willing to "try anything" to get out from under intervention and avoid a school closure. At the same time, there were many teachers who saw the small school movement as an opportunity to create a teacher and student-led school that focused as much on how one taught as it did on what was taught. The Chicago Public Schools had also promised

that these new neighborhood schools would remain relatively autonomous: they had their own budgets, principals, local school councils, and an enrollment of no more than 125 students per grade level. Schools, though, were still expected to adhere to certain graduation requirements and content area standards promoted by the CPS.

The student population of CCA, approximately 55 percent African American and 45 percent Latino, came from the surrounding South Side neighborhood that had seen an economic downturn since the closure of many area steel mills in the 1970s. A once predominately, white, working class community of Eastern European immigrants, the South Chicago neighborhoods that fed into the school, had experienced the effects of white flight and changing economic circumstances. The small school reforms were seen by many in the school community as a way to begin addressing the various economic needs of the students the school was supposed to serve.

Despite a sense of optimism surrounding the proposed changes to the school, many teachers were still wary that the reforms would not go far enough. As Jean Anyon reminds us, "even when current school reforms succeed, they fail the students—because there are neither decent jobs nor sufficient resources for college completion available to most low-income urban high school graduates" (17). CCA hoped to reverse the trend Anyon describes by developing relationships with local businesses and other community-based groups to increase economic opportunities for students. The problem, of course, was that because of the large-scale economic disinvestment and the collapse of the steel industry in the surrounding area, we were left with the problem of how to create enough decent jobs for the students who chose not to go to college.

As part of the new small school mandate CCA was allowed to set up an alternative bell schedule and to have community-based workshops every two weeks on Wednesday. In addition to our Wednesday workshops, we sponsored biweekly field trips for students to explore different parts of the city on those days. Each teacher was also required to design and host a workshop, some of which took the form of fiction or poetry writing, music, or some other arts-based activity. Teachers were also required to help, as part of a team, design curriculum-based field trips for students. Some of the workshops that had been set up by community members included guitar, airbrush, mural painting, computer art, cosmetology, and kickboxing. Surveys were also conducted every quarter to find out how students felt about the workshops and how the workshops might be improved, changed, or reimagined.

In one popular workshop, sponsored by art teacher Stephen Marks, students designed a succession of murals on the fourth floor of the building. Marks worked with students to design a tile mural that would incorporate the new CCA mascot—a phoenix— into a design that would eventually come to show the phoenix rising from the ashes through a succession of corridors that led to a window at the end of hallway. The window at the end of the hall was to be transformed from a regular window into a stained-glass window that showed the phoenix rising from out of the flames that were depicted on successive hallway panels. Marks and his students viewed the mural as a community allegory—one that would plot the path and promise of our new small school.

The plan that Marks and his students developed was part of a larger design to transform the entire fourth floor into a new space: they wanted the floor to be a working art gallery where students could frame and hang their work. According to Marks, this

area "was essential for students to rethink the value and importance of their work." Marks told me: "There's no way I was going to let students just stick things up on the wall in an undignified manner. The students wanted a museum-like space and that's what we tried to make." Over the course of two years the mural began to take shape, the walls were re-painted by students. Viewing art became part of the experience of being on the 4th floor. To many people's initial surprise, the student artwork exhibited in a professional manner—framed, well lit, and accompanied by a written account of the artist and the work—was not vandalized by other students; instead, it commanded and received the respect of the students and faculty.

In another workshop, this one facilitated by Ron McManus, a former woodshop teacher and professional carpenter of twenty-five years before woodshop was deemed unnecessary, took a group of students around the building to do repair work on things that had fallen into disrepair. McManus would first ask all teachers to submit work orders during the two weeks before workshop days, and then he and his team would gather supplies and tackle the jobs they thought were within their range of abilities. McManus and his group re-plastered walls that had been damaged either from vandalism or from the normal wear and tear one finds in a one-hundred-year-old building; they repainted areas where paint was peeling; and, they attempted other projects like fixing door locks and windows that were broken. The workshop, according to one student participant, call him Jorge, "gave us some kind of chance to make the place look better."

Although the two workshops I've highlighted here deal directly with the transformation of the physical space of the school, all of the workshops we offered might be said to have benefited students in some way. The art gallery that Marks and his

students created gave students a new respect for the work of their peers and helped students to see school as a place where their work and ideas were valued, a place where they could transform their futures and be transformed in positive ways. Girls in the cosmetology course that I spoke with said they thought about going to cosmetology school or opening a salon when they finished high school. A young man in my advisor class, Guillermo, who enrolled in the guitar workshop, talked about saving up money and buying his own guitar, and at Christmas he told me his father had pitched in to help him purchase an amplifier.

We might also assume, I think, that other transformations occurred in other workshops were students were given the opportunity to try new things—like writing poetry, playing the guitar, learning to paint with an airbrush—as they explored different ways of knowing and doing. It should also be noted that many of these workshops were simply what students in wealthier school districts or selective enrollment schools in Chicago would have had access to on a daily basis as part of their regular choice of elective courses. In our school, however, where resources were scarce, these supplemental experiences were often seen as something extraordinary and unrelated to a student's academic achievement, something that was seen by those with administrative power to add little or nothing toward bridging the achievement gap or bringing up test scores.

Closing the Door on Opportunity: Education as Test Preparation

The first principal at CCA, Ms. Johnson, had been elected to lead the school by the entire staff. However, that fact that Ms. Johnson did not hold the appropriate administrative

certification (Type 75) did not sit well with the area administration. Ms. Johnson's lack of the appropriate credential—despite being well liked by students and faculty, increasing attendance rates and test scores—became the reason that after just two years of administering the school she was "asked" to retire. A new principal was quickly chosen, one who had little investment in the original vision of the school and whose support for the initial proposal quickly eroded as it came to be seen more and more as an additional and unnecessary administrative challenge.

Our new principal, Ms. Lucas, reluctantly allowed the workshops and field trips to continue for one year—her first at CCA—before deciding unilaterally to discontinue them. Her distaste for our school model, however, was made apparent during staff meetings where she would denounce the workshops and field trips as "untenable" an "organizational nightmare," and "lacking in any educational value." During the summer before what would be her second year as principal, Ms. Lucas declared that the Wednesday workshops run by community artists and educators would effectively be closed down before the start of the coming school year. After the news broke that the workshops and field trips would be eliminated, several teachers left for other schools. Those of us who remained either felt powerless to do anything to stop the shift in momentum or, perhaps, we were simply indifferent (as I suspect many were) to yet another policy change handed down from on high.

The official reason for the elimination of the workshop and field trip days was a lack of funding, although not long after the workshops were cancelled our principal purchased a test preparation program that would end up costing the school more than twenty thousand dollars—enough to pay for a large portion of the field trips and

workshops. Ms. Lucas subsequently chose a handful of teachers to undergo the test

preparation training with the idea that the test taking skills these teachers were learning

would then be taught to the rest of the staff during professional development days, time

that had been previously used to plan field trips and to discuss ongoing concerns or ideas

for workshops.

The unofficial reasons for the move away from the school's mission were many;

the workshops were becoming too difficult to manage in a school that shared a bell

schedule, lunch room, and gym with three other small schools; there was no political will

on the part of the administration (the principal and the Area Instructional Officer) to

advocate in favor of something they viewed as having little academic value; many of the

teachers involved in writing the proposal, sensing the lack of support, had moved on to

other schools; a significant number of teachers who were involved in the creation of CCA

had retired; the area administration saw the workshops as taking away academic face

time in the classroom that was needed to bring test scores up and prepare students for

college. It wasn't long before our small school, set up originally to discover the city and

community outside our walls, had officially shut its doors to the community and gone

back to advocating for the kind of pedagogy that had led to the school being targeted for

intervention in the first place.

Finding New Ways to Connect: Service-Learning, Civic Literacy, and the Community

 At the time I was teaching at CCA I hadn't yet been acquainted with John Dewey's

notion of the "adequately conceived" educative experience (90), nor had I heard of Jay

Robinson's notion of "civic literacy" (Robinson 12). I had, however, during moments of critical reflection with colleagues (conversations where we actively discussed the successes and failures of various projects we had worked on together), begun to realize the value and importance of connecting students to the things they cared most about. It was clear that many of us wanted to engage in the kind of praxis, described by Paulo Freire as, "the action and reflection of men and women on their world in order to transform it" as a way of creating valuable learning opportunities for our students (60).

In conceiving of CCA, my colleagues had hoped to create the conditions for experiences that would be based on our specific social context; we wanted our students to have access to a variety of educational opportunities that would allow them to participate in activities of their choosing. Teachers and students had begun, with our limited understanding of what to us was a new approach to schooling, to appreciate the value in connecting work in the classroom to issues and needs in the surrounding community. Shortly after the workshops and biweekly field trips were cancelled, I was asked to take over the position of service-learning coach at CCA. At the time, I had only a vague notion of what the position entailed and had not taken the time to thoroughly examine the pedagogy behind this teaching methodology. My initial enthusiasm for the position derived from what I saw as a possible avenue for more project-based learning—at a time when such things were starting to disappear at CCA—that would potentially connect students to their community in meaningful ways. After several meetings with the service-learning coordinator for Chicago Public Schools, I came to understand the service-learning methodology as a way for students and teachers to cooperatively develop curriculum-based projects that would in some way participate in the interest of the

community.

Through my work at the school and in the community I began to understand that service learning was not just a series of unconnected forays into the community to do good deeds (e.g., spending an hour working at a homeless shelter). Rather, I now understood that for service learning to be meaningful for students and their community it would need to be more of a sustained experience that has specific objectives in terms of developing skills and solving (or attempting to solve) problems. That is, it needed to be based on the model of doing work "for us and by us" in order to address and respond to ongoing community-defined issues.

The biggest challenge I faced while attempting to reignite an interest in community-based learning was that many of the teachers and administrators I spoke with still viewed service-learning in a very limited way: to many people service-learning was a hold over from the days of community service where students would perform an often meaningless "service" in exchange for the required number of hours. Because these service hours were mandated, they also had an unfortunate association with court-ordered community service. There was really very little understanding on the part of staff, administration, or students about how this kind of community service could connect to issues of literacy or social justice in authentic ways. With the help of several colleagues, however, we began a campaign to resituate service learning at CCA in order to help our colleagues reimagine the possibilities of civic engagement.

Many of the teachers I worked with on service-learning projects were well meaning, but, perhaps, like me, not quite sure what it meant to teach as a form of social justice in a community-based setting. For one thing, most us were relatively new to the

profession and very few of us actually came from the community we were supposed to engage with outside the school. In addition, many of the teachers at CCA were white, middle-class educators with very little experience working with a population of students that had grown up in a world largely out of our realm of lived experiences. In addition, many of my colleagues still viewed service learning as performing a kind of community service rather than as a teaching methodology to connect classrooms to the community in authentic ways.

The dual challenges of changing perceptions about the possibilities for community engagement through service-learning while also encouraging our fellow educators to take steps into the community and construct knowledge along with their students, was ongoing and often difficult; many of our well-meaning colleagues felt safer and more secure simply doing things the way they'd always been done (i.e., teaching their subjects). After what came to be viewed as our failed experiment in using the community as our classroom (failed, in large part, because our institutional support disappeared), and after suffering under intervention for several years, I could understand all too well the reluctance that some teachers felt as we began to challenge them to make more community connections with the work they were doing in their classroom.

From my various discussions with the staff at CCA we realized that we wanted to avoid being viewed as what Freire termed "cultural invaders," imposing our will on our students or the community (152). We also wanted to do more than just set up the conditions for discursive democracy that simply recreated middle-class ways of knowing while avoiding actual confrontations with power (Schutz 19). Our shared goal was to create a space where a community of learners could, in the Deweyan sense, see the

potential and possibility for further change, or what Dewey calls the "the ability to develop" (46). In other words, we wanted to create the conditions where students had "the power to retain from one experience something which is of avail in coping with the difficulties of a later situation. This means power to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences" (Dewey 49). To do this, we needed to create the conditions in our classrooms that would allow teachers and students to enter into dialogue around issues of interest, so that these conversations could form the basis of social action.

What became apparent to me and to a few of my colleagues and students who had been discussing the various ways in which our school was failing to live up to its mission, was the lack of will on the part of anyone holding power to do anything significant to change or challenge current conditions. The more that teachers and students became involved in civic engagement projects related to issues we cared about, the more we began to examine and discuss the conditions of our own school community and how we had arrived at the place we found ourselves. We had been spending time and energy on a number of worthwhile projects—including a neighborhood exchange program, a environmental clean up around the old steel mills, a project connecting students with the elderly in the community through letter writing and face-to-face meetings, a global warming awareness project that included creating a mural—but none of these projects directly challenged or engaged with conditions in our school.

As Henry Giroux points out, theories about why schools aren't working seem to be everywhere, but teachers and students need to do more than simply discuss these problems:

> Given the current mood of cynicism, despair, and defeatism, it is important for radical educators to move beyond theories of reproduction that do nothing more than analyze

either the contradictions that exist in schools or point to the way in which schools are influenced by structural determinants in the wider society. (Giroux 105)

Despite an ongoing discussion among teachers and students about enacting changes in our school, the note of defeatism we detected in many of our colleagues was apparent whenever the discussion of our current conditions turned to what we might do to transform our situation. One colleague put it this way, "If there's no money and there's no will, then it's not going to happen." As much as I didn't want to believe it, I found it hard to disagree with her. The notion of reclaiming power in the school community, of holding those around us accountable to us, didn't seem possible without the support of our colleagues, the student body, and access to additional financial resources.

In my view, social justice teaching asks us to do more than set up shop in urban schools and begin to teach students about issues we think they ought to know or do something about; instead, teaching as a form of social justice means that teachers and students working together, as Freire notes, "must acquire a critical awareness of oppression through the praxis of this struggle" (51). However, social justice teaching also requires us to begin by listening to students and allowing them, as Robinson tells us, "to make meanings for themselves" and to address the concerns that are of interest, first and foremost, to them (9).

Thus, while social justice teaching will always require that "teachers provide opportunities for students to become participants" (4) and that teachers "start and end with the imperative 'I must do something" (22), this critical pedagogy also requires that we allow a movement or action to develop organically from existing conditions. As Robinson suggests, teachers can help students develop civic literacies in response to the

lived conditions of the schools and communities they come from, and not through an insistence on the part of well-meaning adults to "do something" immediately and without the proper consultation of those whom such changes will most affect (9).

At CCA our later attempts to mobilize the community and to rally our members in support of changes at our school developed out of particular conditions both in the community and at the school and should be viewed as neither a model nor a formula for teaching as a form of social justice. Instead, what our story provides is a glimpse into the way in which teaching in response to specific social, economic and cultural concerns might come about. Students at CCA who led the push for more accountability from community leaders were driven both by their passion for the issues and by the confidence and experience they gained from a series of successful service-learning projects. These student activists believed in the possibility for a future that many of the adults around them could not, or would not, stop to imagine with them.

Phoenix Rising: The Price of Change

This story, like too many before it, begins with a school shooting. While walking home from school with some friends a CCA student, Eduardo Mendez[2], was shot in the chest and killed just two blocks from the high school he attended for three and half years. His cousin, Manuela, was standing nearby when the shooter got out of a car, pointed his gun, and pulled the trigger. She ran to Eduardo's side and held his head in her arms while he died on the pavement. By the time the ambulance arrived the students said he was long gone. He'd stopped breathing, and though his eyes were still open, they didn't move.

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[2] All names of students and teachers have been changed. Unidentified teacher quotes are my best recollection of converations I had with my colleagues.

When I came into the school the next morning students stood in the hallway, many of them stunned and crying, staring silently at the picture of the murdered student that someone had taped on the wall. Below the picture was a large piece of poster paper; one by one the students began to walk up and write down some final thoughts about Eduardo.

I was struck by the silence in the hallways. Not even the students from the other small schools were making much noise that morning. It was like a cloud had descended on the school and everyone knew it.

I saw our principal at the end of the hallway and I went up to speak with her.

"Are we going to get the crisis team out today?" I asked.

"No," she said. "There were multiple shootings at another high school so everyone is over there today. Maybe tomorrow."

The crisis team never arrived. Not that day nor the next. None of the adults I spoke with seemed to have any idea about what to do with or how to respond to the sobbing and withdrawn students they had to face. People stood in the hallway as if paralyzed by the utter incomprehensibility of it all. It seemed to me that the students, the ones who put up the memorial on the wall and cried together, knew a lot more about how to handle the situation than any of us did. It was clear to me that neither my background nor my teacher preparation program had not prepared me for this moment and that none of my colleagues, almost all white, middle-class teachers who cared deeply about their students, knew what to do either.

The day ended up being one of the strangest of my career as a teacher. Students floated in and out of classes all morning, mostly talking quietly to themselves or taking

time to cry with friends. When I asked students if they wanted to talk about what had happened most of them did not; they wanted to put their heads down, and in my opinion, they were hoping that what they were feeling would eventually go away. I could hardly blame them for wishing such a thing.

In the weeks and months that followed after Eduardo's death, I talked to a lot of angry teachers, students, and parents. Some parents did not want their sons to stay after school for soccer practice anymore; they came to see me to express their concerns (I was helping to coach the soccer team at the time). These parents were afraid to let their children play soccer on school grounds. Other parents wanted to see an increase in police presence on campus, while many others just wanted information and reassurances that nothing like this was going to happen again. Even though I was still willing to work outside with the soccer team, I could offer no assurances or even information about what had happened and why nothing had changed because of it.

The district police commander serving our area of Chicago assured everyone there would be more police presence, but that was something that most teachers had heard before (and many believed that more police would not fundamentally change anything). Upon hearing from our principal about what the police planned to do, one of our veteran teachers just laughed, saying, "Sure, they'll have an extra car out there for a week, after that it'll be business as usual." Other teachers felt unsafe coming to work and wanted the police and the administration to do more, and students were frustrated and sad at seeing another one of their peers killed. According to Jean Anyon, "history suggests that in order to obtain equitable policy in low-income communities, a social movement that builds economic and educational power is needed" (21). Unfortunately, none of us

had any idea how to do such a thing. People seemed anxious for change, but no one seemed to know quite what to do or how to get started.

Political Action in the 7th Ward: Organizing, Collectivizing, and Accountability

In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire notes, "human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world" (79). What followed at CCA after Eduardo's death came about through a kind of praxis that students and teachers went through together. These subsequent events evolved from the initial anger and frustration that were so prevalent immediately after the shooting. But, it wasn't until a small group of students resurrected—as a result of what these students viewed as the ongoing injustices in the school—how they felt after Eduardo's death that people in power finally began to take notice of the problems on our campus.

On a Tuesday afternoon during lunch two seniors, Marquisha and Silvia, had come into the room I shared with my colleague Marilyn Wilson. Marquisha, a tall and intense young woman who was critical of the education system she felt was letting her down, and Silvia, a much shorter but equally energetic and opinionated student, began a discussion about the lack of choices in their programs that year at school. Both young women talked about what they felt was a lack of respect for students from school administrators. Students being shot and killed with little or no response from those with power was just another example of the lack of respect these students felt.

On this particular day, Marquisha and Silvia were disgusted that after asking multiple times to be transferred out of classes they didn't want to take—or had already taken—their pleas had one again been rebuffed by the school administration. Most of the

adults in the building they had talked with about the problem had simply thrown up their hands and said, "Well, there's nothing I can do about it; I'm not the programmer." Marilyn, who was sympathetic to their cause, spoke with the students at length about their options and helped the two young women make an action plan.

These important conversations and actions notwithstanding, the sense of defeatism in our school—and in many public schools—cannot be overstated. It's not my intention to paint so bleak a picture as to be discouraging to others, but it's important to understand the obstacles teachers face when undertaking any type of social action within a school-based setting (Payne). There is often a sense of powerlessness that seems to come over teachers when attempting to confront what feel like the overwhelming problems of a large bureaucratic system like CPS (not to mention the economic, social, and political challenges they see students and their parents face).

Teachers see themselves as being at the mercy of Board of Education mandates, area office directives and priorities, economic and political policies, and local administrative whims. Many of the teachers that have been teaching in the system for long periods of time tend to speak condescendingly to younger teachers who even suggest making changes within a school or community. These veteran teachers often see the pursuit of social justice as a waste of time and energy, preferring to simply point out the systems deficiencies while leaving the action to others foolish enough to try. Administrators, too, can be loath to entertain or support projects or actions that incorporate civic engagement components; they often see their work through a neoliberal lens that mandates higher test scores above all else. Teachers who want to work with students to effect change in schools or communities are often on their own in a hostile

environment where the benefits of maintaining the status quo often far outweigh any potential rewards that collective action might bring.

What started at CCA as a conversation between a few students and a couple of teachers about school security then turned into questions about programming decisions, equity in school funding, and unregulated construction schedules. Eventually, over the course of many weeks and several actions, a small group of student and teachers began to organize (i.e., talk with others and meet regularly). We invited Jim Thompson from Public Action for Change Today (PACT), a youth empowerment organization affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), to join us as we tried to identify how to take thoughtful action. Jim and I set up relational, or one-to-one meetings, with a number of the CCA staff members who had shown some interests in our ongoing projects. We began the process of, as Jim, borrowing from Ed Chambers, called it, "waking people up to what was going on and what could be done about it." Jim brought with him the collective knowledge of the IAF to help us organize a plan. We started sharing our stories with others. As Ed Chambers notes, "it's the sharing of stories that sustain and energize the process" (23).

While we (i.e., teachers, students, and parents) knew much more about how the school functioned as well as the problems and challenges we faced, Jim provided a way for us all to connect to the issues we cared about; as Schutz puts it, describing the techniques of community organizing developed by Alinsky and Chambers,

> In the ideal, one-to-ones provide a conduit between the mass of participants with limited time and core leaders who come together in meetings. A common practice for leaders is to pool what they have learned from their interviews to discover what issue their constituency seems most interested in. (30)

The one to ones we conducted—individual face-to-face interviews with colleagues—helped us to identify key people and form a group around our shared concerns. Because of our discussions in these one-to-one relational meetings our small group of teachers and students was able to work together to produce a space to think about changes to our school.

In our first real meeting together as a group there was very little agreement on what actually needed to be done; each of us had our own particular problem we wanted to address. However, Jim's one-to-ones provided us with a broader view of what we had in common; namely, that we wanted to have a voice in the decisions that were being made in the school and community, decisions that were affecting us all, and we wanted those in power to respect our voices.

Although everyone agreed that improvements were needed to the one-hundred-year-old building where our school was housed, most of us who worked or went to school in the building didn't appreciate the noise or the distraction of having work crews operating inside the building during the day while we were trying to teach or learn. The work on the building had begun during the summer and teachers and students were assured over and over again that despite appearances to the contrary, the work would be completed before the new school year began.

Just days before the start of school, we were informed that because the crews were behind schedule we should expect work to continue throughout the school year; it was exactly what we had all feared, but hoped would not come true. In addition to the ongoing work, there would be no operational science labs for CCA and most of the bathrooms would not be functioning until later in the year. Once school started, the work

continued uninterrupted and while it was already January there was no end in sight. It seemed, despite our protestations that nothing could be done to stop the work during the school day or speed up work on the science labs.

The ongoing work also caused students and teachers to raise questions about the potential health risks from being exposed to the chemicals and other debris that was being stirred up in the building. During the summer, areas of the school had been cordoned off with plastic tarps and labeled "Warning: Do Not Enter" due to asbestos removal. Some of these areas were still being worked on. We all had a lot of questions about our health and safety in the building while it was still a live construction site. Why couldn't the crews begin work in the afternoon, after school let out for the day? Who was responsible for allowing workers to change windows in November, leading to freezing temperatures in parts of the building and the displacement of entire classes into the gym, when it was available, or into the hallways when no room could be used? One of the science teachers I spoke with described the scene like this:

> They began taking the widows out while my students were trying to take a quiz I'd just handed out. There was no place for us to go—that's what I was told. You know, there were no free rooms. So, while they were pulling out the old windows the wind kicked up and the snow started to blow into the classroom. There's literally snow falling in the classroom. It was surreal. Kids didn't have jackets on either because they aren't allowed to wear jackets into classrooms. Eventually I told them to forget the quiz. What could I do? Should I make them sit there? It was freezing. You see the construction guys have gloves and these heavy coats on. Finally we all went into the hallway and stood around for the rest of the period. I wish I'd had my camera. It was a scene worthy of a photograph.

Our initial questions about events like the one described above led us to others, like whether or not selective enrollment high schools in Chicago would approve the same work schedule at their schools. Questions were also raised by teachers at staff meetings and students also tried to get answers from various officials inside the building about the

ongoing disruptions. No one, it seemed would stand up to the contractors and advocate on behalf of the teachers or students. As Alinsky puts it, "in a world where everything is so interrelated that one feels helpless to know where or how to grab hold and act, defeat sets in" (xix). The more questions we asked the more we seemed to be pointed in circles. At the time, there were four principals in the building and one building manager, but no matter whom we spoke to, it became apparent to us that no one was capable of putting and end to what was happening, no one seemed willing to put "children first."

After a series of meetings between teachers and students we finally got around to discussing what steps we might take to hold those in charge accountable for what many of us viewed as real impediments to teaching and learning in the school. A small group of teachers and students began to build a platform of issues that we felt needed to be addressed. There were several petition campaigns surrounding various issues; a student-led sit-in that resulted in the principal threatening to have students arrested if they didn't return to class; phone calls and emails were made to officials; meetings were held that were open to parents, teachers, and community members; we took a trip to Springfield to lobby on behalf of school funding reform (an issue we saw as related to our ongoing struggles); and, finally, all of these actions culminated in an accountability session held in the school library that brought together the candidates running for alderman in the 7th Ward to answer student and teacher concerns about what was going on in and around the building.

Institutional Resistance: Different Views of Accountability

The7[th] Ward accountability session held in the school library was modeled after a gubernatorial accountability session our students had participated in earlier that year. Our group of about ten students, five teachers, and three parents worked closely with Jim from PACT to set up the session, develop a program, contact media outlets, publicize the event in the community, and bring the candidates and the community together. We were becoming bridge builders, in the way Aaron Schutz calls on us to do this work, finding ways to connect the working class students and community with the middle-class educators and community organizers to promote change. This meant changing the way we all normally went about our individual lives. According to Alinsky, "present arrangements must be disorganized if they are to be displaced by new patterns that provide the opportunities and means for citizen participation" (116). We were attempting to do something that had never been done in our school, and because of that, many of the people with whom we came in contact did not hesitate to tell us that we were wasting our time. In my view, this action is precisely the kind of cultural form (or, emergent culture) that Williams suggests that we can develop in order to resist mandates and create alternatives.

Early on in the planning process we had secured verbal approval from our principal, and we continued to invite her to the planning meetings we held after school. Of the fifteen or so meetings we held she came to only two; the first was at the very start of the process, and second was right before the event was to take place. At the first meeting she attended (there were just two students, two teachers, and a community organizer) our principal gave us the impression that she not only did not think we would

actually get the candidates to come to our school, but she also doubted we were up to the task of organizing the event. Her exact words were, "Teachers aren't going to do this. No one is going to come." It seemed that, in her opinion, there would be no event and, therefore, she had no reason to think about it anymore. Despite her lack of interest in the action, we went forward with our idea.

Working together to inform parents about the event, to contact the candidates and to help the students prepare to moderate the event, we created a program and secured commitments from all the candidates except the incumbent, Darcel. Ms. Beavers, who had recently been appointed to the alderman's seat by her father William Beavers, a longtime incumbent who had vacated the position after he was elected county commissioner, declined our invitation to attend the accountability session. Despite Beavers' decision not to participate, the other candidates saw the session as an opportunity to get some free publicity and address the community.

As the date for our event drew near, the race began to heat up. Sandi Jackson, the wife of congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. had been mounting what was now considered a serious challenge for a seat and had been widely viewed as safe. Later in the week before our session, when we informed our school principal about the possibility of major news outlets coming to the school to cover the event—the 7th ward race was between two major political families on the South Side and was of serious interest around the city of Chicago—she began to back peddle on her initial approval. I was called down to her office just two days before the scheduled date of the event and met there by a representative from the Area Office.

Mr. William Jeffers, the Area Office representative, asked me to sit down as I

entered the room. He closed the door behind me and then asked me to explain exactly what was going on, and in no uncertain terms made his disapproval known. He listened to me for a very short time and then began to tell me everything I had done wrong in setting up the event. My job, he said, was not to participate in community politics. During this meeting, he never once mentioned the potential educational value of students engaging in authentic civic engagement, nor did he even acknowledge that our actions could have any potential benefit to the school or community or that we were not endorsing any one candidate. In fact, to Mr. Jeffers, everything we were doing seemed to contradict what he thought education and teaching should be about.

According to Mr. Jeffers, I hadn't informed the area or obtained the necessary approvals to hold such an event. Despite my protests that we had kept our principal informed of our progress, it was Mr. Jeffers' opinion that I had not followed Board of Education protocol. He then read from a script of demands that included asking those of us who were organizing the event for the following: to pay for all additional costs for having the engineer on hand to lock up the building after hours; to pay for any additional security needs; to show proof, through certified mail, that all candidates had been invited to attend; to insure that in no way would the school tour (we offered to give each candidate a tour of the school) disrupt instruction; to have a one million dollar bonded insurance policy faxed to the Area Office; to complete all necessary approval forms and obtain all necessary signatures to host the event. We had only two days to comply with these requests. Then, after a long and rather unsettling conversation with my principal and Mr. Jeffers, I was told that I would be written up for my lack of respect for Board protocols. In the end, Jim from PACT was able to fax an insurance policy to Mr. Jeffers,

but, interestingly, we decided not to immediately address the other demands, and we were never asked about any of them again.

Reflecting back on the event I think that we were lucky that we had been somewhat naïve when it came to dealing with Board of Education protocols. Had we spent more time filling out the required paperwork the event may never have taken place. There would have been ample opportunity for those in charge to shut down the session before it had built any momentum within our community of interest. Of course, we thought we had made efforts to keep our principal informed every step of the way. But instead of following board-mandated procedure (i.e., a bureaucratic model), we worked backwards, inviting the community and the candidates and publicizing the event before going through all the official channels so that there was already, in my opinion, too much at stake for the administrators to risk trying to shut it down (i.e., and Alinsky-based model). This was our way of acting in radically pragmatic ways (creating a form of emergent culture), since we took the notion of accountability and tried to reimagine how such a term might be made meaningful to our community of interest.

Rethinking Accountability: Students and Teachers Acting Together
The action itself took place in the school library on a Friday night in February. More than 140 people attended, including parents, teachers, principals, and community members; it was standing room only. Four of the five candidates running for 7th Ward Alderman showed up and answered questions written and asked by students. The candidates and the audience members also made a pledge to work together to improve conditions at the school, to provide better security inside and outside of the building, and to work with the

contractors so that the work going on would be less disruptive to teachers and students. The candidates present also agreed, if they won the election, to speak at the graduation ceremony that year.

Marquisha, Maria, and several other students hosted the event and made their demands known to the candidates. They talked about Eduardo, the construction crews, and a lack of educational opportunities at the school due to funding shortages. Principals from all four small schools attended, including our own principal who, in a surreal turn of events, stood up to lead a cheer at the end of the event, yelling in call-and-response fashion, "Support!" while the crowd yelled back, "CCA!"

Those of us involved in the accountability session—students, parents, teachers, and candidates—considered the action to be a qualified success. We had all learned some important things about what it meant to organize a community action: the students had been given a forum to raise their concerns to the community; the parents had become more aware of what was happening in the school; the teachers realized what was possible when we worked together; and the candidates took the school community more seriously. Organizing the event, however, was just the first of many necessary steps toward sustainable change in the school and community. Students graduate, teachers move to different schools and politicians can quickly forget the promises they've made to constituents if no one is there to remind them.

There is much more to be said about this social action project and its effects on the community but we may, perhaps, learn more from hearing from some of those who

were directly involved in the project from its inception. Marquisha, looking back a year

later, had this to say about how it all began and how she felt about the death of one of her

classmate.

> When Eduardo was shot and killed it made me feel unsafe to return to school;
> that's how me and the other students felt. I think that the CPS system, police, and
> the alderman did a very bad job on responding to this event. The alderman didn't
> even claim us as being a part of his ward and the police had just one more car sent
> to the school every day and the CPS system, I don't have anything to say about
> them because they did not respond at all. Eduardo's death was hard for a lot of
> students. After that you would think the police would be on top of it, but it
> seemed to me that they just don't care. It is bad to say that more people die in the
> school system than at war fighting. The bad thing about it is that the school
> system, the alderman, and the police look at them all the same. They will just say
> another gangbanger is dead and then go on with their life. They don't care about
> how many kids die a year; all they care about is if the boys are on the corner or in
> jail, so the more dead the better for them. That's why we had to do the event with
> the alderman. (Marquisha)

Marquisha's words tells us that in her eyes, and in the eyes of many of the students at

CCA, the adults who were responsible for her safety had not only failed to live up to their

responsibilities, but they had also failed even to care about what was happening in the

surrounding community.

In Marquisha's view, this lack of caring for the world outside the school

amounted to a lack of caring for the students themselves. Marquisha recounts what

Maxine Greene might describes as our often troubling ability "to accede to the given, to

view what exists around us as an objective 'reality,' impervious to individual

interpretation" (7). In other words, teachers, administrators, police, and many other local

officials had acceded "to the given" and in doing so had given up on the possibility for

change (e.g., a Chicago where students could walk around safely). Students were no

longer seen as young adults with futures; they were simply gangbangers with no hope of

achieving success.

The question of security that came up in meetings before and then during the accountability session was for Marquisha far more than simply a question of putting more police in or around the school; it was an indictment of the adults who had turned their backs on the community where they worked. As Robinson notes, "we cannot now, insulate our classrooms from the problems outside school walls that trouble our students—problems that must be confronted and acted upon if anything like a civic literacy is to be practiced" (22). To put it another way, teachers need to listen to what students like Marquisha are saying and help them to find was to make change.

Another student who participated in the action, Deondre, wrote down his questions for the candidates and spoke in front of his community at the accountability session. He had never before participated in any public event like the one we held in the library. A year later Deondre had this to say about CCA and the event:

> Well, to tell you the truth there been a lot of things that changed up in there. They got the walls all painted and it look clean now. There aren't no more of them construction crews but I think that just because they done. A lot of teachers left, and there some new people working there. But it mainly the same. School be boring up in there. They don't do none of them projects like we used to when we first started out. Now they don't have nothing like that. Yeah, I did like the project we worked on together. Before that I didn't even know we had a alderman. To tell you the truth, I never thought of it before that. I think it was good. It was good because the kids got to say something. Like usually the kids don't get to talk. I mean, in most classes that's how it is. You don't get to talk about nothing. You just supposed to sit there and listen. Yeah, I think it important to get out in the community. That's where everybody be at anyway once they finish high school, if they finish high school. I do miss them workshops. I don't think much has changed. It back the way it always was in there. (Deondre)

Deondre's words can teach us a number of important things, including why we need to create opportunities for students to develop as citizens and participants in the affairs of

their communities. Yet, his words also speak to the deep intransigence of the current cultural forms and institutional realities shaped by neoliberal mandates.

While the accountability sessions and the workshop model of schooling seemed to appeal to Deondre, we were still a long way from helping students like Deondre develop the kind of civic literacies that might mean, as Jay Robison notes, "access not merely to the means for acquiring literacy but to opportunities for practicing its competencies in specific concrete situations" (18). And, as DeStigter notes, the problem with teaching civic and other literate practices to students and then imaging that we have done our jobs as teachers is "that to possess the knowledge and skills to do something is not the same as having the chance to do it" (294). Which is just to say that I could not agree more. "Teachers must resist the temptation to believe that if we can teach our students to read critically and write compellingly to a variety of audiences and for various purposes, we will soon see an end to unemployment, poverty, neglect, and loneliness" (294). In other words, just because you have a voice and know how to use it, doesn't mean anyone is going to listen to you. This is precisely what Deondre means when, reflecting on the accountability session, he says, "I don't think much has changed."

Accountability to Our Community: Learning from Action

The night of the event, after most of the audience had gone home, our small group of teachers and students got together in a nearby classroom to discuss how we felt about our accountability session. At the time, we were all asked to reflect on what we were most proud of and to talk a little bit about how we were feeling. Many things came to my mind while I sat in the small high school desk considering the night's events. What had we

learned? What would this event mean for the future of our school? How could we build on this collective work? What were the limitations of our action? We needed to keep asking questions, of course, but we also needed to take some time to acknowledge what we were able to accomplish together.

Silvia and Marquisha had been able to stand up in front of 140 members of their community and engage in what Schutz describes as, "alternative avenues of expression" (Schutz 18). These two students told a story of their school experience and the friend they had lost to gun violence; they wrote their own speeches and spoke in their own language to people with power in their community. Other students had watched as the candidates for the local alderman's seat had answered direct requests from the students who had become involved in the action; here were adults with real power in the community answering to youth. Students and teachers were able to, as Robinson suggests, "glimpse possible worlds and then, perhaps, to imagine possibilities in their own neighborhoods, possibilities that might be made real through individual, or, more likely, collective action" (10). We had opened the eyes of some of our more skeptical colleagues to the possibility of making change in the school community. People seemed hopeful and there was a palpable sense of excitement in the room.

My colleague, Samantha Williams, echoed many of Deondre's comments, but she also provided her own unique perspective on the action as well as on the relationship between one of her students and his father.

> As a teacher, the accountability session gave me a sense of ownership to tackle larger school-wide problems that often seem beyond my control. It also created an important dialogue between teachers and some students as we tried to focus our goals for the session. For me personally, I had never participated in an accountability session before and I gained an awareness of the process and a sense of confidence to participate in future sessions. I believe the students who

participated gained a feeling of importance as they mediated and told their stories during the accountability session. I believe it even affected students who were in the audience to gain involvement and insight into the political process.

I became involved in this process because I believe there are larger issues outside of a teacher's individual classroom that can either help or hinder our students from achieving success. I really enjoyed the ability to discuss and debate school-related challenges in a larger social context. Too often, the discussions between teachers and administrators focus on specific classroom or school problems and rarely look at the larger social context and usually do not include time for debate and true discussion. I enjoyed graduate school because we were able to look at educational issues with a larger lens, taking into account different viewpoints. However, planning for the accountability session was the only time in the four years that I have been an educator that I have had the ability to have such an important discussion.

The only student who I discussed the event with did not participate in the planning or presentation, but was an audience member. He told me the next day that his father encouraged him to shake the hand of one of the candidates. His father talked to him about the political process and how important it is to vote. The student then continued to follow the election and was really excited when his favorite candidate won the election. I believe this session gave him an opportunity to become engaged in the political process.

Unfortunately, I have not seen a great deal of continued impact from this accountability session. I believe the Alderman spoke at our graduation as agreed during the accountability session. In addition, I would like to believe the Alderman has a greater interest in the success or failures of our school; however, I have not witnessed it, if this has occurred or not. It seems to me that the reason there has been little visible impact is because the team of teachers/students is no longer active in the school. If we'd continued to build upon the session during the school-year, we may have been able to see greater effects. (Williams)

Thus, while the action proved to be a powerful experience for many of us who worked closely with the group to create the event—and for some like Samantha's student who came to the event and met the candidates—I too wondered, what, if anything, our action changed in the long run for the school or the community. It is a question that provokes other questions and compels us to consider the effects of our actions. To put it another way, participating in and helping to organize events like the one at CCA requires that teachers be willing to interrogate their own practices, acknowledge failures, and reflect

on events in order to better understand our role in community work with students and other partners.

This type of social action project taught me several important lessons. First, I came away with an awareness of the inherent risks in school-based social action projects that try to link students, curriculum, and community organizing. I also discovered, however, that if students are to learn to change their communities through praxis they must start by engaging the world in ways that matter to them, and risks will need to be taken. In my experience, students in schools that lack resources and opportunity are intimately involved with and aware of the ways in which their schooling limits their field of experience and opportunity. What they may not be aware of is how much power they have to change the conditions of their environment and to demand that changes be made on their behalf.

In order for changes to occur in school-based settings, however, educators must be willing to take the necessary risks. This risk, or process of taking a "critical inquiry stance" as described by Bob Fecho, "may involve paradigm shifts, the investment of a considerable amount of time, and a more complicated relationship with stakeholders," and will involve "learning together" because "we are involved in mutual work" (142). It is, I believe, when we understand the work of teaching as mutual, dynamic, and reciprocal, that we begin to see beyond our content areas to the role we play in the larger world we share with our students.

Changing Social Conditions: Final Reflections

Reshaping the social and economic life of a community, transforming our individual social conditions, participating in local politics, taking small actions inside of our

schools, getting our voices heard through story and poetry—these are all legitimate ways of thinking about social justice and schooling. Questions remain, though, for those of us concerned with education and justice, about how teachers and students can actually do this important and challenging work. What forms and models can we learn from as we try to reimaging and expand the role of teachers in communities?

As the saying goes, much ink has been spilled mulling over questions regarding the moral and ethical implications of social and political action in communities, of what it means to adopt a critical pedagogy, of how one might go about teaching for social justice, about power, about gender, about class, and about race. All of these questions are important and worth exploring, of course.

But, as Alinsky so aptly reminds us, "the most unethical of all means is the non-use of means" (26). To put it another way, those of us "on the ground" attempting to facilitate civic engagement must be prepared to formulate ways of acting that encourage purposeful social action in each unique context; we must be ready to take practical, thoughtful steps toward real action, however one might conceive of these steps and wherever one might be, in order to become advocates for change in our own particular situations.

In my view, teachers would do well to develop what Todd DeStigter calls "principled habits" that are, in fact, "a way of thinking and acting that leads them to explore what a principle like 'justice' or any other might mean amid all the variables of a given context" (126). The "thinking and acting" described above need not be predicated on some preformed notion of what social justice has to be or how it should be enacted in schools, but rather these "principled habits" could help us create the conditions wherein a

teacher, in cooperative arrangement with students, might act to shape public life in a particular context.

In the Chicago Public Schools, where 40 hours of service-learning are now a mandated graduation requirement, teachers and students have a unique opportunity to work together, "to learn to become citizens—active participants of civic projects intended to improve and enrich collective lived lives" (Robinson 16). This is an opportunity that students and teachers should make good on by beginning to organize what Alinsky calls a "community of interests" around specific inquiry questions in order to take action on issues that matter to them (120).

That is not to say that teachers should single handedly undertake the enormously complex task of trying to change schools and communities on their own and without any prior research or thought about what it is they are trying to do or how it is that they are trying to do it. This is not an argument for change simply for the sake of change. In fact, in my view, teaching for social justice is the opposite of political radicalism for its own sake; it is a pedagogical stance based on DeStigter's principled habits that leads to action in specific social and political contexts. Any radical pedagogy that has social justice as its aim must be carefully considered by those whom it seeks to involve and affect, while also having at its core a desire for, as Alinsky says, "a way of life that has some meaning or sense" (xv), and isn't simply about resisting power or challenging authority.

Teachers might aim for a pedagogy based on what Alinsky calls a "radical pragmatism" that believes "different people, in different situations, and different times will construct their own solutions" (4) to the unique challenges they face. As Schutz argues, we also might begin to think of schools as a place where teachers and students,

"ask both what kind of practice others are engaging in and why they deem it appropriate at a particular time in a particular place while also exploring issues of power, inequality, and history that affect what practices are operative in a given context" (297). Once we've begun to explore these questions the *what and the how* of teaching for social justice will start to make themselves apparent to those of us who wish to act in meaningful ways to change our schools and communities. As Fecho notes, "If I believe in the power of inquiry and the primacy of culture, then I need to trust the process and let it work through my classroom" (50). To put it another way, students and teachers must be willing to ask difficult questions about the issues they see around them and then take informed action to correct these conditions.

What I hoped to show in this chapter is how Dewey's "democratic communities" could develop in unlikely settings. Democratic communities, in turn, might promote the conditions for the development of what Robinson termed civic literacies. Developing civic literacies in schools may require teachers and students to learn some of the strategies and tactics pioneered by community organizers to create real social change in communities; these strategies and tactics can then be taken together to inform the way we think about the work of teachers and schools. Organizing what we do in schools through critical inquiry can help students and teachers develop what Robinson describes as civic literacy. According to Robinson, civic literacy involves students in teachers in, among other things, "engaged acts of citizenship as they seek to learn about and take actions" in their communities (12).

Teachers and other professionals interested in civic-engagement, or meaningful

participation in one's community, can, as Cathy Fleischer and David Schaafsma tell us,
be involved in

> the creation of habitable spaces for all citizens which in turn allows for the development of human agency; the establishment of participatory communities in which students can move their private understandings into public settings, connecting their pasts with their presents, anticipating their futures (xxv).

This type of social action, or civic-engagement, can take many forms, but teachers might begin with the understanding that students and community members bring a knowledge and language of their own about their communities; it is this knowledge that should be the starting point for meaningful action in any school. Students and other community allies must first connect with and make meaningful the past that they know in order to envision and create the future they hope for.

4. Toward an Ecological Approach to Schooling: Radical Pragmatism and Community Engagement

> "You're using your relationships and your social capital. You've got to be truthful. You can't bullshit people."
> --William Gerstein, Director
>   Family and Community Engagement (FACE) for the CPS

> "If schools are places of knowledge—all the knowledge you need—then they should be institutions of liberation. I mean, what's the point of education if we aren't trying to come up with solutions."
> --Tiffany Jenkins, Teacher
> North Lawndale College Prep

An Ecological Metaphor for Education Reform: Or Why Fixing People is Not Enough

If one of our primary goals as educators is to improve outcomes for students, particularly students in Chicago and other urban areas, we may want to begin by examining the broader social context from which our students come. As Robert Yagelski notes, "If the overriding purpose of formal education is to enable us to imagine and create just and sustainable communities that contribute to our individual and collective well being," then we will need to do more than reproduce the status quo (8). After all, it is "the status quo that has helped give rise to the crisis of sustainability in the first place" (8). The status quo—focusing on individuals while ignoring the unequal economic relations and the structures that create them—needs to be challenged in ways that do more than simply suggest or point out that what we currently do will not work. Educators and activist, then, might begin by presenting plans and ideas that articulate principles and commitments that encourage different ways to organize schools, prepare teachers, and design curricula. In doing so, we can begin to address the problems that present the most pressing challenges to both individual and community success.

It goes without saying (and this is precisely the problem), that our schools and communities are linked in ways we often do not acknowledge in our classrooms. However, solutions to the problems we face in both communities and schools will not be forthcoming if we continue to approach the work of education in ways that have remained fundamentally unchanged from one century to the next. What this means, of course, is that while we might value the vast potential that resides in our public schools and many of our under-resourced communities, we cannot go on defending a system that fails to do what it only imagines it is doing: preparing students for standardized tests and success in college. Thus, one of our first goals might be to reframe the purpose of schooling in ways that shift the most pressing challenges we face in our communities to the center of our curriculum (Dewey).

While I have tried to show that radical pragmatism provides a theoretical framework and a method of inquiry that teachers and students can use to explore and ask questions about what schools do and why in specific contexts, I want to suggest here that an ecological metaphor can help us broaden the scope of this type of teacher and student-driven inquiry to include the health and well-being of our communities. An ecological metaphor helps bring into focus the reciprocal nature of our work and the possibility for doing it differently and for different reasons. According to Sarah Robbins, doing our work differently means that teachers come to "believe that viewing school literacy as 'public' can also mean tapping into its potential for culture-making" (8). Similar to Raymond Williams' idea about the potential of emergent culture, Robbins sees public literacy as a way for students and teachers "to make meaningful contributions to the places where they live" (8).

While most current models of education tend to emphasize individual achievement and success (both student and teacher), these same models often ignore the power and importance of relationship building and collaboration among teachers, parents, students, administrators, community members and schools. However, when teachers acknowledge the connections between schools and communities and see these spaces as sites of legitimate inquiry, Robbins tells us "it encourages students to see themselves as active composers of their communities' identities" (10).

In other words, when we authorize ourselves to explore our communities with our students, we transform the community and its most pressing issues into the lived curriculum in our classrooms (13). In this way, we refocus the goals of teaching and schooling on the meaningful contributions we make to place and people, shifting our gaze away from individual achievement in order to look to the ways in which people and place are involved in a reciprocal process of redefining the aims of education to include the health and well-being of communities.

In order to do this, it is important, I think, to recognize, as Dewey did, that an individual's successes, achievements, and learning are never solely the results of that one individual. As Dewey notes in *The Public and Its Problems*, "Singular things act, but they act together. Nothing has been discovered which acts in entire isolation" (22). Yet, so often in our schools and classrooms we imagine the opposite: we valorize individual student achievement based on test scores, school assignments, college acceptance letters, etc., while ignoring the myriad ways in which the environment, peers, mentors, teachers, and parents have contributed to that student's successes. Seeing schools in traditional ways—as sites for individual development in competition with others—encourages us to

ignore the importance of relationships with others in the work that we do.

An ecological metaphor for schooling helps us to frame our work in schools around the question of what it means to live in the world with others—to know and work with those around us for stronger, healthier communities. To put this another way, radical pragmatism encourages students and teachers to use community-organizing strategies and models to authorize themselves to act around shared concerns and common interests; an ecological metaphor helps situate this work in relation to a larger social, political, and economic concerns of the community.

By using what community psychologists have called an "ecological approach" to our schools—meaning we take into account the institutions, community resources, and experiences that shape our students—teachers and school officials can develop a much richer understanding of who their students are and how these students can best succeed and in ways that have benefits that reach beyond the individual. That is, by seeing the work of the teacher as involving intentional relationship building with parents and community organizations—making it our job to first learn about the places our students come from—teachers stand a much better chance of becoming allies and advocates for the success of both their students and the communities where these students live.

What is an ecological approach to schools and teaching? Psychologists working on mental health issues, beginning in the 1950s, began thinking about the limitations of focusing solely on fixing individuals. If we fix individuals and not the conditions that contribute to their problems (e.g., poverty and inequality), these psychologists wondered, then won't we just continue to produce individuals that we think need fixing? Such questions led these psychologists to theorize social problems in broader terms. Building

on the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and James Kelly, psychologists at the 1965 Swampscott Conference, set out to define a new discipline based on an ecological understanding of how the environment influences individuals (Trickett).

Individuals, it turned out, could be better understood as part of a complex social network that influenced (positively or negatively) outcomes. According to this view, community psychologists understand individuals as both products and producers of their social milieu. Thus, individuals on their own and without the support of their communities stood very little chance of changing or improving conditions, since the individual and the community were mutually constitutive. In other words, context influences behavior, these psychologists asserted and, thus, treating individuals without considering the social conditions that helped produce them would not help most individuals or solve our larger social problems.

As community psychologist Edison J. Trickett notes, "While the concept of ecology has many meanings, its general intent is to focus on the community embeddedness of persons and the nature of communities themselves" (265). To put this another way, where the neoliberal lens compels us to ignore context and ask what an individual has done to deserve access to additional resources, opportunities, and institutions, the ecological metaphor suggests that we ask what the community (i.e., the political, social, and economic reality) has done (or can do) to and for the individual.

Such a view encourages us to examine how we can make changes to this broader structure—changes that would benefit entire communities. In other words, it allows us to ask the question, What do we want this community to be and how can we make it so? Individuals, of course, play a role in our attempts to answer this question. However,

individuals in this framework are understood as always and already part of a larger context. This is an important distinction, since the ecological model I am proposing encourages individual growth and development with an eye toward the greater good of the community, rather than, say, at its expense. That is, individuals might be encouraged to learn about themselves, to ask question about their world, and to identify ways of being in the world that will allow them to live a happy life with others.

Taking an ecological approach to social issues, including education, has begun to gain some acceptance among education reformers and researchers interested in community-based approaches to school reform and improvement. For example, Sue Hong in her book *A Chord of Three Strands*, explores what can happen when a community-based group in Chicago works closely with parents to develop an authentic partnership with a school. Hong advocates partnership building between community-based parent groups and schools using what she calls the "ecology of parent engagement" (179). She believes that by empowering parents through a dynamic process of induction, integration, and investment, parent organizations can disrupt and challenge the way schools work in order to make room in schools for community members (180).

Hong defines induction as a process by which parents are encouraged "to become involved in ways that give them insight into school expectations" in order to better support their children (183). Integration happens, according to Hong, as parents get more involved in a school and begin "to understand their involvement in collective terms" (184). In this model, schools begin to invest in parents because they "emphasize the assets that parents bring to schools and the central role they can play there (186). In Hong's example, the "ecology of parent involvement" and the experiences parents

have in the school she writes about are made possible through an existing Parent Mentor program developed by a community-based group. This group helped parents co-create a school culture that is now open and welcoming to parent participation.

Meira Levinson writes in her book, *No Citizen Left Behind,* about the failure of focusing on individual self-improvement in schools and the need to address what she calls the "civic empowerment gap" in our public schools. Thus, Levinson argues, students need to learn how to reshape their communities through public, political, and civic action. Additionally, the Keeping and Creating American Communities (KCAC) project, supported by both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Writing project brings together a collective of students and teachers "committed to inquiry research and public writing about where they live" (10).

What these examples suggest to us, in my view, is that when educators have a moment to pause and consider the purposes of their work, they often identify real disconnects between what the official curriculum—the one produced by schools and boards of education far removed from the daily realities of most urban schools—and the lived curriculum—the dynamic interplay between students and teachers in real spaces—that enfolds in classrooms that are always and already shaped by the communities from which our students come.

Charles Payne, in his book, *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistent Failure of Urban Schools*, notes that "most discussion of education policy and practice is dangerously disconnected from the daily realities of urban schools…most discussion fails to appreciate the intertwined and overdetermined nature of the causes of failure" (5). Payne goes on to point out that though we may find problems in our schools—many of

them, in fact—we cannot continue to make the mistake of reducing these problems to just the people in the schools (45). His point is that rather than looking for quick fixes to improve teachers or the next new program to raise test scores, we need to look more broadly at the ways in which students, teachers, parents, administrators and community members can build relational trust and work together to solve pressing community issues. According to Payne, relational trust needs to be present in ways that encourage all of these groups to genuinely care about each other and work toward making the local community just and sustainable (36).

In this chapter I document three attempts to bring Chicago schools and communities together in meaningful ways. I chose to focus on these three stories because, in my view, they each reveal something important about the way in which communities and teachers can organize together. In other words, they point us toward—and make a reasoned appeal for—an ecological approach to schooling. These relatively recent efforts also allow me to report on some of the challenges inherent in taking an ecological approach to schooling—challenges embedded in our outmoded ways of seeing the work of teachers and schools.

Yet, by highlighting the connections I see between schools and the places we find them, I hope to call attention to the important ways in which place matters for people in schools. As I hope these stories illustrate, developing a shared understanding of the importance of place and working together as active citizens will be both challenging and rewarding. Yet, I also want to acknowledge that using an ecological metaphor for schools sets up enormous difficulties because it not only challenges mainstream ideas about what teachers do but also prompts us to reconsider the purposes of schooling in ways that may

make us uncomfortable.

What will it take, then, to get educators, community members, and policy makers to think about schooling and teaching in different ways—ways that encourage seeing the work of teachers and schools as directly connected to communities? Perhaps the statistic on CPS graduates recently reported in an op-ed piece in *Catalyst Chicago*, an independent newspaper about education in Chicago, will remind us to think carefully about why we continue to do what we do in our schools. Authors Lisa Kulisek and Cheyney Worthman note the following:

> By the age of 25, just 6% of students who enter CPS high schools as freshmen will have a bachelors' degree. For African-American and Latino students, that number drops to just 3% who will hold a four-year degree. This is a systemic problem that starts at birth, but is exacerbated by inequities in a school system (10.15.12).

In my view, rather than seeing this statistic as, say, and indictment of our teachers or our public schools, we might consider what these numbers suggest to us about the ways in which communities and schools interact. Doing so may help us to ask the important questions about how we organize our schools and for what purposes.

One of the many potential barriers to building strong partnerships between community-based organizations and schools is that many teachers, administrators, students, and community members already see their work as extraordinarily difficult and time consuming. Rightly so, I might add. What is more, many of these individuals understand schools in ways they have been taught to understand them: as spaces for individual growth and development through separate academic disciplines. That is, many of us still see education (in its traditional articulation) as the key to individual success and

fulfillment. We believe this, despite the fact that schools in urban centers rarely produce the type of individual successes we profess to believe in and want to encourage (Marsh). Thus, the biggest challenge to creating school and community partnerships that allow students, teachers, and community members to address key community concerns, then, will most often be the teachers and community members themselves.

How might we address this tension? What might teachers do to actively invite partnership and begin to see community members as the solution, rather than, say, the problem? When I asked Ed Chambers, former head of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), what he thought about this question, he offered a characteristically provocative answer: "Close all the schools in Chicago for a year," he said. "Put the teachers to work relating to the communities. Get the parents to relate to their kids and their neighbors. Get people talking to each other. Find out what they care about. That would be a good start." While the odds of this happening seem rather slim, the point that Chambers makes is, in fact, instructive.

By moving things like relationship building between students, teachers, parents and other community members to the top of our list, we change the nature of our school priorities and, thus, open the door for teachers and students to focus on community inquiry as well as community health and development. In other words, relating with others to identify the most important concerns for people is an important first step toward remaking schools as spaces for the growth and development of both the individual and the collective well being.

The snapshots I provide below attempt to show traces, or outlines, of what schools and teachers might look like when central to what they do is a concern for

relationship building and mutual engagement for the betterment and sustainability of the community. In other words, these stories may help us to embrace the notion that the success of our schools is always and already inextricably linked to the success of our communities. Another way to say this is that rather than, say, continuing to fixate on education as the solution to all our social problems, we begin, instead, to look more broadly at the problems of poverty and inequality that plague so many of our urban communities (Marsh).

In the first vignette, I describe a collaboration in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago between community-based groups, parents, school administrators and teachers in order to enact their "Community as Campus" plan. In the second, I report on the observations and concerns of a teacher who sees her work in her North Lawndale school through the lens of a community organizer. And, finally, in the third example, I explore the challenges of initiating a community-based arts project that attempts to bring teachers out into the community, both literally and figuratively through a public art instillation.

I ground this research in the stories of people working to change circumstances for the better, rather than, say, in the narratives that emerge from traditional metrics like attendance rates or test scores. An overreliance on data seems to characterize every aspect of the current school reform movement—a movement framed by discussions of deficiency and crisis. So often the data tell us discouraging tales that strip entire communities of value or humanness. While I do think there are ways in which we might use data—much like the statistics I quote above from Catalyst Chicago—I prefer to use

vignettes—or stories—to both show and explore possible alternatives to traditional ways of understanding schools, teachers, and community partnerships with schools.

In order to ignite different kinds of actions and conversations, I tried to find stories that would help us reframe the challenges we face in education around the idea of sustainable, healthy communities. While the stories I tell are also incomplete, they do, I believe, move us away from data-driven conclusions and gesture toward the dynamic, messy, and often contradictory ways that people working together try to carve out their own narratives of possibility—often in the most challenging spaces of our cities where schools and communities intersect in ways that are impossible to ignore.

Community as Campus: Community Action and the Shaping of a School

On the near West Side of Chicago on the boarder of Humboldt Park, I met Bill Gerstein at a Puerto Rican coffee shop. I had heard about the work that Bill was doing at Roberto Clemente High School from a friend of mine, a former community organizer with an IAF affiliate, who now worked as a community organizer for the Chicago Public Schools. Bill, a slight man with wire-framed, John Lennon glasses, came through the door wearing a white shirt and a dark tie under a brown overcoat. He greeted me with a smile and a handshake. The two of us huddled over our cups of coffee and talked about some of the people—teachers, principals, activists, and professors—we knew in common.

I asked Bill to talk with me about the Family and Community Engagement Office (FACE), a relatively new office (started in 2010) at the CPS, and the work he was involved in at Roberto Clemente High School in Chicago's Humboldt Park

neighborhood. The story Bill told me went beyond his work for the CPS. And, perhaps, it is fitting that Bill began his work in Chicago helping to run his family's store in Hyde Park on Chicago's South Side. It was there, Bill suggested, that he got to know the community and the people who lived there. Later, Bill would begin his work in education as a teacher in Chicago Public Schools.

His work in schools as a teacher, he told me, gave him invaluable insight into the challenges and possibilities of the profession. Unfortunately, though, Bill was forced to leave teaching a few years later, not because he did not like the job, but because his family needed him again to help run their business in Hyde Park. So, he went back for a few years and built up the business. Once the business was on track, though, Bill told me he wanted to get back into education. This was about 10 years ago. This time around, however, Bill took the job as principal of a South Side high school.

Experiencing the world of the CPS from the perspective of both a teacher and a principal—and then having this experience interrupted by a return to his family business—gave Bill a unique opportunity to see firsthand the importance of relationship building, cooperation, and reciprocity in schools and communities. These experiences helped shape his understanding of what schools might do and be in communities where resources and opportunities are scarce. Now, as Director of the FACE office for the CPS, he focuses his efforts on connecting schools and communities in order to improve outcomes in both of these spaces for students, parents, teachers, and community members.

One of the first things I asked Bill was how he went about initiating his work in Humboldt Park. "It started with a lot of legwork," he said. "We did a lot of one-one-

ones and small group meetings. We needed to explain what we wanted to do in order to see if they wanted to participate" (Gerstein interview). According to Bill, those who chose to get involved would define, in large part, what the collaboration would be about. "We started with people we knew in the community, leveraging those relationships. What we wanted to do is partner with the community to come up with school strategies that the community defined" (Gerstein interview). For Bill, his job was about "working with communities and trying to partner with them about how their schools can be improved" (Gerstein interview).

From a series of initial meetings and one-on-ones, Bill and his team helped assemble fourteen Community Action Councils (CAC) across Chicago, including one at Roberto Clemente High School in the Humboldt Park neighborhood. These councils, Bill told me, are typically made up of approximately 25-30 people. The groups include elected officials, community-based organizations, parents, faith-based leaders, educators, and members of the FACE team. Of the fourteen CACs in Chicago, Bill was particularly enthusiastic about the community involvement at Roberto Clemente and he invited me to join him at their monthly meetings.

The Clemente CAC had recently published a set of recommendations for CPS called "A Roadmap for Improving Educational Opportunities and Community Supports" where they developed a concept they named "Community as a Campus." Bill enthusiastically shared the report with me to help give me a better sense of what they were trying to do. According to the report authored by the Clemente CAC:

> The 'Community as a Campus' is a unique concept that sees educational
> excellence and success as an outcome of a fully integrated community ecosystem

responding to the needs of its learners and preparing citizenry of the 21st century. (Roadmap 2)

The report, then, can be seen as evidence of a community that has come to understand that successful schools are directly related to the health and well being of the larger community, or what the CAC in Humboldt Park called the "community ecosystem."

Of course, the work of the CAC was not done overnight. The Humboldt Park CAC and the development of the report and recommendations to the CPS came about as a result of a long history of involvement in the CPS. According to the executive summary of in the CAC report, as well as many of the CAC members I spoke with, many of those involved in the CAC have been around and active in the local community for many years. The report notes:

> While the Humboldt Park-Clemente CAC is just one year old in November, its membership, which includes a diversity of Humboldt Park stakeholders including principals, teachers, LSC members, parents, and non-profit organizational stakeholders, is not new to the educational and community planning process, nor is this the first time that the community of Humboldt Park has come together to engage Chicago Public Schools in a discussion around the question of how to improve the educational outcomes of our children and youth. The Humboldt Park community stakeholders were part of the first wave of school reform, resulting in the creation of the Local School Councils, and since the early 1990s have derived considerable social capital from maintaining the coalitions built around creating an empowerment zone in Humboldt Park and, more recently, the New Communities Plan (see in appendix, attached.). The Community as a Campus strategic plan is an outgrowth of the more than twenty-five years of organizing and planning undertaken by the long-standing committed stakeholders of the Humboldt Park Community. (Roadmap 7)

One conclusion we can draw from the statement above is that coalition building takes time and can be challenging work—more time than politicians and school board officials may want to acknowledge when it comes to changing our schools and communities. However, what may be less obvious here, in statements like the one from the report above, is the role that teachers and schools can play as participants in coalition building,

particularly in communities where a network of community-based groups already exist. Schools, it seems, can be sites of community engagement, critical conversations, and action planning; teachers can become important links (or bridges) between students, parents, the school and community-based groups (Schutz).

After attending the Clemente CAC meetings for several months, talking to members of the council, reading the plan they developed, and listening to a range of participants speak out about different issues, I began to develop a better understanding of just how challenging the work of connecting schools and communities could be. One of the lessons I learned from my limited participation and observation was how important the twin ideas of partnership and reciprocity would be to this process. Without these key concepts, and without some general agreement about their importance by participants, not much would get done. In other words, like any community-based forum the CAC ran the risk of becoming just another community space for people to air complaints and talk past one another, rather than say, with one another in a genuine attempt to solve problems.

The coalition built by the CAC and FACE was authentic work that pushed participants to carefully consider what they wanted their schools to do as well as how they wanted these educational sites to function in the community. Participants understood that nothing could move through the council to the implementation stage without an authentic partnership with the CPS. To that end, the CAC developed a 41-page plan complete with a community assets analysis, a history of the community, a definition of the community (its boundaries and ethnic makeup), a set of core values and beliefs, an educational snapshot (data from public schools in the community), a list of key priorities and an action plan for moving forward.

The CAC plan was presented to the CPS and included some important findings and suggestions, not least of which was the idea to establish three institutes that would connect and serve the schools and the larger community. Also included in the report is the declaration "that no plans be made *about* us *without* us" (4). The authors of this report were seasoned community workers who understood that in order for the plan to work, there would need to be relationships built across institutions on a foundation of mutual respect. In fact, the members of the CAC demanded it.

One of several areas the CAC identified as being critical for school improvement was, not surprisingly, community involvement. The plan, called *The Clemente/Humboldt Park Community Action Council (CAC) Roadmap: A Fully Integrated Community Ecosystem* draws on school research published by the Consortium on Chicago School Research to support the council's emphasis on community involvement. Community involvement, according to the roadmap, "includes the support of parents, local businesses, churches, park districts, community organizations, community residents, and other stakeholders within the community. Informed and intentional input from community stakeholders on strategic educational goals and action plans, leads to responsible and sustainable policies, practices, and engagement. This is why the Community Action Councils (CAC) were formed" (4).

Additionally, the roadmap identifies and describes three key institutes necessary for moving the plan forward as well as coordinating and sustaining a strong community to school connection. The plan states that the institutes will be guided by the belief that education is "a transformational process of understanding the world around us, acting

responsibly upon that world, and dramatically changing the world" (7). Here are excerpts

from the plan's description of each institute:

1. **Parent Popular Education Institute:** This institute will serve partially as a "schools without walls" where the lived experiences of parents are acknowledged, validated and supported. This institute will allow parents to earn their high school diploma or GED when appropriate.
2. **Youth Civic Leadership Institute**: Youth will be offered leadership development opportunities in the basics of grassroots organizing, addressing issues that affect them and their neighborhoods, which will integrate them into the fabric of the community so they are seen as part of the solution and not the problem.
3. **Teacher/Administrator Leadership Institute:** Our university partners will develop professional development opportunities for and with Principals, Assistant Principals and area leaders that will engage them with the latest methodologies and pedagogy around urban education, and inspire them to guide the school with this knowledge in collaboration with the school staff and stakeholders. (Clemente 10)

Council members I spoke with felt most strongly about the need for the integration of

these institutes in order for community involvement, as they understood it, to be fully

realized. The roadmap notes the following:

> The institutes will coordinate a network of programs, services and resources to cultivate leadership development that addresses pressing educational needs and creates a pipeline of educational success defined by transformational practices. The institutes do not reside in one structure, but represent the virtual linkages among existing institutions to harness the social capital of the community. (Clemente 21)

What struck me most about the efforts of the CAC in Humboldt Park, in addition

to the council's ability to bring together various community-based groups, public school

officials, parents, and other concerned citizens, were the members' deeply held and

publicly declared values and beliefs about civic engagement, community participation,

and schooling. Here are just a few examples of community beliefs outlined in the report

as being critical for the success of the school and community partnership:

1) Schools as safe and inviting places to explore the world
2) Parents and youth as engaged citizens in their schools and community
3) Teachers as intellectuals
4) Validate lived experiences
5) Transformative practices
6) Social Responsibility-engender a culture of empathy and solidarity (Clemente 24)

What interests me the most about these values and beliefs is just how possible they are when communities and schools come together to do the hard work of identifying shared concerns and developing plans to address them.

A key strategy in all of this, according to Bill, is building relationships through trust. In working across communities, Bill noted, he and his team needed to build "a bit of trust on all sides. Trust became a really important thing in all of this" (Gerstein interview). Bill stated: "Look, there are people in every community that don't like each other and who don't want to work together" (Gerstein interview). Bill sees his work, at least in part, as being about bridging some of these divides. "You've got to get to know people first," he told me. In order for these types of coalitions to thrive and have an impact on both the schools and the community, though, teachers and school administrators will need get more involved in this work. According to Bill, "Teachers can do a better job connecting with their communities." At the CAC meetings I attended there were often school administrators (principals or assistant principals), but there were rarely any teacher representatives. In my view, though, for any educational initiatives—school-based or otherwise—to work, educators will need to be at the table, participating in the development as well as the implementation.

While much work remains to be done, the Humboldt Park CAC illustrates the importance of the kind of relationship building and community involvement that Chambers encourages us to do. This type of ecological approach to schooling means that

communities and schools engage in a reciprocal process of development and reorganizing. What we learn from this approach is that schools and communities have the potential to work together around mutually defined goals when communities are not only consulted but also understood as real partners in the development of healthy and sustainable communities.

Community Organizing and Teacher Organizers: Connecting Classrooms and Communities

"We need indigenous leaders like me where this work is a matter of life and death."
--Tiffany Childress, Educator and Organizer

When I first met Tiffany Childress, an African American science teacher in her early thirties, she was hustling between the two campuses of the North Lawndale high school on Chicago's West Side, where she teaches and works as the director of civic engagement. She pulled up to the school where I was scheduled to meet her, and she told me she had just come from a meeting of the Chicago Peace Warriors, a program that develops peer leaders to promote a culture of non-violence. The program, created in partnership with the Positive Peace Warriors Network, is based on a curriculum developed by the civil rights leader, Dr. Bernard Lafayette Jr., and builds on the principals of Kingian non-violence to help students better understand conflict and violence and use strategies to build peace in their school and community. The program and the work that Tiffany and her students are doing to create a culture of peace is, no doubt, worthy of a book unto itself. But, for the sake of this current project, what I wanted to know more about was who Tiffany was and how she came to understand her work as a teacher.

Tiffany grew up in a neighborhood that she described as being much like the one in which she now works on Chicago's West Side—a place where violence and the problems of poverty are an everyday reality. Her experiences as a young person have helped shape Tiffany's view that "education is a justice issue." For Tiffany, this means that being a teacher requires that she connect what she does in her science classroom with what she sees in the neighborhood where she and her students live. "I don't think there's any other way to do education," she told me. "It just doesn't make sense in a community where you have 35% unemployment rate like North Lawndale that black boys are coloring in maps at school. They should be figuring out how to solve their unemployment issues" (Childress interview). As Tiffany suggests here, schools informed by an ecological approach to their work will devise and develop with students activities and curriculum that encourages connections to the lived experiences of and the issues identified by the students and their community.

In order to do this type of work, students and teachers need time during the school day to tackle the problems that wait for them outside the walls of their schools. Allowing for this, though, requires that we reorient our schools around questions of community and civic engagement, rather than, say, around ideas about test scores. Unfortunately, most of our schools—especially those in high poverty areas—do not do enough to promote civic literacies for both students and faculty. For many teachers, including Tiffany, there just is not enough time in the school day, as it is currently configured, to address the most pressing concerns that face students and their communities.

From my own experience as a teacher in Chicago, I can attest to the fact that at institutions with long histories of "failure," the predominant response is to emphasize a

back-to-basics curriculum structured around test preparation and test-taking strategies. Tiffany shared similar frustrations with me about the school day. "I don't even have time to go to the bathroom," she said. "If you want to make people inactive, make them anxious, make them scramble to get their very basic needs met" (Childress interview). In other words, when so much of the school day is structured around required activities and subject matter, students and teachers rarely have time (unless it is done after school) to address some of the most important questions they may have about their circumstances and how to change them.

Tiffany's point here is an important one because it extends beyond the school to the concerns in the community. Opening the doors of our schools to work with community members and community-based groups will require us to address questions of poverty and inequality (things that make participation in school-based civic projects difficult or unlikely) by allowing time for teachers and students to relate with others in the community. As Tiffany notes, "I can't do as much as I would like because of the time constraints. It's hard to do the flexible work of organizing in very rigid systems, but I do make time to do one-on-ones. It's how I found my partners" (Childress interview). So, even though she acknowledges the limits to what she has been able to do in her school, Tiffany has still been able to make inroads with students and community-based groups by using the strategies and tactics of a community organizer. But, her work has had its drawbacks, too. "It's hard to find time to sit down and meet with people," she says. "We want to do something, but we often get stuck on the information gathering or research and education phase" (Childress interview).

The Teacher Organizer: Taking the Blue Pill

Tiffany came to teaching through her work at a community-based non-profit organization, the Lawndale Christian Development Center. While working at the LCDC, Tiffany had the opportunity to participate in the Industrial Area Foundation's (IAF) ten-day training program. According to Tiffany, the training was a transformative experience. "Your eyes are open to a different reality," she said. "It was life changing. It felt like I took the blue pill. This is what power looks like" (Childress interview). The experience helped her decide to go back to school to become a teacher. According to Tiffany, the power of organizing and the idea of education as a justice issue seemed to fit together. She saw her role as a teacher and organizer as connected. "I don't want them to be separate," she told me (Childress interview).

The way that Tiffany described herself, as a community member, a resident of North Lawndale, and as a teacher and an activist in her community was revealing. In her view, these things were not separate parts of her identity. Instead, they converged in ways that helped Tiffany to see her role at her school as a hybrid of several intersecting frameworks and strategies—including community organizing strategies, Kingian non-violence principles, the scientific method of inquiry, and leadership development ideas. When I asked Tiffany if she thought that there was a need for more teachers to be involved in communities where they work, she did not hesitate: "We need more indigenous leaders like me where this work is a matter of life and death" (Childress interview).

This—identifying and recruiting indigenous leaders—is not an easy thing to accomplish, especially for teachers who are under enormous pressures to raise test scores.

For one thing, many current teachers who work in the CPS do not live in the neighborhoods where they teach. In order to get more teachers involved, Tiffany notes, "You've got to have a school culture. We're working on that right now." Community organizing, she said, "taught me to communicate effectively" (Childress interview). That is, learning ways to more effectively communicate with her peers has helped Tiffany encourage a more activist-oriented culture at her school.

Two additional strategies—ones she continues to use as a teacher—that Tiffany told me she learned as an organizer, are the one-to-one meeting and the power analysis. The one-to-one meeting—when an organizer sits down with a potential leader and tries to learn who that person is and what they care about—taught Tiffany "to get to the gut of the person." The power analysis, as Tiffany described it, is a strategy where you "look at the person that you want to have a conversation with and figure out their goals, their role, their values. And, then it helps you determine whether this person can help you effect change in the school" (Childress interview). These strategies provide organizers with a way forward, a way toward acting responsibly and strategically in their respective contexts.

The organizing strategy of listening to others in order to identify common interests contradicts our traditional understandings of the teacher as dispenser of information. That is to say, Tiffany is redefining what it means to be a teacher according to ecological principles. Her approach to meeting with students, colleagues, and community members is a form of intentional relationship building that can help point us outward to others in an attempt to make connections and find ways of acting together.

Like many teachers, Tiffany was searching for ways to make positive things

happen at her school, but she got tired of talking about change; she wanted to do something, but she did not want to do this work alone. "Teachers get frustrated with philosophy," she notes. "They want operations." In order to help students and colleagues to take action with her, she says she invites them to learn more. "I do one on ones," Tiffany said. "I take them to trainings. Kinging non-violence training" (Childress interview). When I asked Tiffany what she was currently working on, she rattled off a list of projects that included a cross-city coalition aimed at helping students respond to pressing social issues like violence, lack of employment, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Did she think it was possible for students to take on such difficult issues? The first step, Tiffany told me, was that "students have to build a sense of shared identity." If students cannot relate with each other, Tiffany told me, then their chances of success were slim. Teachers, according to Tiffany, need to understand the role that schools can play in addressing these issues. What we need, Tiffany said, is "content that provides access to power" (Childress interview).

Tiffany's comments indicate that too often schools teach content that is disconnected from the community. What Tiffany recognizes is that content should not only be connected to the community but also be focused on changing that community and its power relations. Students need to see themselves as part of a community of interest in order to have any chance of making significant or lasting changes. That is to say, Tiffany's approach to helping students "build a sense of shared identity" is another example of what it means to adopt an ecological approach to schooling. Such an approach helps us to imagine schools where collective concerns and well-being are the first order of business.

Turning Schools Inside Out: What makes good teachers?

This final story came about as part of my work as a methods instructor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In a course on the teaching of writing that I taught twice in 2012, students were asked to pose inquiry into the question of what made a good teacher. Without fail, this exercise would generate an interesting conversation among students about teachers and teaching, the role of schools, and the purposes of education. For many students in the class, the question would reveal their own beliefs and assumptions about the work and role of teachers in schools—ideas that were deeply engrained, in large part, by the students' own school experiences.

Students are then asked to pose critical questions about how they came to understand teaching in these particular ways. Inevitably, the conversation would turn to a discussion about all of the things that teachers do as well as how the students thought that teachers should do them. Together, we try to examine where the role of teacher begins and ends, our responsibility to students and their families, and the role, if any, that teachers can play in communities.

In much the same way that Tiffany saw her role as a teacher directly connected to the concerns of the community, I wanted my students to start to see how our work as teachers was always and already connected to the communities in which we would teach. This did not always go well, and students were often uncomfortable with the idea that they should play any role outside of the school. Wasn't it enough, many of them asked, that they were personally committed to social justice teaching or that they were willing to work in the CPS at all?

In order to provide you with a little bit of context, I should note that this

discussion was going on at a time when the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) was under attack by new Chicago Mayor, Rahm Emmanuel, who believed that Chicago needed a longer school day, that most schools were failing, and that we needed better teachers who would work harder for less pay. Not surprisingly, the CTU was gearing up for a potential strike in response to the action that Emmanuel had initiated against the teachers and their union. The students in my class wanted to know what the strike was all about and, why, given the reports in the media of failing schools, the shortest school day in the US, and high teacher salaries, did the CTU want to strike? To examine some possible answers to these questions, we began to look at what teachers and others public school advocates were saying in response to government officials and others who wanted to break the union.

We looked at official union communications, teacher blogs, and reports from magazines and newspapers around the world that were covering the strike. From this initial inquiry came other questions about the way that teachers were being talked about in the media, the way many people understood the role of teachers in schools, and the value of the work that teachers performed in schools and communities. The conversations that these questions sparked led the class to discuss possible ways in which we might ignite a more positive conversation about the role of teachers in communities. In essence, students wanted to change the conversation about teachers in order to examine ways to support and honor the work of teachers in Chicago.

After a series of brainstorming sessions about how and what we might do, we came across a global arts project that seemed, in many ways, to be an ideal way for us to link teachers to their communities and get people talking. The project we found was

Inside Out, a global arts project started by a street artist in Paris named J.R. His work on Inside Out has been featured at the Technology Entertainment and Design Conference (TED) and in the *New Yorker* magazine and can be seen in communities across the globe, from Israel to Brazil to Palestine. Initially, the idea for the project came to J.R. when we began to think of positive ways to rehabilitate the image of the people living in the *banlieue*, the low-income communities that fringed the outer border of Paris, after the destructive riots that took place there in 2010.

JR's idea was to take photo portraits of individuals (often mugging for the camera) living in the community and then print and post the photos in a large-scale format around Paris. The main idea of the project was to figuratively turn communities inside out by bringing the stories and images of individuals and communities to a larger public audience. Confronted by the oversized images of the actual people living in what we might consider ghetto-housing complexes, the hope was that people around Paris would pause to consider the larger social problems as well as the human costs of the policies that excluded large segments of the population.

In other words, the goal was not necessarily to solve these problems or to even suggest solutions, but rather to begin critical conversations about why and how decisions are made that often result in the marginalization of large amounts of people, most often poor people of color. The point, then, was to reverse the process of ghettoization by making the human dimensions of poverty and inequality unavoidable, since one could literally not avoid seeing these massive portraits all around the city.

Students in my course were likewise invited to think about ways in which they might change the image of public school teachers and ignite or reframe a conversation

about what makes good teachers. Because the course required students to develop and participate in a series of writing projects (it was, after all, a course on the teaching of writing), I offered students the opportunity to pursue the idea of reframing the conversation around teacher education as one of their course projects. At first, about six students signed on to participate in what we became an ongoing project: Chicago Teachers: Inside Out.

After some meetings outside of class and some initial work to reach out to teachers, it became clear that the project would take some time to launch. At this point, because we felt we could not realistically complete the project in the few weeks we had left in the semester, we decided to make the project and optional field experience, instead of one of the required writing projects. In this way, students who wished to participate could still get field experience credit for visiting schools and talking to teachers, while also having the time to participate in writing projects that they could complete by the end of the semester.

During the final weeks of the semester we set about identifying a group of teachers with whom we might work. First, we made a list of those teachers we knew around Chicago and then discussed ways we might build momentum for the project. One idea was to build a Facebook page and then ask teachers to upload their photos along with a personal statement about teaching or teachers. We built the page and then reached out to the teachers we knew around the city, mostly by e-mail or Facebook messages. This approach met with limited success. What we did hear from the teachers we knew who supported the project was that teachers were reluctant to be the first to submit their photos and statements to the site. We quickly realized that rather than focusing on

individual teachers, we needed to find an entire school that would embrace the project on a much larger scale.

In order to do this, we approached several teachers who had shown real interest in the project and asked them if we could get a meeting with their principal or department chairs to further discuss the project. From these initial requests, we were able to get meetings with a few more teachers, but nothing seemed to stick. We couldn't seem to get a larger enough audience to really launch our idea as a school-wide project. The challenges, of course, were multiple and complex. One of the interesting contradictions— and, perhaps the most telling—that we encountered in our meetings was that while many teachers with whom we met felt that community engagement was a real and important goal of theirs, they did not see themselves as members of the communities in which they were teaching. They often suggested that we change the project to highlight and showcase stories about students. Many said they were uncomfortable with the idea that they had any role to play in the community. Even when these teachers did admit that they (i.e., high school teachers) did play an important role in the community, they were still reluctant to identify themselves as members of these communities. Despite this reluctance on the part of some teachers, we decided to continue looking for teachers with whom we might partner.

The UIC students with whom I worked went with me to several different schools around Chicago to meet with teachers and discuss the project. They spoke enthusiastically about the project's potential and gave, what we believed to be, many valid reasons for participating. At each school, we asked the teachers with whom we met if they thought it would be possible to build school-wide support for project. We wanted

to know if we could count on them to be a partner and to help build support for and excitement about the project.

Many of the teachers were cautiously optimistic about such an endeavor, expressing their individual support for the project, while remaining skeptical about other faculty and administrative backing. Some of these teachers suggested to us that the relationship between the school and the community was contentions and strained. And, despite our efforts with teacher over the next several months, we were unable to build on the interest of those individual teachers with whom we had met. It seemed we would not be able to gain school-wide support, and the project appeared to be stalled.

It was still our opinion that if we could get one school to participate and see the project through to completion, this would make it easier and more likely that other schools would want to participate. Since I had been a high school teacher in Chicago, I believed that our best bet was to reach out to those with whom we still had positive relationships. I decided to set up a one-on-one meeting with an art teacher, Patricia, with whom I had worked and who I knew still worked at the high school where I had taught several years before. My main ask at the meeting would be—if she was interested in pursuing the project—to get us a meeting with the principal of the school.

My initial meeting with Patricia went well, and a few weeks later I was invited to bring my team of UIC students to meet the new principal. In preparation for our meeting, I met with two UIC students who were still interested in working on the project. We created fliers to explain and publicize the project and then made an agenda for our meeting with principal. We discussed how we would talk about our role in the project and the kind of commitment we would need from the teachers who chose to participate.

On the day of our meeting with the principal, I met with two of the students from my UIC class in the parking lot of the high school where we would be presenting the idea for the project to the school principal. It was a warm day and we could feel the sun as it shone down on us. The three of us stood together on the newly coated blacktop discussing our strategy for the impending meeting. I put the agenda on the trunk of my car and took out a pen to write down the names of the students, and we made some decisions about what each of us would discuss. We looked over our plan one last time and walked into the school to meet with the principal.

Inside, we were greeted warmly by the security guards working at the back entrance to the school. They remembered me, and I remembered them. There were smiles and handshakes and some questions about children and colleagues. We also told the guards, briefly, about our project, and they wished us luck. On our way down the long hallway toward the main office I talked about some of the reasons I thought we might be able to get something started here, but I also tried to be realistic about our chances for success.

Given that no other school had signed on to partner with us on the project, I did not want my students to be further discouraged, if we were unable to convince the principal that the project would be worthwhile. Even though we believed, as did many of the individual teachers we met, that the project was valuable and could be an interesting way to build community in the school and develop new relationships in the community, there was no guarantee that this principal would see enough value in the project to dedicate time and resources to it. We just didn't know what to expect.

In fact, when we sat down with the principal we were prepared for the worst. My

students looked at each other nervously and waited for someone to begin speaking. To

our great surprise, the new principal at Bowen High School—a school made famous (or

infamous) by both Jonathon Kozol and Mike Rose—announced that she had read the

description of the project that we had sent her a few days before; she appeared

enthusiastic about the project, but had questions for us.

The students answered each of her questions and showed the principal images of

completed projects in other cities around the world. Then we waited for her response.

Given our track record, we really did not know what she would say or ask next. When the

principal told us that she loved the idea and thought her staff would like it, too, we were

thrilled. She invited us to come back in a week to speak to rest of the faculty. The

principal said she would personally encourage her teachers to participate in the project

and asked us to make more fliers and put them in the teachers' mailboxes.

Connecting to Community: Arts in the Neighborhood

The meeting with the staff at the school went better than expected. We had more

than 80 percent of the teachers volunteer to participate in the project. For some, this

meant simply lending their image to a portrait, while for others, this meant helping to

organize the logistics (e.g., fundraising to pay for the cost of portraits, finding a location

in the community, and promoting the project in the community). The UIC students set up

teams and recruited teachers to help them with each part of the project. While many

teachers signed up for different committees it turned out that Patricia and the Principal at

Bowen were our main supports and contacts for the rest of the project planning.

One UIC student, Veronica Parker, took on the role of lead fundraiser and set up a

Kickstarter page. Once the page was up we all helped get the word out about the project. Another student, Drew Manor, began working on publicity and helped create some new flyers and draft a version of our press release. Alex, another UIC student, took up the role of colleting teacher statements and organizing the portraits. Together, the project began to take shape. Over the next few months we met our fund raising goal and then paid to have our forty-one teacher portraits printed. With the help of the Patricia and the principal at Bowen, we were put in touch with Mark, the director at the South Chicago Chamber of Commerce. Our group met with Mark to discuss a date and some possible locations for the teacher portraits.

For the next few weeks, our group met regularly to work out the final logistics and to publicize the event in the community. Then, on Saturday, February 23 our group came together to install our 41 larger-than-life teacher portraits on South Commercial Avenue in Chicago. We had a fairly good turnout for the event, given that it was 32 degrees outside that day. There were members and employees of the Chamber as well as other UIC and Bowen students and family and friends on hand for the installation. Thanks to Mark's help, we were able to work with several local businesses and building owners to install the teacher portraits and statements along the main commercial district in the neighborhood.

Thus, our group represented an interesting and unusual coalition of university students, CPS teachers and students, a CPS principal, members of a local chamber of commerce, business owners, and friends and family affiliated with all of these spaces. In my view, this is another example of an ecological approach to action through intentional and sustained relationship building. In a sense, what had developed was a community of

interest around the goal of bringing this project to the larger community.

During the installation, the group cut and arranged about twenty of the portraits and pasted them alongside the side of the Chamber building. Out in front of the building was a display case where we posted a description of the project along with teachers' statements about teaching and learning. Former Bowen students who walked by stopped to talk with us about teachers they recognized. Other community members paused to read the information we had posted about the project, while some even joked that we were vandalizing the buildings and they would have to call the police. The point, though, was that during the installation we caught glimpses of what the project would do in the community and we could imagine the kinds of conversations it might provoke.

While many of us who were involved in the project had a great sense of relief and accomplishment after the installation, we were plagued by some nagging questions about our work. For example, while Patricia and the Bowen principal had come out to help with the installation, no other Bowen teachers had helped with this part of the project. It was also the case that very few teachers actually responded (although some did) to requests made by the UIC students heading up the different committees (e.g., fund raising, logistics, etc.).

The principal at Bowen did tell us that there was a fire drill the day before the installation so that she did not get the chance to address the staff and remind them of the project. Because of this, she said, many had probably forgotten about the event. Our experience in the school was largely positive with many teachers expressing interest and offering support for the project. What are we to make of the low teacher turnout? It is hard to say, given that our group did not have unfettered access to the school or its

teachers. In any case, the project left many of us feeling that while we had succeeded on one level, we had certainly failed to fully engage and excite the teachers at Bowen in the way we had hoped.

Yet, much like the initial Inside Out Project that was envisioned as a way to publicize the notion that the young people living in the Paris suburbs were real people and not faceless and nameless thugs, we were focusing on teachers in the context of their being vilified in the press during the run-up to the CPS teachers' strike. In other words, we were trying to intervene in a public conversation (to reframe it) and make the case that the teachers were not greedy and self-serving, but were actually hard-working people making a principled stand for certain educational values and priorities. This project, then, serves as another example of the ecological approach to schooling, not only in what our community of interest was able to accomplish but also in what the teachers wrote about in their statements and were trying to promote (i.e., something other than generic, standards driven instruction).

The High Price of Poverty and Inequality: Teaching and Learning in Chicago Communities

If there is one thing that unites all of these stories it is that educators working in schools that serve low-income students and their families understand all too well the many barriers there are to opportunity and learning when the problems of poverty and inequality go unaddressed in our communities from one year to the next. Each of these stories in their own ways attempts to close what Meira Levinson calls the "civic

empowerment gap" by exploring the often unexamined connections between achievement in schools and the health and sustainability of our communities. The challenge, of course, is not so much in identifying the problems that we know often prevent students from learning and schools from functioning well, but in convincing others that we must first address the twin problems of poverty and inequality before we can imagine schools as spaces of equal opportunity.

Though, perhaps, by imagining that we must first convince others, we miss out on the opportunity that each of us has to change the way we do school, teach teachers, and construct curriculum in the spaces where we live and work. If poverty and inequality are problems that students, teachers, and communities care about and can identify, then we need to ask why it is that we seem unable (or unwilling) to address these concerns in our schools. We need to consider ways we might disorganize these spaces in order to create truly ecological models of schooling that address many of our most challenging problems. John Marsh notes the following about poverty:

> A great crime has been and is being committed against those who must live in or through it. Through an accident of birth, job loss, illness, or whatever else precipitates a fall into it, poverty robs people—and their children after them—of lives and livelihoods that they might otherwise have had (58).

This argument against poverty and inequality becomes increasingly important when we consider the ways in which the debate about education reform has been structured.

Education reform, as understood by those who would promote charter schools, dismantle unions, and reduce teaching to scripted curricula, have argued successfully— using the metric of standardized testing almost exclusively—that public schooling is largely a failed project. It's hard to disagree with them when we use test scores and

college completion as our sole benchmarks. These reformers have, in turn, used this argument to justify privatizing and colonizing public spaces for private profits.

What can we learn from all of this? Well, for one thing, we might use the very same data (e.g., data that links poverty, low test scores, and a lack of social mobility) to show how and why schooling, as it is currently conceived—schooling that ignores context and imagines that poverty and inequality do not matter—has never and will never work for most poor students or their families. In other words, we can reframe this debate and use this data to suggest doing school in radically different ways rather than, say, turning school over to private corporations. Additionally, we might continue to use stories of low-income students along with data to suggest that rather than say, arguing for better or more hard working teachers, better or more efficient curricula, or students who are more self-disciplined and hard-working, we might, instead, argue for more resources to communities, schools, and teachers that support community development, anti-poverty programs, and better paying jobs for students and their families.

The question, then, of course, is how might we link our schools and communities in ways that allow us to address our most pressing concerns. While each of the stories above suggest different answers to this problem, I will explore this question—from the perspective of a teacher educator—in greater detail in the next and final chapter.

5. The Making of Citizen Teachers: Community Organizing and Engagement in Teacher Education

> For an educator to play a part in promoting democracy thus defined, I believe it is crucial
> that she or he regard the contexts of school and society as overlapping,
> interactive, and mutually influential.
> —DeStigter, from *Citizen Teacher*

> The more people participate in the process of their own education, the more people participate in
> the process of defining what kind of production to produce, and for what and why,
> the more the people participate in the development of their selves.
> The more people become themselves, the better the democracy.
> —Freire, from *We Make the Road by Walking*

Introduction

In their radio documentary turned book, *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago*, authors LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman, two African American middle school students, describe their Chicago neighborhood as a war zone. LeAlan tells us: "It's like Vietnam" (33). For LeAlan, though, the comparison has at least one key difference. "In Vietnam, them people came back crazy. I live in Vietnam, so what you think I'm gonna be if I live in it and they just went and visited?" (36). While LeAlan's point may seem obvious enough, it is probably hard for many readers to really grasp what he means—readers like me who have never been to a combat zone or lived in a neighborhood like the one LeAlan describes on the South Side of Chicago. It would be all too easy to dismiss LeAlan's statement as a kind of youthful exaggeration of sorts, particularly if we have never walked through or lived in a neighborhood where violence is ever-present, yet unpredictable.

And, perhaps, even for those of us who have worked (or walked) in neighborhoods like the one in which Lloyd and LeAlan spend their days and nights, it may still be difficult to fully appreciate what LeAlan means when he compares where he

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lives in Chicago to fighting as a soldier in Vietnam. After all, teachers like me, who

taught or teach at a school much like the one that LeAlan and Lloyd attended, get to go

home every night. We get to leave. We get in our cars and return to other, safer

neighborhoods. Kids like LeAlan and Lloyd don't have that luxury. They live in a world

where the potential for violence is always hovering on the horizon.

In his book, *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America*,

Geoffrey Canada puts the problem this way:

> Young people in our inner cities know that there is a war going on; millions have
> been accidently or intentionally caught up in the many small battles that make up
> the war on America's streets. Most young people are interested in surviving the
> war, but the price they pay is being prepared to kill or be killed almost every day.
> (68)

Such statements bring to mind serious questions about the role that teachers and schools

play in communities. For example, how can we realistically (and why do we) expect

students who live in communities where violence is a daily reality to come to school

ready to compete against middle-class and upper-income students around the nation?

This seems naïve at best, and cruel at worst. I am not suggesting, however, that we lower

our standards in schools. Rather, I'm suggesting that we reconsider what we are

committed to doing in schools and why we seem so committed to continue doing it.

The problem is that many people interested in education "reforms" continue to

imagine that if we could just provide better teachers or curriculum we would solve the

problems that authors like Canada and LeAlan describe above (Brizzard; Darling-

Hammond; Duncan; Hirsch; Ravitch; Rhee). As John Marsh notes, though, "some new

and fascinating research shows that you would have better luck improving educational

performance—for the nation as a whole and for low-income students—not by undertaking educational reforms but by reducing poverty and economic inequality" (210). The point here is that most people working in education know that the idea that students like Lloyd and LeAlan (as bright or average as they may be) can compete with their more affluent peers in Wilmette is largely a fiction perpetuated by an education industry interested in focusing our attention on things like "accountability" and "standards" rather than, say, equal access to resources, jobs, and further opportunities.

Current research shows that the effects of poverty and inequality are damaging to our entire society (Krugman; Marsh; Schwarz; Shankoff). Marsh cites an analysis done by epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, who theorize "that economic inequality may affect the quality of family life and relationships, which then may affect early childhood development, which, as neurologists and educational psychologists now understand, is crucial for brain development and later educational achievement" (211). The authors of the study go on to note, according to Marsh that "the general quality of social relationships is lower in more unequal societies, as are physical health, mental health, and rates of substance abuse" (211). Finally, Marsh notes that "the more unequal your home country, and the further you fall down the scale of parental educational achievement, the worse you can expect to do on measures of adult literacy" (210).

It turns out that economic inequality and poverty (i.e., where you happen to land on this continuum, in terms of social class) are great predictors of how healthy you will be, how far you will go in school, and how well you will do in life. Yet, despite research like this, many education reformers continue to want to fix people, when schools and

communities would be far better off directly addressing the social and economic problems that shape so much of our everyday lives.

My purpose is not to highlight one more problem in our urban communities; rather, it is to urge educators and policy makers to think carefully about what we believe we are doing in schools and why. Do we want our new teachers to believe that we can fix individuals (give them more and better education so they can score higher on standardized tests) without considering the larger problems of poverty and inequality in communities? If ever there were a collective fantasy about education, this would be it: fixing teachers and students (and education, by proxy) will fix our social problems.

I'm not arguing against better schools or education or even better teachers, of course. There are many things to be said for individual growth and development, for more and better education, for well resourced and staffed public schools, for well-funded after school programs and activities, for higher standards and more accountability, for additional supports and meaningful professional development for teachers. And schools are certainly one place where all of these things can be fostered and encouraged. The problem, however, is that even when we help one student find a way out of a low-income community, we leave so many others behind.

Schools and curriculum, in order to position them to play a more meaningful role in communities, need to be disorganized and then reimagined around the social and economic concerns identified by communities. Put another way, rather than believing that education in its current manifestation will solve all of our problems, we have to revise education so that it more directly addresses the kinds of problems that disproportionately afflict the urban poor. In this way, students and teachers can directly participate in the

struggle for a more just society in ways that may actually make a difference.

Like most teachers that I know, I also believe that education is important and necessary, particularly if students have the tools to leverage that education in ways that provide access to more and better opportunities. What I don't believe, though, is that if a student chooses (for whatever reason) not to finish high school or go on to college, that he or she should be condemned to a life of poverty and violence. Many teachers want to believe that their students are going off to college and to better lives. For most kids in low-income urban spaces, though, this simply isn't true or even possible (Marsh). These young people need more and better options, not necessarily more and better education or teachers (Marsh).

Despite what we may want to believe, as they are currently organized, schools have very little effect on economic inequality. On the one hand, I don't want to sound too discouraging to those of us concerned with the way things are going in education, while at the same time, I do want to address the realities of what schools do and do not do for many low-income students. What I'm trying to point out—and I don't think this can be overstated—is that as a way to solve our larger social problems, education has largely failed. I'm not saying that teachers or schools have failed to do what they have been asked to do (i.e., educate students around particular subject areas in order to perform well on standardized tests), or that our education system as a whole is a failure. In fact, I would argue that the "crisis" in our education system has been largely manufactured for political purposes (Berliner and Biddle; Rose; Lipman). The "crisis" that many education reformers point to is not an education crisis at all: it's a crisis of inequality that disproportionately affects low-income people (Marsh).

What I am saying, then, is that schools don't solve our major social problems because they are not set up to try to solve these problems. So, this is not to say that there are not many dedicated, hard working teachers and principals doing valuable work with students under extremely difficult circumstances. It's not that we should give up on education or that schools are irrelevant institutions. Rather, it's just that education as we currently understand and organize it is not enough for most children living in low-income communities.

Taking an ecological approach to schools would allow educators and policy makers to do at least two important things: first, it would allow people to see clearly and then acknowledge that traditional education alone won't solve deeply rooted societal problems; and, second, such an approach would give us a better understanding about what really has to happen to solve our larger social problems – that is, attack them directly. Radical pragmatism offers us one way to do this type of work because it suggests intentional steps—steps I outline later in this chapter—that teachers and educators can take to remake or disorganize schools in ways that integrate and adapt practical, local knowledges in order to find new, or augment existing, forms for acting in concert with others.

Before we think about importing more educational solutions, like charter schools, higher standards, scripted curricula, more and better teachers, or programs to raise reading scores, we might begin by considering creative ways to address the problems of poverty and inequality through our existing public intuitions, since these are the persistent problems that breed the violence and brutality we see in many of our communities. And, of course, as I've noted already, no amount of schooling as it is

traditionally enacted, will solve all of these problems. In fact, it never has (Marsh). That is, poverty and inequality are functions of larger structural problems that produce severe and damaging inequalities. But, I also want to make clear that because schools are situated throughout our communities (rich and poor) they serve as possible sites for community engagement and development as well as collective action that could, potentially, address some of our most pressing problems. Community organizers call this type of approach starting where the world is, rather than where we want it to be.

If what I'm proposing sounds radical or nonsensical, then consider what it is we currently think schools should do. That is, consider what it takes to make it out of an urban school in a place like Chicago (i.e. a non-selective enrollment school serving a typical low-income community). What would it require for a low-income student not just to find the resources and supports to complete college, but to actually overcome so many of the socio-economic and educational barriers to learning and succeeding in an academic context? If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that the odds are stacked against this happening for the vast majority of city kids. Such an idea—that all these students will succeed in college—is not only wishful thinking, but also inhumane. Why? Because we offer students a solution (education) to a problem it cannot and has not ever solved (poverty and inequality).

Would we want these same odds for our own children? That is, would we want to send our own children to a school where the prevailing belief among teachers was that only a savior, or some kind of miracle worker or super teacher, could save our child from poverty and violence? Would we want our kids going to a school where teachers said things like this: "Well, if we can save just one kid, then we have done some good, right?"

Or, here's another phrase we often hear in connection with urban schools: "Education is a matter of life and death for these kids." While this may well be true, it's also a sad and disturbing comment on what is at stake for so many young people in our country, especially when so many students do not succeed on these terms. Let's not forget, too, that we've now made a student's very survival (it's life or death) the responsibility of the teacher and the school.

Given a choice, most of us would not choose to send our children to such schools (i.e., one's where our child's chance of survival was in the hands of their teachers). The problem, of course, goes far beyond what happens (or does not happen) in our schools. And the problem, in part, has to do with our broader understanding and conceptualization of the role of teachers and schools in our society. All of this is just to say that if we really want to solve some of the problems that keep kids on the South and West Sides of Chicago from going to college or pursuing other opportunities to live fulfilling lives, we will need to reconfigure our schools to look very different than they do now. We need to disorganize these spaces, because we need to create, through intentional conversations with our communities, uncommon types of institutions.

How might things be different? What will it take to start seeing our social and economic problems as directly connected to and a primary cause of our education problems? These questions have shaped the bulk of this project and have convinced me that while no one thing will solve all of our social or economic problems, a good place for us to begin would be to see that creating schools that directly address the problems of poverty and inequality will require us to work with our communities. These (inequality and education) are reciprocal projects, since we already know that schools and

communities are mutually constitutive.

Might things be different if we were to organize our schools in ways that not only taught students the kinds of things that society values, but also the kinds of values and skills that would help them to remake society? Currently, most schools try to address social problems indirectly. They seek to give students knowledge and skills that can later be exchanged for security and wealth rather than providing security and wealth that these students could then use to leverage their knowledge and skills. What we need are educational institutions that directly address the problems that actually keep so many kids from succeeding rather than more institutions that imagine these problems don't exist, or worse, that they are unrelated to education. It's true, then, that education for many students is a matter of life and death, but, perhaps, it's even truer (or more accurate) to say it's a matter of poverty and inequality.

While those of us who teach may find comfort in the notion that our work does help some kids—even if that sometimes means just one kid—it is important to acknowledge that this notion also aids in the reproduction of so many of our most dearly held and destructive cultural myths and dishonest narratives about teaching, schooling, and opportunity. The myths I refer to here are the ones that allow us to construct and identify success in individual terms (success that allows us to renege on our responsibility to the larger community and its concerns).

I am not arguing against working with an advocating for individuals with whom we work; rather, I am suggesting that when we resign ourselves to live by platitudes about saving individual kids, we close off the democratic potential for communities and schools to work together. Doing so means that teachers can ignore social context and still

say with some confidence that they are doing their jobs, since anything that appears to be outside one's content area does not officially count as part of his or her work (Fish). Seeing teachers and schools through such a narrow lens involves the closing off of any alterative possibility for organizing or doing school in different ways, because we have already convinced ourselves that by just doing school better (i.e., by fixing teachers) we can help our students succeed.

I open with this account of the connection between violence and poverty because narratives by and about people facing great challenges in their communities can tell us something important about what can be gained when we start to see schools through an ecological lens: as places for imagining and encouraging ways of acting in the interest of the collective good and what is lost when we cannot or do not take these ideas seriously. The point is that poverty and inequality are not just problems for teachers and students, though at one level this project is about that. All of us have a stake in these problems— even those of us who do not work in schools.

But, of course, we do not often acknowledge this fact. This is not an accident, because in doing so (acknowledging that the socio-economic context matters), we tend to make our jobs about something we were not prepared for in our teacher preparation programs. How can we possibly solve all of these complex problems? The point is not that teachers can solve all of our problems, but rather that by taking and ecological approach to schooling we can begin to see our work as directly linked to and a result of poverty and inequality. We can use radically pragmatic strategies to reach out to and work in communities by truly listening to others and identifying common interests. This

project, then, is as much about expanding the role of the teacher as it is about students

and other community members gaining and exercising power through collective action.

Re-Making Methods: Myths, Metaphors, and the Making of Teachers

If we could just make better teachers, it seems to follow that we could also get better

results in our schools. This idea is at the heart of how the National Council of

Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) imagines its work. According to its

website, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the

organization seeks to be "the profession's mechanism to help establish high quality

teacher education" (ncate.org). Not only does NCATE claim to make a difference in the

profession, it also sees its work as part of a larger reform effort that directly addresses

student achievement:

> NCATE operates as a lever of reform for schools of education. The three states
> that required NCATE accreditation for all schools of education during the 1980s-
> Arkansas, North Carolina, and West Virginia-all experienced greater than average
> increases in student achievement during the 1990s according to test scores in
> reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. (ncate.org)

Good teachers, in turns out, play an important role in raising test scores on standardized

tests. But NCATE goes even further in its claims for what teachers can do for students

and the country:

> Teaching children—to recognize letters, to read for the first time, to understand
> how a tree grows—is one of the most important jobs in America. The nation's
> future depends, in large part, on how well it is done. (ncate.org)

According to NCATE, then, teaching is not just an important job; it is the job that our

entire nation's future depends on. None of this is really all that surprising, though. Claiming that teachers can play an important role in the lives of students is practically a cliché. Even claiming that they do one of the most important jobs in our nation seems commonplace. The problem, though, is not in the claims, but rather in the way in which we understand and prepare our teachers to live up to them.

Ways of Seeing and Being Teachers: Making Unusual Demands

In his book, *Against Common Sense*, Kevin Kumashiro describes the results of his study of 80 teacher preparation programs across the United States. In doing so, he points to three images of "good teachers" that inform how we currently prepare teachers. His purpose is to describe both how these images structure teacher preparation courses and to propose alternative views of teaching and images of teachers that move us toward what Kumashiro calls anti-oppressive education.

In his analysis, Kumashiro describes the following three images of teachers: 1) teacher as learned practitioner; 2) teacher as researcher; and, 3) teacher as professional. The "teacher as learned practitioner" image, according to Kumashiro, is informed by three main ideas about what teachers should know and be able to do. The first thing that the learned practitioner should know is something about the way in which students learn. This knowledge, Kumashiro tells us, is typically informed by educational psychology and helps beginning teachers develop and understand theories of learning. New teachers, in the programs that Kumashiro studied, are also required to have relevant content area knowledge. And, finally, students who aspire to be "learned practitioners" need to know something about classroom teaching (i.e., methods and strategies of instruction,

classroom management, etc.).

All of this may seem rather familiar to teacher educators; yet, one of the problems or limitations of the "learned practitioner" approach is that these ideas are often presented as given, or unproblematic:

> Almost no program made central use of the readings or assignments on anti-oppressive methods that focused on differences, equity, power, and oppression. (7)

This suggests that many teacher preparation programs understand or believe their content area methods and strategies to be neutral; they can be implemented across contexts without biases, or worse, in ways that are unrelated to or unaffected by the differences that Kumashiro notes above.

The second image of the teacher that Kumashiro identifies is the "teacher as researcher." In this view of teaching, "teachers need to continually learn, to be lifelong learners, to themselves be perpetual students of teaching" (10). This image suggests that teachers are never fully or completely learned (i.e., that teachers are permanently in process of becoming). The problem with this view of teachers, according to Kumashiro, is that such a view of teaching leaves unexamined the topics, goals, and methods of teacher research (11). So, while asking questions about our practice can be an important part of what we do as teachers, we also need to examine how and why we are committed to only certain practices and not others. As Kumashiro notes, "by assuming that the problem is a lack of knowledge on the part of teachers, they fail to address the ways in which both our teaching and our research often consist of a desire to repeat oppressive practices" (12).

The third image of good teaching that Kumashiro identifies is the "teacher as professional." This image of teaching takes shape around a series of accreditation steps that lead new teachers to certification. Those who would promote the idea of the teacher as professional, according to Kumashiro, believe that professional teachers "could improve the quality of education, and that the way to do this is by requiring that teachers and the institutions preparing them meet certain standards" (14). Kumashiro notes, however, "it is problematic for some in society to prescribe ahead of time what all teachers need to know and do and be in order to be 'good' teachers, or even to be allowed to teach" (14).

One of the central claims in Kumashiro's text is not that the three prevailing ways of seeing teachers are inherently bad; rather, it is that by fixating (or fixing) on these three and only these three ways of defining the role of the teacher, we tend to silence or marginalize alternative views of teaching and schooling. As Kumashiro notes:

> By saying that teachers are professionals, we fix the identity of 'teacher.' The professionalized identity of teacher is just as normative as the cultural myths of teacher. Both say who teachers are supposed to be, and neither requires that teachers teach in anti-oppressive ways. (16)

How we imagine and ask new teachers to perform the role of the teacher has important consequences for what we believe is appropriate work for teachers, students, and schools.

In a similar study, Peter Smagorinsky and Melissa E. Whiting analyzed English methods courses at 81 universities in order to identify how English teachers get taught. The authors, however, note the following about their study:

> While we are not concerned with finding the "best" way to teach a methods course, we are concerned with describing ways in which it can be effectively

taught. We hope our analysis of the methods course syllabi provides some understanding of the potential for developing instruction that facilitates learning among preservice teachers. (4)

In other words, the authors make clear that the purpose of their study is not to question *how* and *why* we do certain things in methods courses, but to find better ways for doing what we already do (i.e., teach more effectively).

These authors, like Kumashiro in the study cited above, want to help us to understand something about teacher preparation programs. Both studies show that, in general, teacher preparation programs are not invested or committed to the idea of the teacher as activist or community worker. An important difference, though, is that while Kumashiro asks us to examine the ways in which certain views of teachers and schools can potentially limit our ability to understand how teaching and schooling can contribute to or perpetuate certain inequities, Smagorinsky and Whiting want to help us identify how we can teach English teachers more effectively.

Smagorinsky and Whiting go on to note a series of approaches to teaching English methods courses, including survey, workshop, experience-based, theoretical, and reflective approaches. The authors also analyze what they call the "theories and issues" represented in the syllabi they examine. They note, "we review the different theoretical positions and issues that are assumed or articulated by the texts students were assigned to read on the syllabi" (51). To the authors, what is significant about the readings on the syllabus is what they reveal about the different instructors' "beliefs about learning" (51). What this means is that the study is at least, in part, about identifying the ways in which an instructor's theories of learning inform her practices in the methods course.

The most interesting part of their analysis, however, is what they do not analyze

or discuss in the syllabi. There is no sustained discussion or critique in the book, *How English Teachers Get Taught*, about the underlying assumptions that structure *how* and *why* we do the things we do in English classrooms. The authors, it seems, are interested in examining the beliefs and ideas that shape the discipline of English only insofar as those beliefs and assumptions relate to already known and accepted theories of learning. What they do not appear to be interested in is how these beliefs and assumptions about learning help define and make official certain types of knowledge and ways of teaching while excluding others.

The Smagorinsky and Whiting study describes how methods teachers teach as well as why these teachers might use particular methods of instruction and assessment (e.g, minilectures, teaching demonstrations, midterm and final exams, etc.) as opposed to others (e.g., portfolios, symposia, etc). But there is little or no analysis of why certain content in the English classroom is being taught in the first place. In other words, the authors do not explore the assumptions on which these content decisions rest, nor do they examine or critique the assumptions that shape the syllabi they analyze. In other words, the role of the teacher is static and unquestioned. English teachers do what they have always done: teach English.

What this shows us, then, is that while new English teachers may have opportunities to examine different approaches to organizing curriculum, they rarely, if ever, are asked to imagine new ways of thinking about the work of the teacher, the role of schools, or their relationship to the communities in which they teach. At no point do the authors call attention to the how the discipline has been constructed (i.e., how and why teachers have come to imagine what students should learn) or why and for whom these

courses have been constructed (i.e., who benefits from this construction and who does not). Nor is there any discussion of how curriculum and instruction shape, authorize, and limit what teachers can do.

The most radical position the authors take is that preservice teachers need to read the theorists that inform so much educational practice:

> Here we will make an argument with which many people are likely to disagree. We feel that in order to emerge from our methods course theoretically informed, students need to read the theorists themselves, rather than getting the information secondhand and often sanitized in a general textbook. We think that it is significant for students to know who Rosenblatt, Applebee, Vygotsky, Hillocks, Murray and others influential thinkers and researchers are and read them in their own words. (109)

While I do not disagree that preservice teachers would do well to acquaint themselves with the important theorists in their field (as well as the many different methods of instruction), I also believe, like Kumashiro, that teaching is not only about (nor should it only be about) learning methods or theories for teaching or how to be a professional, or learned practitioner, or researcher. In contrast to the approach to teaching presented by Smagorinsky and Whiting, an ecological approach to schooling suggests that teachers can and should be asking questions about the nature of their work and its relationship to our larger socio-economic and political structures.

Unfortunately, what Smagorinksy and Whiting argue for is another version of making better teachers by improving teacher education programs (i.e., improving the teaching of literature and writing). Making better teachers (by learning about how others make them), will presumably help each of us to make them better ourselves. This is precisely the problem I am trying to address, since when we continue to focus on fixing teachers (i.e., raising standards, changing methods, revising the standards, creating better

standards, etc.) we miss out on the opportunity to identify and directly address the root causes of many of the problems we find in our schools and communities.

It's worth noting, too, that there is no mention of teaching English to promote an active democratic citizenry or of community engagement of any kind in *How English Teachers Get Taught*. The closest the authors come to a discussion of these ideas is when reviewing the relevant literature on teaching English they mention that in Gere, Fairbanks, Howes, Roop, and Schaafsma's *Language and Reflection: An Integrated Approach to Teaching English* the authors of the book propose a "language as social construct" approach to teaching English.

This approach encourages new teachers to develop their own theories of teaching that take into account "the social and cultural environments of learning" (90). While Smagorinsky and Whiting note that, according to Gere et al., such an approach is "student-centered, it promotes high expectations, it teaches critical, political, and social skills, and it is flexible," they also note that its "limiting factors are that it is unconventional, teachers may have trouble administering it…it privileges the group over the individual, and it makes unusual demands on the teacher" (90).

It is precisely these "unusual demands" that we can begin to make on our new teachers in order to promote and encourage new ways of seeing and being teachers. As Kumashiro reminds us, though, "research findings and schooling practices that run counter to commonsensical ideas of what schools are supposed to be doing are often dismissed as biased, as a distraction from the real work of schools, or simply nonsensical" (Kumashiro xxxiv).

Our work preparing new teachers will, no doubt, include finding ways to make

our "unusual" and "nonsensical" ideas about teaching and schooling more acceptable and understandable to our colleagues and students. The problem, however, is that when we "continue to call for traditional or neutral forms of knowledge and proven or accountable methods of teaching," we continue to imagine that teaching and learning in our schools is somehow separate from, rather than a function of, the world we see when we leave our classrooms (Kumashiro).

Citizen Teachers: Re-Making Teacher Education through Community Organizing and Engagement

In his book, *Reflections of* a *Citizen Teacher: Literacy, Democracy, the Forgotten Students of Addison High,* Todd DeStigter defines a citizen teacher as someone who is interested in "expanding and strengthening institutions and human relations that support participatory democracy" (13). The citizen teacher, according to DeStigter's definition above, understands something about the importance of the political and socioeconomic context for schools because "these two sets of concerns—the sociopolitical and the educational—merge into one, as schools are recognized to simultaneously reflect and contribute to the inequities of the broader society" (14).

But how do we reconcile the fundamental contradiction between what we know to be true (that the socio-economic realities of a community affect how a school functions) and the way we organize schooling (as if the socio-economic realities are irrelevant)? One way we might begin to address this paradox is by exploring this and other contradictions in both schools and teacher preparation programs. Doing so encourages

new teachers to ask questions about how their work in schools and with students is linked to the communities in which they find themselves (even when and precisely because the curriculum does not acknowledge such things). How, indeed, when we know, as DeStigter reminds us, that this work is not easy or free of complexity, that it involves risk taking, contradictions, patience, and the often difficult daily work of developing relationships across lines of gender, class, and race? In what ways can we encourage and support different ways of understanding what schools and teachers can do, given these challenges?

DeStigter's conception of the citizen teacher is useful for thinking about what is possible in schools not only because it links the work of teaching with the broader questions of equity and justice in our society, but also because it compels us to revive the idea that the teacher is involved in more than the explication of the processes of participatory democracy: it calls us to actively participate in these processes (not simply deliberate about them) and to include that active involvement in our work—to make it part of what we do in our classrooms and beyond. In other words, this view of teaching fuses the work we do as teachers to collective organizing and action both in schools and communities.

Saul Alinsky, a Chicago-based community organizer made his name in the late 1930s organizing in Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood, pioneered some of the most useful and widely used strategies for supporting and encouraging collective action (Sen); strategies, I believe, that when taken up by teachers and adapted for different contexts can help citizen teachers develop ways of acting in the world for the collective good of the communities in which they work.

Eli Goldblatt, writing about the uses of Alinsky's ideas for university and community collaborations, reminds us that Alinsky "regarded the abilities to compromise and to develop relationships as crucial qualities in an organizer, just as he called for organizers to show courage and candor in the face of corporate threats" (280). Developing relationships across divisions of class, race, gender and religious affiliations and having the courage both to compromise and to stand up to corporate threats, I suggest, are important qualities for citizen teachers to have and understand.

Developing strategies that citizen teachers can use for intentional relationship building toward collective action and resistance can help us reframe the role of the teacher and purpose of our schools. Goldblatt, reflecting on his community-based work as a university writing professor, asks the following question about this reorientation toward community engagement: "What if the 'throughput' model didn't dominate our program designs, but instead we followed a model of long-term investment in the neighborhoods where we work and centers with which we form partnerships?" (11). In other words, what if the work of school was not simply about moving students through from one grade to the next to diplomas and degrees (i.e. the "throughput" model), but instead, was about the growth of healthy and sustainable communities over time? What if schools and communities developed a kind of reciprocal accountability for the things that happened (or didn't happen) in these spaces?

The citizen teacher, in my view, resists the notion that a teacher's job is to disengage from the world and to look at "academic" questions from the point of view of the disinterested scholar (Fish). If we decide as a society that teaching stops at the classroom door (or the edge of the school parking lot), instead of, say, opening

classrooms to connect our work with the world outside (through public art, writing, street theater, community-based projects, etc.), we do our students a disservice because this kind of disconnect minimizes the students' local knowledge, intellect, and potential agency.

No longer can we afford to assign community engagement and civic responsibility a marginal role in our schools. To do so, is to go on reproducing the divide between school and the "real world," a division that so many students already feel so deeply and one that helps perpetuate the status quo. To do so, is to evacuate our classrooms of the very dynamism that we find in life when we connect ideas and apply our knowledge in lived situations. To do so, is to rob our students of the chance to explore the truths about the world they live in, about what they are being asked to learn and why they are being asked to learn it. Instead, we need to incorporate strategies into schooling and teaching that encourage collectivizing, organizing, and acting with others.

Teachers and teacher educators can take concrete steps—some of which I outline below—to make relationship building and collective action a priority in and out of schools. The list below is, of course, not a prescription; rather, it is an outline of some ideas and strategies adopted by community organizers of various affiliations and orientations. It is also not an endorsement of one model or frame for community building or organizing: it's a step toward a fluid model and encourages hybridization and adaptation by teachers and community partners in different contexts.

I suggest here, too, that we might look to current and past social movements, to unions, to current and former activist groups, to feminists and to the wide array of community organizing groups that currently exist in order to help us better understand

ways of acting intentionally and respectfully within communities (Schutz; Sen). In other words, there are many approaches and strategies for doing this work. None of them are perfect. I encourage citizen teachers to take up and adapt approaches (or invent new ones) that make sense to them. Just as important as understanding the flexibility and possibility for change and adaptation, though, radically pragmatic approaches to teaching and schools encourage us to refuse to believe the dishonest narratives we have been told about how schools must be organized, about the importance of standardized tests, and about what it means to succeed. This collective refusal by teachers and teacher educators to "play along" might serve as the starting point for a new social movement around education and justice.

Teachers and teacher educators might take up and embrace the idea of the citizen teacher and move community engagement, active citizenship, organizing, and social action to the center of what we do. We can take the most pressing individual questions (Who am I? What should I do with my life? What does it mean to be happy?) and link them to the most pressing issues (e.g., poverty, inequality, violence, etc.) of our time in order to make them the things that we spend the most time exploring and addressing in our schools and communities. As Goldblatt notes, "in the long run, the shift to a more collective view of education is profound" (21). Moving to a more collective view of education—one that privileges healthy and sustainable communities—will require all us to rethink the role that teachers can and do play in our communities.

Living on the Boundary: Citizen Teachers in the Making

Mike Rose, in his book, *Lives on the Boundaries*, tells the story of his early education and how he came to be a teacher. In one particularly instructive section Rose describes his time as a Teacher Corps member in the 1970s. Rose writes: "When I was in the Teacher Corps, I saw daily the effects of background on schooling…the connections between neighborhood and classroom were striking" (177). In his travels in and around the neighborhood in Montebello, California, where he was teaching, Rose began to take note of an interesting contradiction about what we say that we believe as a nation about education and what we do to support it: "our educational ideals far outstrip our economic and political priorities" (188).

For Rose, then, the beliefs that often structure the economic and political priorities of our nation often cripple or, at the very least, contradict or impede our stated goals to create a more just society through more and better education. In other words, while society wants to imagine that hard work and persistence will pay off, for the hundreds of thousands of hardworking people who end up low-paying jobs, nothing could be further from the truth. Marsh notes that "those who live in poverty do so because the work they do leaves them earning poverty wages," and, not as some might think, because they don't work hard enough (43). But the dishonest story—the myth of the meritocracy—as well as the socioeconomic realities that poor people face, often keep people working jobs that will never lead them out of poverty and into the middle class (Marsh).

And like Rose, the vast majority of the students in my university methods courses, almost all of whom aspire to become high school English teachers, enter my classroom with at least some idea (however vague or well thought out it might be) about the type of teacher they aspire to become when, at some date in the future, they will walk into their

own classroom to greet their first class. Interestingly, many of my students have told me that when they first began to think about becoming a teacher they had a vision of themselves walking confidently into a classroom and delivering a dazzling, thought-provoking lecture on some important literary work (i.e., teaching English is about reading and analyzing literature).

This is an idea that they associated with a certain part of their undergraduate education. It's a view of teaching that seems normal and natural to them. And, why shouldn't it? After all, isn't this—producing insightful and entertaining readings of texts for an interested and receptive audience—what teaching English is all about at universities? Isn't it our job as English teacher educators, then, to teach students about great books (i.e., how to read and write about them) and give them the chance to read and discuss them?

While one could argue that the teaching of English at the secondary level is about many things (including reading and talking about literature) that it is not often about at the college level (e.g., test taking strategies, personal growth, relationship building, etc.), it is almost certainly not about—at least in the minds of most of my methods students when the first enter my classroom—examining and then working with others to solve the problems in the communities where we teach.

The purpose of calling attention to this contradiction—between the realities of teaching English in secondary schools and how English is experienced at most colleges and universities—is that in order to introduce students to different ways of understanding the work of the teacher, teacher educators will first need to challenge long-standing assumptions about what English teachers do and why. Before we can encourage our

students to develop the tools and dispositions to become citizen teachers, we will need to

find ways to show them how and why they might expand their disciplinary knowledges in

ways that connect their classrooms with communities. Examining how English teachers

have historically been taught as a way to critique, or trouble, our disciplinary knowledge

and methods, would be a good place for us to begin. Doing this type of work, would

allow us to extend this analysis with our students in ways that explore how the

socioeconomic concerns of a community profoundly impact schooling.

In *Lives on the Boundary,* Rose describes his time in the Teacher Corps as being

very different from the training that most teachers receive in traditional teacher

preparation programs. During his apprenticeship in the Teacher Corps, Rose, having

grown up the son of Italian immigrants in a poor section of South Los Angeles, became

more aware of some of the things that he felt intuitively about teaching in low-income

communities. Working with his mentor, Ben Campos, Rose came to understand teaching

in ways that are not often taught in colleges of education. Rose describes his mentor this

way:

> Ben possessed the kind of binocular vision I needed so badly. He was able to see
> head-on the community's poverty and despair, yet saw as well the many points of
> desire and possibility. He knew where to tap. He'd identify a need and figure out
> a way for us to help. (129)

In my view, what Rose describes above is his version of what it means to be a citizen

teacher, because it involves attending to the context, both the larger sociopolitical and the

local realities, within which teachers and students meet and work. But, this attention to

context is not, according to Smagorinsky and Whiting, something that English teachers

are usually taught to consider in any in-depth way. Yet, as DeStigter tells us,

understanding context is critical:

> From national, even global economic and political structures to the most subtle comments and gestures of individual students and teachers in small-town classrooms, there is very little that doesn't matter... (19)

It is this studied and sustained attention to the context that serves as a starting point for

much of the work we might do preparing new citizen teachers.

Community Organizing and Engagement in Teacher Education: Strategies,

Principles, and Paradoxes

As is probably obvious by now, much of my work as a teacher has been influenced by

ideas about social action and community organizing. I found that the ideas, strategies, and

tactics pioneered by community organizers and other community activists to be both

powerful and appropriate for thinking about connecting schools and communities, for

building coalitions around particular issues, and for intentionally relating with those we

might not others take the time to know.

So much so, that I am convinced that understanding, adapting, and employing

these strategies in different ways, citizen teachers can make a profound difference on the

way in which schools and communities interact. In other words, instead of waiting for

communities and community-based groups to come to us and try to influence what

happens in schools teacher preparation programs, I suggest that teachers take an active

role in moving their work to communities. That is, teachers can play an important role

just by reaching out and inviting the community to collaborate with them and their

students.

In this next section, I attempt to outline, describe, and then make explicit how teachers might use some of the key organizing and community building strategies and principles. I believe that teacher educators can adapt these principles and strategies to help encourage and support future citizen teachers.

Relating: The One-to-One Interview

Anyone who has ever tried to solve a social problem or address a social issue will tell you that doing this kind of work is tough. Trying to do it alone is even tougher. Community activists and organizers realized long ago that the key to most successful actions is in the strength of our relationships with others. Relationships with others are what hold our organizations and coalitions together and make them effective when it comes to taking action to challenge power.

There are, obviously, many ways to build relationships in our schools and communities. One of the ways—a way used by many community-based groups—is something called the one-to-one interview. These interviews, conducted, as you may have guessed, one-on-one, are a way to build community, identify an individual's self-interest, and determine an individual's commitment to a particular issue. Organizers also conduct these interviews as a way to identify new or existing leaders and allies.

Teachers, then, might adopt this strategy—setting up and conducting one-on-one interviews—as a way to create and identify new allies, build community and determine what a community cares deeply about. The idea here is that communities do not exist, ready-made and waiting for citizen teachers to call them into being and toward action.

Instead, it is important to understand the idea of "community" as being fluid and dynamic—as something we build together with others. In this way, citizen teachers are more likely to see themselves as part of the communities they help to shape, rather than, say, outsiders meddling in the affairs of others. The phrase "community solutions to community problems" takes on new and interesting meanings when we conceptualize community as something that resists the often rigid boundaries of race, class, and gender.

Communities, then, are formed through the power of relationships between individuals and can cut across boundaries of class, gender, and geography. As such, communities can take many different forms and be organized around various interests. The point here, though, is that citizen teachers might use the strategy of intentionally relating with others to find out what other teachers, school employees, parents, community activists, artists, business leaders, religions leaders, etc., care about and want to change. This work, then, is fundamentally about listening to others and learning what their stories have to teach us. It's about meeting with and listening to others in order to form a relationship.

When we (teacher educators) help our students see the power and efficacy of intentional relationship building, we open up new possibilities for community engagement in schools. Giving preservice teachers the opportunity to do one-to-ones in class and during field experiences can help them gain confidence in themselves and as well as the process of intentionally relating with others. New teachers begin to see their work in ways that connect their classroom practices with the concerns of those with whom they work. Teachers can actively participate, by using one-to-one meetings, in the creation of new school cultures build on relationships and trust; these types of schools

encourage and support collaborations between teachers, community members, and students (Payne).

A typical one-to-one interview involves identifying someone's passion (their story about why something matters to them) and intentionally building a relationship with the person (Chambers). Organizers almost always end the one-to-one interview by inviting the person being interviewed to participate in something (e.g., another meeting, an action, etc.) or suggesting some concrete way of working together. In this way, you have intentionally begun a process of relating that will build over time.

Like any good interview, the one-to-one should be about listening to the person, identifying something they care about, and inviting more conversation. In this way, citizen teachers can actively participate in learning about communities within communities. That is, intentional relating with others allows citizen teachers to develop communities of interest that might include other teachers, parents, students, activists, community-based organizations, religious, civic and commercial institutions.

Listening Sessions and Campaigns

Listening sessions are simply an expanded version of the one-on-one interview, often conducted in a group setting, for the purpose of collecting information, rather than, specifically identifying leaders or allies, though these things may happen, too. Sometimes called "house meetings" a listening session can be a powerful way to reach out to members of a community to find out what their concerns are and why. Listening campaigns are a way for teachers to intentionally reach out and listen to parents, students, and community members. The focus of a listening campaign is not so much to identify

partners, but rather to listen to and introduce oneself to as many people as possible.

Typically, a community organizer will work with other leaders or other allies that he or she has identified through a series of one-to-one interviews as part of multipronged listening campaign. The purpose of conducting a listening sessions or campaigns is to hear what a community is saying about things that matter to them. In this way, a group of citizen teachers and allies can better understand the key concerns of a community and get to know those with whom you might work. Again, the purpose is to listen to what others are saying rather than trying to convert others to believe in our cause or issue. New and practicing teachers can use this strategy to learn from and about the people with whom they work as well as those who work and live in the surrounding community.

Community Power and Asset Identification

The power analysis is an organizing strategy that can help those wishing to solve a particular problem. Citizen teachers, working with others, do research to identify power and how it works in a community. Power can take many shapes, but organizers look to the power of individuals working through institutions as a way to address issues or concerns within a community. That is, community organizers recognize that powerful individuals have much say over policies and decisions that affect schools and communities. Most powerful people and institutions, it turns out, are not interested in relinquishing or sharing their power with others without first being presented with a demand. The purpose of conducting the power analysis is to identify who makes decisions on particular issues, how those decisions are made, and what these decision makers care about (i.e., how you might influence them to make the decision you want).

Powerful decisions makers, sometimes called "targets" by community organizers are the ones with whom citizen teachers and their allies would want to meet. In other words, once you've identified a "community of interest," the next step is to figure out who can help you get what you want (or solve the problem you've identified). Maybe you can do it on you own with your partners and allies. But, it's just as likely that you may need the help of local leaders or politicians.

Many organizers recommend trying to build a relationship with your target in order to address your particular issues. That is, the target may know about your issue or idea, but he or she will only act on it once you've made it clear that there is an organized group that wants the issue to be addressed in a particular way (i.e., you need a plan as well as a demand). At the same time, organizers understand that many people in positions of power are unwilling to act until their power is challenged or until significant pressure is brought to bear on the target. For these reasons, the power analysis can be an important part of planning any social action.

In addition to analyzing power in a community, citizen teachers would do well to identify assets within a community. Assets might include local leaders, activists, community-based groups, parent groups, central meeting spaces, local histories and stories, as well as institutions like churches, hospitals, and schools. The point of doing an asset analysis is to find ways to build on a community's strengths in order to solve or address issues or concerns identified by a community. In other words, before trying to solve a particular problem citizen teachers will look carefully at the local resources and how they might be leveraged to solve a particular problem.

In my own methods courses at the University of Illinois at Chicago I introduce

preservice teachers to some of these ideas through a community inquiry project. In preparation for this work, students learn about and conduct one-to-one meetings in class and then identify and discuss how and why teachers might use this strategy in schools and communities. This community inquiry project—a version of the asset and power analysis above—invites students to identify key assets and leaders in a Chicago community where we will be working later in the semester with a group of high school students. In small groups, the preservice teachers research the history of the community, visit the community, research and visit community-based groups, identify key political, religious, school and community leaders and then conduct one-on-one interviews with at least two of these community members. For their final projects, groups produce a visual representation of the community as well as a written analysis of the key concerns, assets, and spaces they have identified through their research and field work. In this way, students take a small step toward understanding the principles and strategies that guide the work of citizen teachers.

Schools and Communities: Building Bridges

Community building and organizing is often slow, because it takes time and commitment to build people power and community. Organizing people, defining issues, identify targets, planning actions, conducting listening sessions, and creating solutions can be daunting work for anyone, let alone teachers working under difficult circumstances. However, it is equally true that teachers are uniquely situated to work with others to create communities of interest around specific issues.

For one thing, teachers and students, as well as other school employees, see each

other almost every day of the week. Teachers, then, have the advantage of being part of institutions that serves a specific group of people and their children in a specific area. One of the ways in which teachers can help build community is to reach out to already existing communities of interest in their schools and the surrounding neighborhoods. Citizen teachers can begin their work in communities by intentionally relating with community-based groups and leaders from other institutions in order to build trust and identify common concerns.

This view of citizen teachers—where teachers actively and intentionally work to meet with and relate to community members and existing community-based institutions—can help open our schools to community-based partnerships that encourage and support collective forms of action. Such an approach can help undermine the often contentious relationships that many schools and teachers have with politicians, boards of education, the military, parent groups, and other community-based groups seeking to influence what happens in schools.

Rather than, say, waiting for groups to come to us and tell us what they want us to do (this is typically how civic action is conceived around schools and education), teachers can take the lead on helping to form productive partnerships in communities by setting the agenda and making our initiatives a priority. Instead of waiting until outside institutions (e.g., government or private interests) act against schools and teachers, the citizen teacher makes it his or her job to reframe these relationships by actively relating and listening to individuals and community-based groups. In this ways, teachers and community members work together to develop plans, offer solutions, and, when necessary, make demands on or act against government and other interests groups.

The idea here is that instead of organizing a community of interest that largely responds or reacts to mandates from outside institutions, citizen teachers relate with individuals working in a variety of institutions to help shape policies and better understand how teachers can participate in the reshaping schools and communities. Citizen teachers listen and work with others in a community of interest to develop plans, actions, ideas and proposals and then work in ways that compel outside organizations to respond to and react to these sets of community and school-based concerns, rather than, say, simply reacting to the actions and demands of others. This is a fundamentally different approach to community-based work in schools, because instead of waiting for others to run actions against them, citizen teachers work in collaboration with others to actively shape policy and programs that identify the needs and concerns of various constituencies.

Some Principles to Guide Our Work in Communities

In addition to some of the important strategies and ideas above about collective action and community engagement, I include here a list of principles based on my work in schools, my work with community organizers, and my reading of Alinsky and others. These principles, much like the ones that Goldblatt develops for his own work in composition, could have been written by Dewey or Freire (Goldblatt 281). My hope is that teachers and teacher educators might use these as a starting point for action. These principles include:

1. Relate (intentionally) with the people with whom you work or hope to work.

Practice relating and work to get better at it. This means making plans to meet

with, listen to, and relate to people in their neighborhoods, organizations, and

homes.

2. Assess community assets and identify key community leaders, activists, and

   centers of power.

3. Work with individuals to identify their self-interest, but also try to be guided by

   and help others to see self-interest in broad terms and across multiple issues (i.e.,

   build coalitions)

4. Identify issues and problems that participants can do something about (try to

   begin with winnable actions) and embrace a "community solutions to community

   problems" approach. Develop concrete plans on specific issues.

5. Be open to adapting your tactics and strategies to fit the circumstances in which

   you find yourself. Try to be useful to others, rather than imposing your own

   agenda. Don't get stuck on a set of "rules" or procedures.

6. Shape experiences and create conditions for authentic partnerships and active

   participation in the solving of community problems.

7. Identify success for actions and try to anticipate outcomes and desired reactions.

   In other words, ask yourself what success looks like so you know what your goals

   are and whether or not you've reached them.

I offer these principles to encourage us (teacher educators, teachers, and students)

to begin by authorizing ourselves to ask difficult kinds of questions about our work—

questions that might help us act in ways that challenge disciplinary constraints and

boundaries and embrace an ecological approach to schooling. The ideas and principles above might also permit us to ask our students and ourselves big questions about our political and economic systems, including how they shape our daily lives in both positive and negative ways. Asking these questions will open up new avenues of inquiry that may lead us to informed actions that challenge, modify, or imagine new alternatives to the conditions in which we live and work.

Thought Experiment: Imagining Possible Futures

The question for those of us who are interested in the way it's going in teacher education is not how we can make better teachers, but how we can create or reshape existing spaces to encourage and support new ways of understanding ourselves and our world—spaces that both reflect, honor, and challenge local ways of knowing and doing. Schools that reflect an ecological understanding of communities are spaces that can be sites of collective resistance to prevailing logics about learning, efficiency, success, failure, and intelligence. These schools can be spaces that serve as resources for entire communities with programs and support services that community members choose and develop for themselves.

Teacher educators can begin this work by imaging schools and teachers as participants in the process of shaping and reflecting communities in more intentional ways. Doing such work also requires us to acknowledge the limits of our ability to know and work in communities and the potential colonizing effects of community organizing and development work. Since many teachers do not come from or live in the low-income

neighborhoods where they teach, it is easy to imagine this work being done by do-gooders who assume to know the answers to the problems they have set out solve. As citizen teachers, we must be aware of this possibility and be willing to revisit with our community partners the goals of and approaches to our work together.

It is also possible that schools and teachers working with local communities may solve some problems while creating others. This is an inevitable and unavoidable risk of doing this work. Yet, it is still possible for schools that intentionally relate with communities to become a home to educators and community members who are interested in exploring the contradictory nature of this work: contradictions like believing that we can help individuals and their communities improve (or play a role in this work) while also believing that only communities can solve their own problems. Acknowledging the way in which the work we are involved in may marginalize or oppress individuals even when we set out to help develop democratic spaces that promote individual and collective health, sustainable economic growth for many, and opportunities for individual and collective civic engagement, will also be important.

To give you an example of what I mean, we might consider what a school might look like if it put principles of community organizing, community building and community engagement at the center of its work. Coupled with commitments to community-based work, resisting and challenging power, and projects aimed at economic development and revitalization, there might be an equal and important commitment to unraveling and examining the contradictions inherent in such work. An inquiry-community of this type would acknowledge that "embedded in any way of thinking about teaching and learning are values and perspectives, including values and perspectives that

can be quite oppressive (i.e., ones that privilege or favor certain ways of being in this world and marginalize or disadvantage others)" (Kumashiro, xx).

Because our plans for and ideas about change are always ideologically driven and inevitably reflect our own perspectives, one of the potential dangers of this kind of work is that we are trying to transform poor people into our own image. One way to try to avoid this problem is through dialogue – truly listening to the people with whom you're trying to work and finding ways to put our experience and expertise as teachers to work in trying to achieve what they want. Doing so, of course, will never fully eliminate the possibility that we might reproduce the different power dynamics that already exist in our society. But it is also true that an obsession with implementing democratic processes that would always allow all members to speak with equal authority and be heard on every question is equally impossible.

Given the potential for even well-meaning teachers to advance their own priorities rather than those of the communities in which they work, one might well wonder whether or not it is possible or even desirable to conceive of a school that takes relationship building, trust and the development of the collective good as its central mission. Can we still envision a school where every teacher and school worker (including, for example, engineering and kitchen staff) knows each other and every student? Is it possible to imagine a school where every adult has time to sit down and talk with, listen to, and relate with every student in that school on a regular basis? And, by relate to and with each student, I mean regularly ask questions of, listen to, encourage, and get to know something about who that student is and what he or she cares deeply about so as to identify common goals and interests.

What might happen if every student then got the chance to sit down and talk with and listen to every other student in that school in this same way? Imagine this as intentional work that students do as part of their school day. We might see students relating to each other as a way to find common ground, and, wherever possible, identify collaborative projects that might impact their school and community in ways that make sense to them. This would be a place where people talk with each other about what it means to be happy and to care for others and about how to make such things a reality. This form of relating across a school community would be the first of many steps toward creating the kind of space where every teacher has met and related to every parent or legal guardian of every student in his or her charge.

The type of school I am describing is one built around a relational culture. Relational culture, to summarize Mike Gecan in *Going Public*, is a culture organized around voluntary associations and a "belief in the ability of most people to grow and develop, as well as a faith in the newly arrived or recently organized people or formerly excluded people to exert their newfound power in effective and responsible ways" (163). Such a school would have no need for scripted curricula or outside "experts" to assert or maintain control over what gets done or how it gets done, since such decisions would be made by teachers, students, and community members who chose to come together to solve particular problems.

Relational culture is understood in opposition to a bureaucratic culture (i.e., rule-bound, by-the-book, fractured, and repetitive organizations) structured around rational beliefs about discrete needs (e.g., homelessness, hunger, unemployment) and deficits (e.g., disabilities), rather than holistic, or ecological, understandings of people and

communities. Schools that adopt bureaucratic cultures often reward individuals who can successfully escape the low-status work of teaching and get themselves into management or supervisory roles like principals or other instructional officers or consultants. Bureaucratic cultures are characterized by their commitment to themselves where clients (or students) come to the institution during specified hours to receive specific services. Such an institution, according to Gecan, "curls inward, is preoccupied with itself, loyal to itself, protecting itself—drifting further and further away from mission, from action, from relating to the people it was originally created to 'serve'" (162).

What I'm talking about is a radical shift in the culture of schooling away from a bureaucratic emphasis on individual responsibility and success and toward what might be called a relational culture that understands success and development in broad terms. A school built around a relational culture would not necessarily jettison the traditional curriculum or ignore the knowledge and skills that society values; rather, such a school might try to integrate these things into individual and collective projects that directly address "real world" problems and concerns that participants identify.

I can imagine that such a school would also make time for one-on-one relating between teachers and school officials and key members of the community. For example, panels of teachers and students meeting regularly with and conducting one-on-ones with prominent religious leaders, artists, writers, performers, key community activists and entrepreneurs, police commanders, politicians, park officials and other grassroots leaders in order to build bridges and foster important relationships that could lead to collective actions and collaborative projects.

The community—the people and institutions that come together and are shaped

by and have to live with the consequences of larger social, economic, and political policies—would become the textbook, the space of inquiry. Everything would be on the table for legitimate investigation. The school would be the laboratory for the testing, shaping, and creating of ideas for community-based action. Parents would be invited and have opportunities to do this type of relating, too. People in the school and the community would intentionally set out to relate across barriers of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in an attempt to find common ground and common projects for greater equality. Or, as Dewey reminds us, this work is a form of democratic living. It involves:

> the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. (*Democracy and Ed* 87)

The projects identified and agreed upon by teachers and students would form the basis of the curriculum for the school year, but the process of identifying issues and relating to others would also be central to what this school values and supports: it would be the stated goal and work of the school to help students learn to be happy and live with others in a healthy and sustainable community.

Schooling would be organized around making or building spaces for collaboration and collective action. Arts, history, and literature would be studied, discussed, and challenged in ways that support both individual growth as well as collective involvement in the world. Science, math, economics, and politics would be studied and debated in ways that would help students and community members critique certain ways of doing things. All of these ideas and systems would be examined for the ways in which they

have historically empowered certain groups while marginalizing others. Teachers, in collaboration with students, parents, and other community members would determine how to do these things as well as why they are important.

Developing a relational culture in school, as opposed to a bureaucratic one, would be intentional and supported at every level. It would be the guiding principals around which the rest of the school would be built. As Alinsky reminds us, **"**change comes from power, and power comes from organization. In order to act, people must get together"(13). Relating with others, then, might be the cornerstone of a strong and healthy community. What comes next would be up to those individuals involved. The idea here is that rather than developing a prescription for how a school should look and what it should do, educators can borrow strategies from community organizing in order to build alternatives to our current school system.

What I'm proposing requires a reconceptualization of the purposes of schooling. In order to do this, we need to ask ourselves what it is we are currently committed to doing in schools and whether or not these commitments make sense (or do anything for the vast majority of students living in poverty). We might also ask ourselves, then, if the real utopian narratives are not the ones told by the many educators and "reform" advocates who believe that raising test scores and standards in schools will save kids from poverty and violence.

Paulo Freire asks us to consider this question:

> How is it possible to work in a community without feeling the s*pirit* of the culture that has been there for many years, without trying to understand soul of the culture? We cannot interfere in this culture. Without understanding the soul of the culture we just invade the culture (131).

In other words, Freire tells us, we must first relate with and get to know others before we can begin to work with them or they with us. Successfully relating within schools and in communities, then, is an essential component of any highly functioning school (Payne).

Paradoxes of Practice: White Teachers, Urban Schools, and Other Problems with Organizing Communities

Heroes (and Villains)

One of the reasons that many of us do not emphasize relationships (or an understanding of the kind of community "spirit" that Freire describes above) in our schools and between our schools and communities is because many of us still imagine success for ourselves and for our students as being about individual advancement in competition with others. As Smagorinsky and Whiting show us, teachers see their jobs as being about certain disciplinary knowledge and skills. And most teachers would probably say that they want their students to escape from low socioeconomic communities though high academic achievement. Teachers often deny that this positions them in ways that are contradictory.

For example, since the teachers are both saviors (it's their help and their knowledge that can save these kids) and guardians of the status quo (since imagining success in these limited disciplinary ways simply perpetuates the same narrow views of success and achievement that have never really worked), they end up helping to secure a system that largely accrues benefits to those who are already its beneficiaries.

While what I propose (using schools as sites to take on community-based issues) may sound like an articulation of a white savior, or rescue, or missionary narrative to

some, it is actually the opposite. Because relating with others involves sustained and deliberate dialog with those with whom we might work, it involves communities of interest in any form of action. It requires that those most affected by any decision or policy be involved in the decision making process.

It's worth noting, too, that teachers of all races already play a paradoxical role in the schools in urban communities in which they work. White teachers (like most teachers, regardless of their race) already believe to some extent that they have something of value to share with their students. In this way, even when white (or any other) teachers say that they want their students to learn to solve their own problems in their own ways, they are always and already involved in that problem solving by the very fact that they are teaching their students different ways in which they might do these things.

In a similar way, when teachers like me say that we are not trying to make our students like "us" we might also say that we want to teach our students to have access to what Lisa Delpit calls "the culture of power." In other words, while we may say to students that the "culture of power" is just one of many different ways to be in the world and that it is this type of knowledge that our society values, we are also teaching students precisely how to be like "us" by teaching them this very knowledge and then explaining to them that other types of knowledge (presumably theirs) is not valued very much by society.

The problem that most of us have with the white teacher hero on a mission to rescue poor children of color is not so much that the teacher is white or middle class (although some may still say this is the problem); the problem is really that we already know that no one teacher—regardless of her race or class—is going to solve the problems

that most poor students face in their communities. So, we find it offensive that a white middle class teacher with no experience with being black or poor would suggest such a thing.

The response that most teachers have to this critique is to position themselves as teachers who care about students, but who are professionally responsible to teach only what they have been trained to teach. Thus, one of the problems with the teacher-hero narrative is that it actually teaches us not to directly address the problems we see or hear about in the communities where we teach. It's not the teacher's job—and certainly not the white teacher's job—to get involved or address these problems. Doing so, we are told, positions us as teacher-heroes.

It is a common sense approach to teaching, then, to ignore community and, yet, to still say that we want our students to do well academically and go to college. So, we encourage individual students to do the types of things that we imagine will prepare them to successfully complete college. We teach them the "culture of power." In other words, while we may profess the opposite, our actions often suggest that we already imagine that we "know" what these students need in order to succeed in the world and exactly how to do it (i.e., learn a set of skills and go to college like we did).

In English, for example, we teach our students to value story, to read texts in different ways, to write about themselves and what they care about, to write in a variety of genres, etc. We often emphasize academic skill and achievement rather than, say, the ability to work with others to create just and sustainable spaces (though we often hope this is a byproduct of what we do). Even more often, though, we understand school in terms of finding and verifying the correct answers (or winning arguments) rather than

about the search with others into why our communities are the way they are and how we might improve them.

If we talk about such things (creating healthy and sustainable communities) at all, it's almost always when imagining the future. That is, we often tell our students and ourselves that the things we teach now will help students build a better world later on at some undefined future time. We believe, then, that our work is useful and valuable for students and communities, but we often refrain from involving ourselves in the immediate political and economic questions of the communities in which we work.

The point I'm trying to make here is not that emphasizing the things that we have traditionally associated with our disciplines is somehow wrong; rather, it is to show that by doing so teachers are always and already imaging themselves as being involved in a project of helping (or saving) others so that they can be and do something in the world. To put this another way, I'm not saying that teachers should stop believing that they can make a difference (since almost all of us already believe this on some level), it's that we aught to be telling new teachers they can make even more of a difference than they thought (if they are willing to step out of their classrooms and work in and with communities). The problem, then, with the white-teacher-hero critique is that instead of generating conversation and encouraging community engagement, this criticism closes off the potential that teachers have for acting collectively with others across lines of class, gender, race, and sexual orientation in many of our communities. As Canada notes:

> We must stand up and be visible heroes, fighting for our children. I want people to understand the crisis that our children face and I want people to act. (179).

Sacred Texts: Reinventing Curriculum from Community

Another problem we face in teacher preparation is that many teachers, in my experience, see the traditional curriculum as sacred and immutable. Without ever having read E. D. Hirch's book *Cultural Literacy*, preservice teachers often site the necessity of and make claims for the utility of the traditional curriculum. The problem with this, of course, is that this view of education is often more about indoctrination and socialization and closes off any type of critical inquiry into what students might need in order to transform their lives and communities. Thus, things like curriculum and standards tend to be all-encompassing and indisputable parts of schooling, structuring so many of our activities and taking precedent over any other type of work in school.

There is a sense among many new and experienced teachers that students must do certain things in school. This should not come as a surprise. After all, we prepare our teachers in specific disciplines in order that they might teach students specific types of knowledge and skills. This leads many teachers to believe—whether they admit it willingly or not—that it is their job to teach students to be like them, since the skills and knowledge being taught are precisely the kinds that have made it possible for us to teach.

Doing this, though, often prevents us from taking the time to ask questions about what we are doing and why. Instead, we tend to ask how we can better prepare individual teachers to teach the same things more effectively. For example, instead of asking why we are taking certain tests or organizing schools in particular ways and not others, we often ask how we can better prepare students for standardized assessments or how we can more efficiently organize schools to save money. What keeps us wedded to so many outmoded ways of doing school, when these approaches to teaching and learning have led so few of our low-income students to the kind of success we tell them they can achieve?

Regardless of where one stands on questions about curriculum, about teacher heroes, or about the structure of schooling, it is clear from statistics about educational outcomes for low-income and minority students, the narrative of individual success and escape from these communities by way of traditional education is part of a collective fiction about students who attend schools in these areas (Catalyst-Chicago.org). Thus, it seems that our problem is, in part, about imagining alternatives to a system that we continue to believe can produce something that it has never actually produced. Or, to paraphrase Slavoj Zizek, the real utopian thinking in education is being done by those on both sides of the political spectrum who believe that things can continue to go on as they are.

The Limits of Alinsky and the Promise of Radical Pragmatism

Saul Alinsky founded the oldest and largest community-organizing network in the United States, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). For this reason, and because he was the first to write down his ideas about organizing, many of us who write about organizing communities reference his model and his ideas about organizing in some way. It is important, then, to acknowledge some of the limits and contradictions to the ideas he wrote about in his two books: *Rules for Radicals*, and *Reveille for Radicals*.

While I'm sure it is already clear to most readers, I am not proposing here that teachers adopt Alinsky's "rules" for organizing, nor am I suggesting that what I describe above is "the answer" for teachers wishing to do more intentional relating in communities. What I am suggesting is that community organizers of various orientations (Alinsky included) can teach us (teachers and teacher educators) something about how to

better engage and work with communities. In this brief section I will outline some of the widely known and much reported critiques of Alinsky and his organizing model.

Alinsky has been rightfully criticized for not looking hard enough at the ways in which race and racism structured inequalities and access to opportunities. He's also been accused of not doing or taking seriously enough the problems of race. According to Rinku Sen, "Alinsky's reputation on race was greatly damaged by the active segregationism of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council in the late 1960s, when it fought to keep blacks form migrating into its neighborhood" (Sen, x). However, this critique of Alinsky and the IAF led to the formation of new networks that adapted some of Alinsky's concepts in order to meet their specific needs and concerns (e.g., Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO), Association for Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), United Farm Workers (UFW), People's Institute for Community Organizing (PICO), etc.) including issues of race and racism. Thus, while Alinsky may not have been very good on race during his time, these more recent organizations have taken up variations of his model and made use of it to attack the problem of racism.

Feminists groups have also criticized Alinsky and his organization, at least in the beginning, for employing mainly white, male organizers (Sen). Additionally, feminist groups have objected to Alinsky's ideas about people's motivations (i.e., all people are motivated by self-interest) and his use of militaristic tactics that focus on confrontation and antagonism of "targets." While Alinsky focused mainly on "winnable" issues and actions through power and conflict, many feminist groups combined service, advocacy, and organizing around important issues and concerns (Sen). According to Sen, women's

groups tended to emphasize cooperation and compromise to win issues and make improvements. She notes,

> In part because many women-centered organizing efforts looked like and led to service provision, organizers in the Alinsky tradition of conflict would not recognize them as organizing, even though they also involved regular people in fighting for institutional change. (iv)

My own experience with organizing suggests that there is still a need for different approaches and that organizing is at its best when it adapts to the needs of a specific situation or issue; organizing works best when it incorporates the suggestions and ideas of those involved. No one method will ever be perfect, of course, but knowing this should not prevent us from acting in conversation with others to try to solve problems that we identify together.

There are, of course, different ways to approach problems and organize communities around shared interests. My experience in schools suggests that confrontations with power will be inevitable, if real changes are to occur. This may mean identifying and enacting new ways of organizing and challenging prevailing power structures in schools and communities, but it also means looking at what others have done and how they have been successful. Some teachers and teacher educators might find fault with Alinsky or his model and choose to use some other model or invent new strategies for working with others to solve common problems. This is precisely what an ecological approach to schooling would suggest we do.

One of the greatest things about models for acting intentionally with others is that they are meant as guides, not rules, for solving problems together. As Sen puts it, "community organizing practice has begun to answer earlier critiques and to create new

practices that enable work that is deeper and more effective than in the past" (lvi). People should be encouraged to read about and learn from other activists, unions, and social movements in order to identify and elaborate ways toward action that make sense to them. What I've tried to provide here are some initial steps that teachers and teacher educators might use to make community building and organizing a central component of schools.

Final Reflection

I started this project examining some of the questions I had about the role of teachers and the relationship between schools and communities. When I was teaching on the South Side of Chicago, I began to notice that teaching was about a lot more than sharing with students whatever content area knowledge I thought I might have had. More importantly, perhaps, is that by attempting to view and understand urban spaces through the eyes and words of young authors like LeALan and Lloyd (i.e., people who live in these communities), we can begin to recognize how important it is to listen to others before we attempt work for change. In doing so, what may become clearer to us, is that young people understand all-too-well how poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, violence, and inequality structure their day-to-day lives.

Citizen teachers, then, begin with an understanding and acknowledgment that the world outside our schools shapes what happens inside them. Along with such an acknowledgment comes an understanding of the difficulty that lies ahead when we try to directly address these concerns. As LeAlan notes:

I know you don't want hear about the pain and suffering that goes on in "that" part of the city. I know you don't want to hear about the kids getting shot in "that" part of the city. But little do you know that "that" part of the city is your part of the city too. (200)

Like LeAlan, the citizen teacher embraces the notion that what happens in one part of our city has ripple effects and lasting consequences for all of us, regardless of where we live.

It is hard, then, to overstate the power that the political, economic, and social context has on individuals and their neighbors or the negative effects that poverty and inequality have for all of us (Marsh). It's also hard not to notice that the negative effects of poverty and inequality far exceed the power of individual schools and teachers and churches to mediate them. The difficulties that kids like Lloyd and LeAlan face in their neighborhood have not and will not be solved by more and better teachers doing school the way it has always been done. We need new models that build on ecological approaches to schooling, if we hope to meaningfully address the problems we see in our communities.

While all of us involved in the work of education (in whatever form that takes) believe that small things matter and that our work can make big differences in the lives of individuals, the fact is that relying on one good teacher or coach or principal or pastor to change the socioeconomic realities of a neighborhood like the one in in which LeAlan and Lloyd live in Chicago, is a losing proposition. Another way to put this is that small things matter, but they might matter a lot more, if were to work with others to build relationships that foster neighborhood and citywide coalitions to take on our biggest and most persistent problems.

I note this danger (in believing too much in small things) because I believe that it

is precisely at the moment that we tell ourselves that if we can "save" just one kid that we have absolved ourselves of our responsibility to challenge the prevailing conditions that prevent so many other students—the ones, presumably, we aren't saving—from living healthy and fulfilling lives. Additionally, we have at the same time (often unwittingly) perpetuated the narrative of the teacher-hero (we are here to save some of these kids—perhaps, just one), while simultaneously opting out of the larger, and I would argue, more difficult commitment to work in and with communities on issues that matter most to them.

Some of us may wish to argue that role of the teacher is not to directly participate in the solving of society's larger problems; at the same time, we might argue that the teacher's job is to teach students about our most pressing social problems. That is, many teachers I have met and talked with believe that it is appropriate to teach students the skills that might someday help those students succeed in solving big social problems; yet, many of these same teachers view the actual work of solving those problems as a job for someone else. Teachers, then, often express the belief that they can help individuals change their individual circumstances (and possibly even their communities). This simply shows us that teachers are always and already involved (directly or indirectly) in a project of social change, whether we choose to believe it or not.

Given the contradictions above, and knowing that no teaching practice or theory about the role of the teacher will ever be free of contradictions, including this project, is it still possible to argue for expanding the role of the teacher to include ecological approaches to schooling? Does it make sense to support and encourage teachers to take up intentional relationship building in communities? I believe that all of us involved in

education believe that our work matters and that we have some ability to work thoughtfully with others to change outcomes for individuals and communities, regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. This means some notion of working with others to change conditions (individual or collective) is always and already a part of what it means to teach. This project has been about acknowledging and extending that truth.

To remove this idea (i.e., that our work can be transformative of and beneficial to society) from what we do is to return to and embrace an outmoded notions of disinterested scholarship where the problems of poverty and inequality are simply problems we identify, but do nothing about (or leave to others to address at a later time). I'm not claiming here that education is an either or proposition. What I am suggesting is that the paradox here is that while we may want to imagine a time or place when we could act with others in ways that are free from paradox or contradictions, free from multiple and contradictory subject positions, free from oppressive social formations; however, by simply waiting for such conditions to arise, we guarantee that they won't.

In this dissertation I tried to explore, despite the many contradictions above, how we might expand the role of teachers to include building relational trust across institutions and within communities. It is my hope that all teachers, regardless of race, class, gender or sexual orientation and despite the many contradictions inherent in such work, might find something of value here, something that compels them to seek out new relationships and commitments in their communities and schools and then find ways of acting collectively to change prevailing conditions.

While I believe it is wrongheaded and naïve to perpetuate colonial narratives of white saviors entering urban communities to solve the problems of poverty and inequality

for poor people of color, I think it is equally dangerous to suggest that poverty and inequality only affect the poor in our urban communities. Because in doing so we seem to be saying that only the poor people from these communities can work on these problems. Or worse, that because of the contradictions we encounter in our work as middle-class teachers in urban spaces that we cannot act on injustices that we see. Teacher educators need to acknowledge that the problems of poverty and inequality have far reaching consequences for our entire society (Marsh). It is equally important for us to acknowledge that teachers can play a role in helping to change these conditions, but that doing school as it has traditionally been done is not one of these ways.

Finally, what I have offered in this project is just one way, not "the" way, for teachers to take steps to build networks of trust, social capital, and partnerships so that they might work more effectively in communities to address issues of concern in different spaces. Teachers, parents, students, community members, activists, and politicians will find their own ways to work together around the issues they find most important. An ecological approach to schooling encourages precisely that: working together with others to solve common problems that affect all of us. As Dewey reminds us, though, we have much work to do:

> The road of the new education is not an easier one to follow than the old road but a more strenuous and difficult one. It will remain so until it has attained its majority and that attainment will require many years of serious co-operative work on the part of its adherents. (*Experience and Education* 90)

Not to embrace "the new education," though, is simply to continue believing the tired narratives about schooling that we know so well. These narratives would have us believe that a child attending a public school on the South Side of Chicago in a

neighborhood like the one in which Lloyd and LeAlan grew up can somehow compete for a space at the University of Chicago with a student at New Trier in Evanston. They would have us believe in the cultural myth that says if we could only teach Shakespeare or Algebra better (and if we could only find better teachers to do it), then we could solve all of our social problems tomorrow. These are false hopes that we would do well to acknowledge now before another generation of teachers closes the classroom door on the power and promise of collective organizing and action.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Approval Notice
Continuing Review

February 18, 2013

Brian Charest
English
601 S. Morgan St.
M/C 162
Chicago, IL 60612
Phone: (773) 301-6134 / Fax: (312) 413-1005

RE: **Protocol # 2012-0127**
         "The Community Organizing Education Project"

Dear Mr. Charest:

Your Continuing Review was reviewed and approved by the Expedited review process on
February 15, 2013. You may now continue your research.

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval Period: February 15, 2013 - February 15, 2014
Approved Subject Enrollment #:   8(Limited to data analysis from 4 subjects)
Additional Determinations for Research Involving Minors: These determinations
have not been made for this study since it has not been approved for enrollment of
minors.
Performance Sites: UIC, United Power for Action and Justice
Sponsor: None
Research Protocol:
   a) Dissertation Proposal: Community Organizing and Education in Chicago; Version
      1; 02/28/2012
Recruitment Material:
   a) N/A- Data analysis only
Informed Consent:

a) N/A – Data analysis only

Your research meets the criteria for expedited review as defined in 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) under the following specific categories:
(5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).,
(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes., **(7)** Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note the Review History of this submission:

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
02/08/2013	Continuing Review	Expedited	02/15/2013	Approved

Please remember to:

→ Use your **research protocol number** (2012-0127) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

→ Review and comply with all requirements on the enclosure,
    "UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"
    (http://tigger.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/research/protocolreview/irb/policies/0924.pdf)

Please note that the UIC IRB has the right to seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 355-2764. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Betty Mayberry, B.S.
IRB Coordinator, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Enclosure:
1. UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects

cc: John Huntington, English, M/C 162
         Todd DeStigter, Faculty Sponsor, M/C 162

VITA

BRIAN CHARLES CHAREST

Employment:

Methods Instructor, Secondary English Education, DePaul University, Chicago, 2009-
> Courses Taught: Teaching Young Adult Literature (Teaching and Learning 429); Reading, Writing, and Communicating Across the Curriculum (special community-based section of Teaching and Learning 525); The Teaching of Literature (Teaching and Learning 428); Introduction to Urban Teaching (special community-based section of TCH 320); Teaching English in the High School Classroom 2 (Teaching and Learning 481); Senior Year Capstone (Teaching and Learning 390)

Methods Instructor, English and Education, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008-
> Courses Taught: Introduction to the Teaching of English (English 459); Teaching Writing in Middle and High Schools (English 486); Methods of Teaching English in Middle and Secondary Schools (English 481)

Instructor, Chicago Civic Leadership Certificate Program, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008-2010
> Courses Taught: Understanding Rhetoric: Rhetoric in Academic and Public Contexts; (special sections of English 160-161); Community Psychology (special community-based section of PSYCH 231)

Instructor, English, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008-
> Courses Taught: American Literature and Culture (English 109); Summer Enrichment Writing Workshop (SEWW summer bridge program);

Composition Instructor, First Year Writing Program, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008-2009
> Courses Taught: Writing for Inquiry and Research (English 161)

Field Instructor, Secondary English Education Program, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008-2009

English Teacher, Chicago Discovery Academy, 2002-2007

Special Education Teacher, Chicago Discovery Academy, 2002-2007

Service Learning Coach, Chicago Discovery Academy, 2005-2007

Director, Summer Study in Paris, 2001-2002 (summers)

Education:

Doctoral Student in English and Education, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2007-present
M.A., Special Education, Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL, 2005
M.A., English, San Francisco State University, 2001
B.A., English, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1995

Publications:

"Remaking Methods: Social Justice and the Community Inquiry Project." *English Education* (in press-October 2011)

"Toward a Theory and Practice of Radical Pragmatism." *Critical Service-Learning as Revolutionary Pedagogy*. Eds. Brad J. Porfilio and Heather Hickman. Charlotte: Information Age Press, 2011, 297-314.

Awards:

Teacher of the Year (presented by the South Side Chamber of Commerce), 2007

Service Learning Coach of the Year (presented by the Chicago Public Schools Office of High School Programs), 2007

Conferences and Presentations:

"Honoring Experience, Imaging Alternatives: Pedagogical Possibilities in English Education." NCTE Annual Conference, Las Vegas, NV, November, 2012.

"The Future is Now: Connecting With the Next Generation of English Teacher Educators." NCTE Annual Conference, Las Vegas, NV, November 2012.

"Civic Literacy and Community Engagement: Teacher Education, Community Organizing, and Neoliberal Mandates." To Learn and To Serve: Critical Service-Learning Initiatives and Community Engagement Conference, Columbus, OH, October, 2012.

"Authorizing Ourselves to Act: Teachers, Community Organizing, and School Reform." NCTE Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, November, 2011.

"A Responsibility to Act: Preservice Teachers Organizing for Change." NCTE Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, November, 2011. Chair.

"Troubling Pre-Service Intersections: Uncertainty and Anxiety in English Education." NAME Conference. Chicago, IL, November, 2011.

"Community Organizing, Collaborative Action, and Teacher Education." CEE Conference. Bronx, NY, June, 2011.

"Radical Pragmatism and the English Methods Course: Exploring What Counts as Curriculum." NCTE Annual Conference, Orlando, FL, November, 2010.

"Radical Pragmatism and the English Methods Course: Critical Frameworks, Student Resistance, and Community Partnerships." International Conference on Teacher Education and Social Justice, Chicago, IL, December 2009.

"Building a Curriculum of Possibility: A Reflection on Partnership." NCTE Annual Conference, Philadelphia, PA, November 2009

"Re-thinking Service Learning: Civic Engagement as School-Based Activism." CEE Conference, Chicago, IL, June 2009.

"Toward a Theory of Radical Pragmatism: A Story of School-Based Activism." NCTE Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX, November, 2008.

"Implementing Service-Learning Throughout the District." National Service-Learning Conference, Albuquerque, NM, March, 2007.

"Strategies for Implementing a School-Wide Service Learning Program: An Urban Example of Student and Teacher Engagement." 3rd Annual Urban Service-Learning Institute, Nashville, TN, 2006.

Professional Organizations:

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
Conference on English Education (CEE)
Modern Language Association (MLA)
National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)