Community Organizing and Educational Change

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As recently as the late 1990s, the concept of *community organizing for educational change* would scarcely have registered a blip on the proverbial screen of most change theorists. The first foray into research on this topic, documenting the origins, growth, and impacts of the "Alliance Schools" of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in Texas (Shirley, 1997), generated some interest, but many considered the Alliance Schools to be an idiosyncratic appearance on the educational landscape and expected community organizing for educational change to dissipate as had so many other change efforts before it. After all, what were the chances that a network of schools organized through community-based organizations (CBOs) founded by the flamboyant, willfully adversarial Saul Alinsky, with institutional membership made up of inner-city African American and Latino churches, could have any lasting impacts on low-achieving schools in a state as famously conservative as Texas? Furthermore, unlike the Accelerated Schools, the Comer Schools, or the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Alliance Schools lacked a powerful, well-positioned academic leader such as Hank Levin (at Stanford), James Comer (at Yale), or Ted Sizer (at Brown) heading the network, with a resultant diminished impact on education anticipated.

But contrary to expectations, community organizing for educational change – referred to here interchangeably with "education organizing" for reasons of brevity – did not disappear into the ever-expanding roster of failed change initiatives. Although Ernie Cortés, the Southwest Executive Director of the IAF, was not based in a university, his talents as a community organizer and his successes in launching the Alliance Schools led him to receive a prestigious MacArthur "genius" award as well as a Heinz award for civic leadership. Cortés skillfully recruited dozens of academic allies to leadership seminars for community leaders in Texas, and soon prominent authors as diverse as psychologist Seymour Sarason (2002), political scientist Robert Putnam (Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2003), and economist Paul Osterman (2003) were writing about the Alliance Schools. Significantly, they were

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not only seeking to understand, but actively promoting the Alliance Schools as a new model of educational and social change.

Texas was not the only site experiencing a renaissance of community organizing with a concomitant expansion of organizing into education in the 1990s. In 1999 a second study, Marion Orr's *Black Social Capital: The Politics of School Reform in Baltimore, 1986–1998*, appeared and documented the capacity of a predominantly African–American CBO named BUILD ("Baltimoreans United In Leadership and Development") to bring corporate and civic leaders in that city to sign a "Commonwealth Agreement" pledging unprecedented support for urban high school graduates to receive scholarships at area colleges and universities or well-paying jobs with health care benefits in the private sector. Soon, cities around the United States were imitating Baltimore's Commonwealth Agreement, thereby demonstrating the ability of a relatively small CBO in an aging industrial city to expand the educational "zone of mediation" (Welner, 2001, p. 94) to enhance the public good.

From those early efforts to today, the field of community organizing for educational change has exploded. Leading scholars at schools of education in the United States increasingly are focusing their research and graduate-level courses on this area. Mark Warren at Harvard, initially trained as a sociologist, has turned from his first masterly overview (2001) of the multifaceted political agenda of the IAF in the Southwest to focus exclusively on community organizing and educational change throughout the United States (2005; forthcoming). Milbrey McLaughlin at Stanford, dismayed by the findings of "misery research" (2008, p. 176) indicating the inability of policy reforms to impact school-site issues without considerable grassroots leadership at the local level, has come to focus her latest research (2009) on community organizing as a powerful resource for knowledge utilization and capacity enhancement. Jeannie Oakes, John Rogers, and Martin Lipton, at the University of California Los Angeles, have broken new ground (2006) by reconnecting community organizing explicitly with the democratic theorizing of John Dewey and extending it in new directions that blend on-the-ground research with equity-driven change strategies. A cohort of scholars affiliated with Brown University and the Annenberg Institute (Mediratta, Shah & McAlister, 2009) have developed a sophisticated blend of research strategies that have pushed beyond the earlier almost exclusive reliance on qualitative research to include hierarchical regression analyses that document strong correlations between high levels of intensity of community organizing in Alliance Schools in one city (Austin, Texas) and pupil achievement gains on Texas' standardized tests. In March 2008, a Community and Youth Organizing Special Interest Group (SIG) was approved by the American Educational Research Association, thereby adding an important academic imprimatur for this new scholarly field. Finally, during the US presidential campaign of 2008, the fact that Hilary Clinton had written her undergraduate senior thesis on Saul Alinsky and Barack Obama had been a community organizer in Chicago brought international attention to the continuing relevance of organizing as a change strategy.

These gains of community organizing as a field of scholarship have not been hermetically sealed off from broader research developments and policy

recommendations in the area of educational change. David Cohen (1990), Linda Darling-Hammond (1990), and Seymour Sarason (1974, 1995a) have all long argued that local adaptations and leadership are indispensable if any policy reforms at the state or federal level are to have a chance of success, with Sarason (1995b) taking the lead in insisting that at some point power relations and strategic conflict are necessary to disrupt the ossified patronage machines that have corrupted too many public school systems. Michael Fullan began his *Turnaround Leadership* (2006) not with a focus on superficial gimmicks to "game the system" to raise pupil test scores but with a deep and probing examination of the impacts of rising inequality on a wide variety of indicators including education outcomes, income levels, and life expectancy. His foremost recommendation for attacking this inequality was simple and direct: "First, focus on the societal problem of income differential and employ direct community-based short-term and long-term strategies," he wrote (2006, p. 9). Likewise, Andy Hargreaves (2002) has written of the need to conceptualize educational change as part of a broad, equity-driven social movement that engages all sectors of the public, and Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink (2006), in identifying social justice as one of seven key principles of sustainable leadership, have viewed a renewal of public engagement with public education as a central component of any durable change strategy.

On the basis of the foregoing observations, one could argue that we are now approaching an important confluence between a rising tide of community-organizing efforts and broader developments in theorizing and enacting educational change. Yet, the rapid rise of education organizing has in many ways outpaced the ability of change theorists to keep pace with developments. Furthermore, occasional fireworks such as Aaron Schutz's in-depth critique (2007) of Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers' *Learning Power*, Francesca Polleta's (2002) forthright description of a macho organizing style that is still evident in many CBOs, and the "marriage made in hell," which was described by one grantmaker who tried to build a coalition between two CBOs (MacKinnon, 2006, p. 11), indicate that community organizing for educational change is much more incomplete and contested than the more positively inflected earlier accounts (Shirley, 1997, 2002; Warren, 2001) suggested.

Three Questions

Community organizing as a new field of study in educational change is thus characterized by a rapid rise in visibility, a plurality of different forms of organizing that blend with other approaches to change, and scholarly controversies about the theories-in-action and outcomes of organizing. In light of this situation, the present chapter seeks to answer the following sets of questions:

- First, what is it that makes education organizing different from other forms of parent and community relationships with schools, as articulated by Joyce Epstein (2001) in her oft-cited six-fold model of parent involvement? How many groups currently are engaged in education organizing, and what kinds of change strategies do they typically use?

- Second, what evidence do we have that education organizing improves conditions in struggling schools and communities? Do we have evidence of improved pupil achievement, high school graduation rates, or greater civic engagement among students and parents in schools that have been the foci of organizing efforts? On the other hand, when education organizing appears to be ineffective or counterproductive, what seem to be common problems that lead to such outcomes?
- Third, how might education organizing best be understood in regard to recent reforms related to high-stakes testing and accountability? In light of these reforms, what role should organizing play in a repertoire of change strategies in the future? Furthermore, how might researchers best study education organizing in the future?

Origins of Community Organizing for Educational Change

Although some recent work (Orr, 2007; Payne, 1995; Ransby, 2003) has directed attention to Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hammer, and other leaders of the civil rights movement in regard to community organizing, the genesis of most historical scholarship (Horwitt, 1992; Santow, 2007; Warren, 2001) on community organizing begins decades earlier, with attention focused on Saul Alinsky's work in the "Back of the Yards" immigrant neighborhood in Chicago in the 1930s. Alinsky, a biographer of Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) founder and leader John Lewis (Alinsky, 1949), took from Lewis key principles of union organizing and essentially transferred them with some modifications to the neighborhood or community setting. To do so, Alinsky had to shift his focus from attacks simply upon employers alone to include the complex web of governing elites and private and public social service providers that failed to improve conditions in the poorest communities. By garnering a number of unexpected victories in neighborhoods filled with immigrants who neither spoke English nor enjoyed high levels of social trust with one another, Alinsky demonstrated that the democratizing potential of the labor movement could be extended beyond the workplace into the community, thereby inspiring thousands of activists and community leaders to study the principles of community organizing and to enact them in their own settings (Alinsky, 1946; Horwitt, 1992).

Scholars have noted that Alinsky generally kept his distance from issues of educational change, preferring to deal with more familiar bread and butter issues such as job creation services, housing provision, and health care (Fish, 1973; Shirley, 1997). When Alinsky organizations in Chicago attempted to become involved in school reform in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were outmaneuvered by the district's ability to contain and ultimately destroy their attempts to start experimental schools through a strategy of attrition (Fish, 1973). The lesson seemed to be that schools, with their complex bureaucracies, specialized knowledge and modes of operating, and vast professional apparatuses, were off limits to and impenetrable by the urban poor. While many community groups sprang up in the 1970s and 1980s to support or battle school busing, or to champion or to denounce various court orders

of federal mandates to support English-language learners or children with disabilities, when it came to their understandings of power, these groups often shared more in common with single-issue organizations such as the National Council for Learning Disabilities or the National Association for Bilingual Education than they did with the Alinsky model of multi-issue and multi-class "people's organizations" that focused on fundamental political change across the social spectrum.

It was not until 1985 that the Allied Communities of Tarrant (ACT), an affiliate of Alinsky's IAF, demonstrated that community organizing could turn around a troubled school in an urban setting. Morningside Middle School, located in an African–American working-class neighborhood in Fort Worth, Texas, was in such trouble at that point in its history that even an Alinsky-affiliated group was welcome to try its hand at turning it around. The school was besieged with gangs who made a mockery of its educational aspirations; the recently retired principal had had his jaw broken when trying to break up a scuffle on a basketball court; and when the new principal, Odessa Ravin, arrived for her first day, she found that her office had been firebombed the night before and she had to set up shop in the school's library.

Ravin connected with ACT, and together they rolled out classic community organizing strategies. Drawing upon local leaders affiliated with churches and schools, ACT began making *home visits* to all of the parents of Morningside students – a task that was expedited by the concentration of parents in two large housing projects adjacent to the school. *House meetings* were convened in the homes of parents and teachers who met with organizers to air grievances and to identify *winnable victories* that they could pursue to build confidence and establish momentum. *Research actions* into school district policies, Texas state laws on education, and potential political allies unfolded. *Accountability sessions* in which public officials and business leaders promised to support ACT's agenda for educational change and community development created vivid public dramas that allowed local leaders to develop new political voices and to create long-term strategies that would improve community conditions. In the course of 2 years, the middle school went from dead last – twentieth of twenty middle schools on Texas' standardized tests in the Fort Worth Independent School District – to third.

This kind of education organizing is quite different from the traditional forms of parent–teacher involvement that have been documented by Epstein (2001). As several scholars have noted, those traditional forms really have no public-forming dimension, but in many ways exemplify the individual client, consumer, or even customer-oriented approach that has become dominant in many privatized, market-driven analyses of educational change (Schutz, 2006; Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2005). Such approaches largely restrict parents to the role of passive consumers of pre-established school curricula, with their involvement limited to volunteering at the school, tutoring the child at home, or enriching the child's learning through accessing educational resources affiliated with but not embedded in the school. Indeed, Epstein's original model did not even include community (rather than just parent) involvement, and when it was belatedly added (Epstein, 2001), it altogether failed to address asymmetrical power relationships between communities and schools – a shortcoming noted by scholars more attuned to the manner in which

schools actively reproduce social inequalities (Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Schutz, 2006).

Community organizing for educational change, then, must be understood as a form of *public* engagement for *public* schools. The emphasis by community organizers is not on an individual's *human* capital, nor even on his or her *social* capital, but more on the development of *political* capital to change power relationships in a community, city, or state to empower the marginalized and disenfranchised (Alinsky, 1971; Chambers, 2003; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001). Nor is community organizing directed toward establishing programs – a point of view that emerged most famously when Alinsky (1965, p. 41) attacked the War on Poverty as a form of "political pornography" for providing services disconnected from community empowerment. While programs often are battled for and their acquisition can be celebrated as real advances, the ultimate goal, Alinsky contended, should be to develop power through authentic "people's organizations" that effectively articulate community concerns and impact the overall distribution of power and influence in a city or state.

Even among social justice activists, community organizing is often conflated with advocacy or social movements, although organizers themselves take great pains to avoid such confusion. Organizers do not view themselves as conducting advocacy as much as developing independent, non-partisan CBOs that will impact politics from the position of intermediary institutions that are beholden to no special interest groups. Nor do they view themselves as part of social movements, which they typically view as driven by single issues that lead to the loss of organizing capacity when goals are achieved (Chambers, 2003). Rather, the intention is to attack a broad array of community issues through multiracial, multiclass organizations that endure over time and that continually are reorganizing and expanding, by identifying and training grassroots community leaders.

Estimates suggest that there are approximately 800 community organizing groups in the United States today (Warren, 2010). Roughly 500 of those 800 groups are now working in the area of school reform. These groups span a broad spectrum, from entities like the Oakland Community Organization (OCO) affiliated with the national People's Institute for Community Organizing (PICO) to groups such as the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Boston and the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) in Chicago. These latter groups are unaffiliated with larger national networks and have truly developed grassroots campaigns that have successfully improved their communities and schools (Medoff & Sklar, 1994; Warren, 2010).

What kinds of strategies and campaigns do CBOs engaged in education organizing typically develop? They usually are working in the poorest communities of color in a metropolitan region in the United States and are concentrating their efforts on those schools that have the least qualified teachers, most staff turnover, and worst records in a district in regard to pupil achievement and high school graduation rates (Mediratta et al., 2009). Conditions of concentrated poverty, higher rates of unemployment, and environmental racism make for challenging work, so organizers need to be selective in choosing organizing "handles" (in the argot of

organizers themselves) that will lead to palpable victories rather than reinforce a sense of fatalism and despair.

In my early work with the IAF in Texas, many of these early organizing efforts focused on what some might consider to be insignificant, almost trivial matters, such as the circulation of petitions to install a new traffic light at a busy intersection near an urban elementary school or efforts to press city councillors to fund a community center or library close by a school. Many of the early efforts did not begin in schools themselves. Rather, they emanated from community conditions close by schools that threatened children, such as a crack house across the street from a middle school or a junkyard infested with rats behind an elementary school that outraged community residents.

By attacking those visible insults to their communities, parent leaders, educators, and community organizers have developed increasingly sophisticated campaigns in recent years that have capitalized upon the human capital of academic allies situated in universities and, in some cases, developed their own research and development projects. In New York City, for example, the Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools in the South Bronx developed a teacher support program with that city's public schools that reduced teacher attrition from 28 to 6.5% in targeted schools in the space of a single year (Academy for Educational Development, 2006). In Philadelphia, high school activists with "Youth United for Change" exposed the way in which one of the only three secondary schools in the city that achieved "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) cheated by posting answers to anticipated test questions on walls where tests were administered (Shah & Mediratta, 2008). In Chicago, the LSNA and other community groups created a "Grow Your Own" teacher preparatory program linked with area universities to prepare poor and working-class parents, many with immigrant backgrounds, to become certified teachers (Warren, 2005). Beyond an immediate metropolitan area, statewide campaigns by CBOs have persuaded policymakers to pass legislation providing additional resources for schools that collaborate with CBOs in Texas (Shirley, 1997) and have led to litigation to improve funding for children in the poorest and most disenfranchised communities in California (see chapter "Social Movement Organizing and Equity-Focused Educational Change: Shifting the Zone of Mediation" by Renée, Welner, & Oakes, this book).

However, while these kinds of strategies and outcomes are encouraging, most of the CBOs engaged in education organizing have only one or two organizers focused on education, and they operate with small budgets, generally in the range of $150,000–$200,000 per year (Mediratta, Fruchter & Lewis, 2002; Warren & Wood, 2001). With such small staff and financial resources, the CBOs have to develop the unpaid leadership of community members. For groups such as the IAF and PICO that rely on congregationally based community organizing, churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques contribute annual dues to support the CBO. Other groups solicit individual memberships, such as is the case with the many affiliates of the Association of Communities Organized for Reform Now (ACORN). Still, for comparative purposes, we should note that just two direct service providers in the San Francisco Bay area have combined annual budgets of over $13 million, 179 staff

members, and over 100 regular volunteers (McLaughlin et al., 2009). Hence, in spite of the growth of education organizing and a string of victories in the past 15 years, organizing remains a comparatively small phenomenon in a larger social ensemble of diverse public, nonprofit, and private entities.

Questions of Evidence

It is difficult to conduct rigorous research on education organizing because the process of organizing is so multifarious and unpredictable. In many ways, only case studies, with appropriate analysis of pupil achievement data and other school district records, enable one to get an overview of the organizing process and its impacts. My own early examination of the impact of education organizing on pupil achievement in the Alliance Schools of the IAF in Texas documented modest gains at the elementary school level and none at the middle or high school level (Shirley, 1997). My subsequent examination of three Alliance Schools in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas showed no test score gains in one elementary school with high levels of parent engagement, high gains in a second elementary school with high levels of parent engagement, and modest gains in a middle school with a faculty that was polarized with the school administration about the Alliance Schools project (Shirley, 2002). Other authors (Osterman, 2003; Putnam et al., 2003; Sarason, 2002; Warren, 2001) who studied the Alliance Schools generally relied on that earlier research or did not discuss test score results beyond brief presentations of achievement gains of individual schools.

In 2002, the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation funded the Institute for Education and Social Policy, then at New York University and now at Brown, to begin a systematic investigation into the diverse modalities of education organizing and their impacts on pupil learning. The research team identified seven urban school districts and targeted schools that were working closely with CBOs for in-depth study. Their research methods included 321 interviews, 509 teacher surveys, 124 youth member surveys, and 241 surveys of non-educators involved in community organizing for educational change (Mediratta et al., 2009). School district pupil achievement results, graduation rates, and enrollments in college preparatory courses were also studied to illuminate correlations between organizing strategies and orthodox measures of educational improvement. Among the findings were the following:

- People Acting for Community Together (PACT) in Miami used a congregationally based organizing approaching matching parents with partner schools to focus on literacy instruction in elementary schools, and those schools improved from 27% pupils at proficiency in 2001 to 49% in 2005, far outpacing a demographically similar comparison set of schools in grades 3 and 4;
- Measuring the intensity of collaboration with the local IAF affiliate, Austin Interfaith, the Alliance Schools in Austin, Texas, with higher levels of faculty engagement in education organizing showed larger percentages of students

meeting minimum standards on Texas' state test when controlled for student SES, limited English proficiency, and after controlling for the effect of baseline test scores;

- A campaign by the OCO broke up that city's largest and most dysfunctional high schools, with the new, small schools showing improved graduation rates, increased enrollment in college-preparatory coursework, and improved ratings on California's Academic Performance Index;
- On a survey distributed across seven sites, young people who affiliated with education organizing projects reported on a higher level of civic engagement than a national comparison group and organizing experience was a significant predictor of enhanced academic motivation ($p = 0.004$).

Perhaps the most interesting finding of the research team was that community organizing is correlated with higher levels of social trust within schools and between schools and community members. Previous research has found social trust in schools to be a prerequisite for raising pupil academic achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2004). Surveys of teachers in the Alliance Schools in Austin showed that schools that had high levels of involvement with Austin Interfaith had higher levels of teacher–parent trust, sense of school community and safety, an achievement oriented culture, and parent involvement in the school than schools with less involvement. High levels of community organizing were also associated teacher–teacher trust, teachers' commitment to their school, and teachers' peer collaboration. The survey data indicate that organizing appears to be associated with a dilution of the individualism (Lortie, 1975) and privatism (Little, 1990; Zahorik, 1987; Zielinsky & Hoy, 1983) among teachers that research has found to be inimical to the creation of learning-enriched schools (Rosenholtz, 1989). Given organizers' stated rhetoric about drawing individuals out of their isolation and creating new political capacity for attacking tenacious social problems, the survey data point to significant success in achieving these goals.

Education Organizing in the Age of Accountability

It would take too long to provide a full history of the rise of the standards and accountability movements in the United States since the issuance of the Nation at Risk report by White House in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983. Much scholarly ink (Center on Education Policy, 2007a, 2007b; Gamoran, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2007; Nichols & Berliner, 2007) has been spilled documenting the rise of standardized testing to increase accountability in education, and the (hotly debated) blessings and curses that have ensued. In general, most of these debates have focused on student achievement results on test scores, with special attention devoted to the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act on schools.

Yet from the very first plan for a system of public schools in Virginia proposed by Thomas Jefferson in 1779 through Horace Mann's advocacy of "common schools"

in the 1830s through battles for equity and integration that animated the Civil Rights movement and galvanized further social justice struggles that continue up to the present day, American education has always been closely intertwined with ideals of civic engagement (Shirley, 2010). An inclusive definition of "accountability," therefore, must include themes of *community* and *public accountability* that have become marginalized from mainstream educational discourse since *A Nation at Risk* was issued. We know that many sectors of the public – especially those who do not speak English and the have least financial capital and the least formal education – are not in a position to influence the formation and implementation of policy in the United States (Rogers, 2006). Hence, new forms of community and public accountability need to be developed to create a truly inclusive public sphere, such as the following:

- Through modalities of "empowered participatory governance" (Fung & Wright, 2003) that place a premium on easily accessible deliberative forums that allow individuals and groups to engage in the political process without presuming a high level of technical and bureaucratic skill;
- Through creating new cultures of "collaborative transparency" (Fung, Graham, & Weil, 2007) that use house meetings and home visits to enable parents and community members to understand not just pupil test score results, but also educational choices that teachers make and why;
- Through school-based "accountability sessions" in which public officials and business leaders commit to community-initiated policy reforms, with ongoing evaluation and reporting embedded into accountability processes (Shirley, 1997, 2002).

Still, while all of these forms of community and public accountability are desirable, they need to be placed in relationship to recent educational changes that have radically restructured education today. How, for example, does community organizing for educational change interact with the recent drive for clearer standards, more testing, and more accountability in terms of pupil achievement?

To answer this question, Michael Evans and I (2007) studied three CBOs and their interpretations of the impact of NCLB on organizing. The three groups were ACORN Chicago, PACT in Miami, and the IAF in Texas. Drawing upon interviews of educators and organizers, CBO reports, and a wide range of school district data, the following findings emerged:

- ACORN Chicago used the "highly qualified teacher" definitions provided by NCLB as a point of departure to document a crisis of teacher quality in Chicago, with high schools in particular unable to retain certified teachers over time; this documentation then contributed to the creation of a "Grow Your Own" teacher preparatory program (www.growyourownteachers.org) that tailored teacher education coursework to community members with a commitment to teaching in their neighborhood schools;

- PACT in Miami found that public achievement data gave organizers a "handle" for working with parents and community members to understand low pupil test score results in PACT-affiliated schools; this access to information was then utilized to adopt a literacy program in PACT partnership schools that led to improved test scores;
- The IAF found that educators in Texas were becoming skilled at "gaming the system" by excluding low-achieving pupils from schools on test days, reclassifying them as special education students, and narrowing the curriculum to tested subjects; in addition, educational administrators used NCLB as a pretext to exclude parents from schools, arguing that they needed to focus all of their efforts on meeting AYP under NCLB guidelines.

These findings indicate that NCLB and the broader accountability movements have had multiple impacts on the field of education organizing. In the case of Chicago ACORN and PACT in Miami, CBOs were able to use provisions of the act to gather and interpret data and to shape policy in such a way as to improve teacher quality and to raise pupil achievement. Here, the two CBOs served as policy mediators that used provisions of the act to increase civic engagement and improve educational outcomes.

In the third case of the Texas IAF, however, community organizers experienced the more heavy-handed and ethically dubious strategies of "educational triage" (Booher-Jennings, 2005) that appear to have led a mere 15% of American educators to believe that NCLB is improving American education (Public Agenda, 2006). These findings indicate that in the Texas setting a new form of "civic triage" (Shirley, 2008) has occurred that resembles the "decline of the local" in contemporary education articulated by Foster (2004, p. 176) in one of his last papers. Rene Wizig-Barrios, an organizer with The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) affiliated with the IAF in Houston, described the conditions there as follows:

> One of our principals was told by her district to make sure that homeless kids in a shelter shouldn't show up on testing day because they would depress the scores. Other principals have abolished free time for kids in first, second, and third grade. Principals tell us that they want to meet with us and work with us but that they're so much under the gun to raise test scores that they just can't make the time. And now we have this new law in Texas which says that if kids don't pass the TAKS [Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills] reading test in third grade they can be held back. That kind of pressure seems to us to be way too great to put on kids who are that little, and it's a major source of fear and stress for the teachers.

Wizig-Barrios noted that it was unclear how many of these actions were caused by NCLB. "It's hard to tell what comes from the principal, the district, the state, or NCLB," she said. Nonetheless, when the larger "policy narrative" places such enormous stakes on test score results, the exact source of the pressures on schools may be less important than understanding the cumulative effect (Gerstl-Pepin, 2006, p. 146).

The Three Contradictions of Education Organizing

In this chapter, three sets of permanent tensions in the field of education organizing have become salient. These are contradictions that are inherent in the very different kinds of organizational settings community organizers and educators inhabit and are related to the compatible but also distinct goals aspired to by educators and organizers. On the one hand, each of the contradictions can appear somewhat abstract and ambiguous; however, in the daily, street-level work of education organizing, they surface repeatedly and illuminate the different ways that educators and organizers frame issues and seek to bridge, amplify, and extend them across settings (Snow & Benford, 1988). The ability of educators and organizers to adjudicate these differences successfully is crucial, I argue, to their ability to engage in cross-organizational learning and field-building processes that are needed to restructure relationships between schools and communities beyond single-shot, grant-funded programs that expire far too quickly when budgets get tight and inadequate capacity has been developed.

The first contradiction concerns the *tension between the educational and the political*. Ideally, political processes support learning, but we know of many cases in which struggles for power come to preoccupy educators and community members. In the case of one Alliance School in the Rio Grande Valley, for example, my earlier research (2002) showed that battles over educators' autonomy, administrators' exhortations to teachers to support the IAF organization, and teachers' intense identification with their academic subject areas and relative disinterest in pupil's community backgrounds led to a long, grinding stalemate. Other research describes educators who resent the intrusive interventions of special interest groups who seek to mobilize power to foist their particularistic agendas on the public schools (Binder, 2004; Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, & Rollow, 1999; Nespor, 1997). On the other hand, researchers with social justice values (Oakes & Lipton, 2002; Welner, 2001) have found that educators' claims to specialized professional knowledge are sometimes used to undermine efforts to develop more democratic and inclusive schools. The point here is not to adjudicate the veracity of either interpretation, but simply to note the presence of a major fault line that can separate and polarize schools and communities.

The second contradiction concerns *the relationship between the community and larger macro-level contexts of change*. Leading change scholars (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hopkins, 2007) often emphasize the national or even international contexts of educational change, but grassroots organizers generally prefer activating community actors to develop "civic capacity" (Stone et al., 2001) to solve local problems. On the one hand, this preference for the local bespeaks a long-standing Jeffersonian tradition in American political thought and, in the case of congregational community organizing, extends the notion of "subsidiarity" that is a cornerstone of Catholic social thought. However, the increasingly transnational nature of urban populations – with millions of immigrants moving regularly in well-defined circuits between their home nations and employment centers in remote corners of the globe – is requiring new elasticity of

approaches and a fundamental rethinking of traditional organizing strategies. For example, the IAF increasingly frames its work in terms of "broad-based organizing" rather than community organizing, and groups such as ACORN, the Center for Community Collaborations, and the Public Education Network have developed a sophisticated repertoire of digitally-mediated campaigns and reporting that are accessible around the globe to those with a PC, an electrical outlet, and a modem. Yet, as this greater technical capacity and professional expertise of organizers expands, one may anticipate that it will be increasingly difficult to maintain credible and deep connections with local communities. It surely can be done, but only with exceptionally adroit and principled leadership.

The third contradiction concerns issues of *representation and legitimacy*. Who really represents "the community"? The term is often used as a simplistic slogan-system. City councilors, school board members, and mayors are all elected through democratic processes, but in some framings, they are seen as not only distant from but opposed to the individuals who elected them (as well as those who abstained from voting or could not vote). On the other hand, CBOs generally only represent a sliver of a population, yet are able to advance claims of universality for a given neighborhood or part of a city while avoiding normal electoral processes altogether. In many cities there are numerous CBOs, often with conflicting agendas, that contend with equal assertiveness that they are the "authentic" representatives of communities. Such claims can give way to demagoguery and de facto misrepresentation of the diversity that exists in communities. At the same time, however, it is by no means clear that elected officials do not distance themselves from their communities for a variety of complicated reasons, and hence need continual pressure from below to assure that they indeed serve their constituencies.

These contradictions are pervasive in community organizing for educational change. Educators learn that a community organization is coming to a school to attend a faculty meeting and fears of intrusiveness and manipulation are raised immediately. A second community organization seeks to develop local political capital to attack academic underachievement and dangerous neighborhood conditions, but is not able to negotiate the maze of local, state, and federal guidelines that lead educators to pay more attention to the requirement to reach AYP than to improve school safety and student learning. A third community organization develops a campaign to provide health clinics in inner-city schools but then is outmaneuvered by school committee members who mobilize religious fundamentals who raise fears that contraceptives will be distributed through the clinics.

Such is the complicated political terrain in which education organizing occurs. Such organizing involves a never-ending oscillation between the educational and the political, the local and the cosmopolitan, and the community and its representatives. In this dynamic and contested field, there are abundant opportunities to improve neighborhood safety, increase student achievement, and advance community development. There are also, however, an equally large number of opportunities for individuals to derail promising school improvement initiatives by defending professional prerogatives, failing to develop effective guiding coalitions, and simply failing to understand the complicated internal workings of schools in the first place.

Yet lest these many problems with educational organizing be misunderstand as grounds for inaction, one must hasten to add that opportunity costs of a particularly devastating kind and scope are incurred when educators marginalize community engagement, overemphasize top-down management rather than bottom-up activism, and mystify the role of power and politics in educational change (Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Sarason, 2005b). Educators often overstate technical considerations in educational change that advantage their own status and knowledge and minimize political and cultural factors that parents and community members seek to bring to their relationships with schools (House & McQuillan, 2005). On the one hand, this reliance upon technical procedures in adjudicating conflicts is understandable for educators or for any "street-level bureaucrats" who engage with a fractious and assertive public (Lipsky, 1983. But educators cannot forget the political decisions that shape the broader social context and have an enormous import for children and their schools.

In one recent study, for example, the United States ranked next to last in a roster of 30 nations ranked by child poverty rate, exceeded only by Mexico (United Nations Children's Fund, 2004, p. 28). Thirteen million children in the United States now grow up below the poverty line, and numerous indicators of child well-being reflect steady declines in the past two decades (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005). Who should be held "accountable" for leaving so many children behind in poverty when other nations with far less wealth and power outperform the United States on these indicators? The consequences of neglectful policies and values injurious to children spill over into schools and communities on a daily basis and suggest that educators have a civic responsibility, as part of their vocation, to remedy the most egregious forms of social injustice that afflict the most vulnerable members of their schools and communities.

Conclusion

We now have a significant and ever-growing body of literature indicating positive consequences from community organizing for educational change. The findings discussed in previous sections indicate that education organizing has an important role to play in contemporary educational change. Positive impacts were found when organizations such as Chicago ACORN and PACT in Miami studied data and used it to develop new strategies of school site and district-level change; when groups such as the OCO promoted a small school reform that improved Oakland's ratings on the multifaceted indicators of California's Academic Performance Index; and when young people affiliated with education organizing in Philadelphia rated more highly on civic engagement than a national comparison group of students.

On the whole, the research on education organizing has been positive in tenor. Nonetheless, some areas of concern must be addressed for the future of this change approach if it is to expand beyond its first innovative phase and is to become anchored in schools and districts as a visible, effective, and sustainable strategy. First, community organizers and educators need much more assistance with capacity

enhancement to overcome the fault lines that can divide local political leaders from the professional autonomy and respect sought by educators. Second, the balance between the local grassroots nature of change and broader national and even transnational developments will need to be reconceptualized to link the ensemble of strategies developed by community organizers in the past to the complex new demographic and technological challenges of the present. Finally, issues of representation and legitimacy will continue to need to be adjudicated and clarified so that single individuals or small groups do not assert themselves as community representatives when they in point of fact may only be representing themselves.

In the years to come, it will be necessary for community organizers and educators to deepen their collaborations and to structure educational change in such a way that community development and school improvement are mutually supportive undertakings that are sustainable over time. To do so, at a certain level, it will be necessary for community organizations to continue their crucial contribution by revitalizing democracy and expanding the public sphere. Educators in turn will need to find new ways to network not only with one another but also to reach out to community members to confront common problems, to share expertise, and to slowly but surely transform schools from islands of bureaucracy to centers of civic engagement. The interdependent relationship between democracy and education may remain fractious and demanding, but it also remains indispensable.

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