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Education Scholars Have Much to Learn About Social Action: An Essay Review

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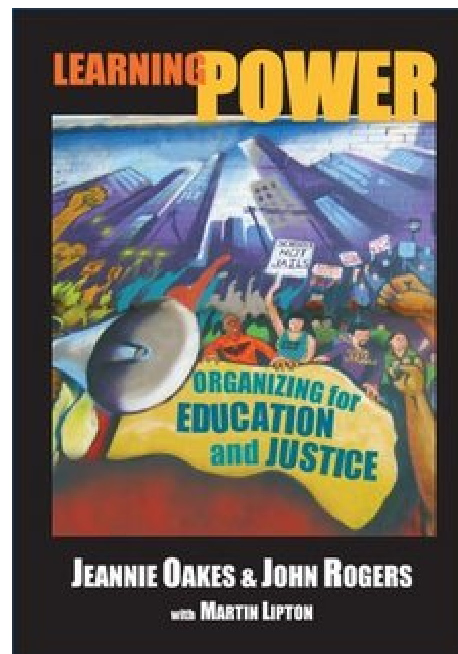

Across the field of education, scholars are slowly waking up to the fact that traditional forms of research on educational improvement have failed, in most cases, to significantly alter the lives of impoverished children and families in urban areas. Almost a decade before the publication of *Learning Power,* the book reviewed in this essay, a leading educational scholar, Jean Anyon, dedicated an entire book, *Ghetto Schooling* (1997), to this issue. Controversially, and admittedly with some exaggeration, Anyon concluded that “attempting to fix inner city schools without fixing the city in which they are embedded is like trying to clean the air on

one side of a screen door" (p. 168).

Widely read and discussed, *Ghetto Schooling* had little immediate effect. The book laid out key problems with our standard practice, but said little about what we might do *instead*. Anyon showed that success had something to do with social and economic change beyond schools' walls, but more than this was unclear. Education scholars who found these arguments compelling nodded their heads wisely in agreement. But then nearly everyone went back to doing what they were doing before.

No one should be surprised by this. The trajectory of the careers of educational scholars and the very structures of the institutions we work within are designed around the assumption that academic achievement and joblessness, among many other issues, are fundamentally *instructional* problems. There are few significant avenues within this world for responding to the idea that, in important ways, this assumption may be fundamentally flawed.

It took Anyon eight years to publish *Radical Possibilities* (2005), her follow-up to *Ghetto Schooling*. Her earlier writings suggest that it took Anyon this long because, like the rest of us, her training as an education scholar left her unprepared to speak confidently about social action and policy beyond schools. In *Radical Possibilities*, Anyon exhaustively described how "*macroeconomic mandates continually trump urban educational policy and school reform*" (p. 2). In contrast with *Ghetto Schooling*, she did discuss in her last chapter how educators might participate in social change efforts. But her recommendations remained quite limited. And she failed to discuss how we might overcome the enormous barriers that have and continue to block such efforts, or how we might develop practical and scholarly expertise in the field that would allow us to effectively follow her recommendations (Schutz, 2006).

Jeannie Oakes

These comments are not meant to deny the importance of *Radical Possibilities* for the field, something Anderson (2005) discussed earlier in this journal. The book laid out the limitations of school-based school-reform efforts in more detail and more comprehensively than anyone in education had done before. She effectively summarized many of the social movements emerging outside of schools to resist the oppression of marginalized inner-city communities. Nonetheless, I believe that the limitations of this text by one of our most respected scholars embodies deficiencies in the field more broadly. In the final analysis, even Anyon doesn't really know what to do. And even Anyon seems only to be beginning to understand what an educational research agenda that isn't focused on

schools might look like.

These preliminary comments bring us to the book that is the focus of this essay: Jeannie Oakes's and John Rogers's (2006) *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Justice* (subsequently cited as LP). *Learning Power* describes a series of efforts by the Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) at UCLA to put into effect what Anyon discussed. There are many laudable aspects of Oakes's and Rogers's book. The stories they tell about their different projects help give a sense of the kinds of strategies that are more and less likely to work as we attempt to engage more directly with the powerful forces that oppress children and families in impoverished communities. Most helpfully, the authors had the courage to describe their failures as well as their successes.

John Rogers

Much of what I write in the pages that follow is fairly critical. I want to emphasize, however, that when I address limitations of the UCLA effort I mean to address, by association, the field of education more broadly as well. Together, Oakes and Rogers and the graduate students and other researchers at IDEA represent some the most thoughtful, critical, and informed education scholars in the United States. They are experimenting with different ways to accomplish tasks that the field of education frankly hasn't really thought much about. While a different group would certainly have made different decisions and come to different conclusions, in a general sense IDEA seems to embody much of the best that the educational scholarship is capable of producing. To some extent, then, *Learning Power* provides a mirror reflecting key strengths and weaknesses of our field more broadly.

It is important to stress that this is a review of a *book* and not the actual work of the IDEA group. It is a review of a particular representation of their effort. However, it is this representation that is likely to have the most influence on the wider educational field. Since Oakes, in particular, is so well-respected in education, this book is likely to be read by a wide variety of scholars and to powerfully influence the thinking and practices of those who would attempt similar efforts. And it is one of the few books currently available that addresses the relationship between educational scholarship and social action in any concrete manner (see also Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Shirley, 1997). Because of its potential influence, it seems important to subject its claims to the kind of sustained examination I have attempted here.[1]

[1] For good or for ill, I have chosen to write this review without discussing my conclusions with members of the IDEA team, none of whom I know well (although I did take a class a number of years ago with Rogers). While this means that I have almost certainly interpreted particular aspects of their work in ways they might not agree with or have intended, it allows

My Own Perspective

Like Oakes and Rogers, I am a relative newcomer to the world of social action. When I arrived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to take a job eight years ago, I had spent most of my time studying fairly abstract theories of human agency and empowerment. Increasingly dissatisfied with what I found, I was looking ways to engage more practically with social inequality. It took me about a year to find Milwaukee Innercity Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH), a congregation-based community organizing group that works in the tradition of Saul Alinsky (discussed below). After attending an intense week of leadership training and participating in a few campaigns, I was hooked. For the past seven years or so, I have been a member of MICAH's education committee, working on issues ranging from class size reduction to health care in urban schools.[2]

These efforts were supported by the unique focus of my Department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), which offers a BS degree in Community Education and which explicitly values community engagement as a core responsibility of all faculty. I have worked to reinvigorate our offerings in community organizing, teaching our course on community organizing and creating an undergraduate Certificate Program in Community Organizing. In addition, for the last three years I have worked in a local charter school with a team of other researchers on what we call the "Public Achievement" project after the model it draws from, exploring how to teach social action skills to inner-city high-school students.

I am not a community organizer, but I have spent a number of years as an active participant in a mass-based social action organization and as a teacher of courses on community organizing. I have worked to gain a broad-based understanding of the theoretical and practical concerns and limitations of the models that inform current approaches to community organizing. I come to Oakes and Rogers's work from a standpoint that seems somewhat different from theirs, then,

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a relatively independent response to their text. In the interest of promoting dialogue, I have suggested that Oakes and Rogers be given the opportunity to publish a response to this review. I also hope that they and others might be willing to participate in a discussion about this and other issues regarding social action and schools at www.educationpolicyblog.blogspot.com.

[2] For most of my time with this and other groups I have intentionally refrained from conducting any formal research. While my position and skills as a professor have obviously had an effect on my participation and on how others perceive me, I came to these groups as a participant and not as a scholar. Recently I have begun to write about what I feel like I have learned (see a series of posts on www.educationpolicyblog.blogspot.com) and plan to write more in the future.

focused more on community-based social action than on traditional forms of school improvement.

The Organization of *Learning Power* and of this Response

This review closely follows the structure of the book itself. Because the first two chapters reiterate many of the points I have already discussed, above, I begin, below, with Chapter Three. In Chapter Three Oakes and Rogers lay out the theoretical framework that has guided their work. This framework is drawn almost entirely from the writings of John Dewey, a decision that I will argue creates some practical limitations for them. Chapters Four and Five tell the stories of two different projects that Oakes and Rogers acknowledge were largely failures in their ability to generate significant social power. In my analysis of these efforts I try to show additional limitations in their approaches that they do not seem to have perceived, partly as a result of their commitment to Dewey. In Chapter Six the authors discuss some additional theoretical and practical resources that they believe provide supplements to "fix" the limitations they do recognize in Dewey's vision. However, the authors skip over social action approaches that conflict with Dewey's, looking to models that fit well with their Deweyan commitments but that may not solve key problems they face. Chapters Seven and Eight describe two projects that the authors believe reflect more successful efforts to promote transformative social action. While I agree that these projects were more promising, I explore ways in which their vision still seems blinkered by their commitment to forms of interaction that may be more relevant to classrooms than contexts of mass political action.

John Dewey and Public Research

> “'The man who wears the shoe knows best . . . where it pinches.'”
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> —John Dewey (cited in LP, p. 37)

Chapter Three lays out the theoretical framework that guides the work of the IDEA team, drawn almost entirely from Dewey’s writings. This should not be surprising, since an attachment to Deweyan democracy mirrors the preferences of the larger field of education. As Apple and Beane (1995) have noted, “most of the impulse toward democratic schooling” in educational scholarship today “rests on Dewey’s prolific work” (p. 12). While Dewey's vision of democratic education is rightly lauded in the field, I have argued that his understanding of democracy has a number of key limitations when applied to broad efforts to promote social change (Schutz, 2001a; 2001b; in press).

As Oakes and Rogers note, Dewey’s approach to democratic engagement

focuses on fully engaging "'each individual'" in determining the direction of their society. It is a model of democracy in which "hierarchical understandings of individuals as 'greater and less, superior and inferior,' must give way to a 'metaphysical mathematics of the incommensurable in which each speaks for itself and demands consideration on its own behalf'" (LP, p. 35, all sub-quotes in this section cite Dewey). Ultimately, Dewey's goal, especially as expressed in *Public and Its Problems* (1927), was for each individual to be able to contribute his or her unique perspectives and ideas to the enormous and complex process of a "planning society" (Westbrook, 1990).

Key to this process was the initiation of all citizens into broad practices of experimental inquiry that would allow different "publics" to subject shared problems "'to constant and well- equipped observation . . . and ready and flexible revision.'" Dewey thus "placed common people in the foreground of public inquiry" while marking "out a limited role for experts" whose job it would be to support common citizens in their collaborative efforts (LP, p. 37). Instead of having experts decide public policy from their ivory towers, they would instead support the deliberation of everyday people, whose day-to-day experience gives them a visceral sense of the realities of the contexts in which they live. Through these collaborations between experts and common people, in the dialogues and experimental efforts pursued by different, often overlapping democratic "publics," politics would become "educative." With Oakes and Rogers, I find this vision quite compelling, and I will argue that it is in conceptualizing new ways for scholars and non-scholars to work together that they have been most successful.

Part of the challenge of pursuing a Deweyan approach to social action, as Oakes and Rogers acknowledge, is that Dewey was not very clear about exactly how enact it. *Learning Power,* then, represents an effort to transform Dewey's relatively vague ideas into concrete options for action. The authors derive from Dewey's writings four key "principles" to guide their work. First, they aim to "engage those most affected by inequality." Second, they try to "ensure access to knowledge and its construction," in contexts where expert and everyday knowledge can interact with some equality. Third, they encourage participants to "adopt a critical stance," challenging the "hegemonic reach of prevailing ideologies" that can ""rationaliz[e] . . . the misery and cultural degradation of others.'" Finally, they seek to encourage the development of "a transformative goal" (pp. 39-41). On the surface, it is difficult to find much to critique in these principles. I will argue, however, that Oakes and Rogers run into difficult problems when they seek to put them into effect.

A key challenge they face is in scaling up Dewey's model for broad collective action efforts. As I have argued elsewhere, a Deweyan focus on the enhancement of individual distinctiveness amidst collective action can only occur when the number of participants is restricted (Schutz, 2001a). In Dewey's model, as

the numbers of participants grow, the distinctness of individual voices is inevitably obscured. Hierarchy inevitably reemerges as particular representatives of different groups represent, however problematically, the larger number of interested individuals whose voices cannot practically be heard.[3] The fact is that Dewey developed his model of democratic engagement in the small, relatively intimate spaces of classrooms, especially in his Laboratory School at the turn of the 20th Century. And while Dewey participated in a range of social change efforts later in life, his role was almost always as a thinker and speaker rather than as an organizer. My point is not that we must give up on the enhancement of individual voices in different ways amidst social action. However, the challenge of scale indicates that a Deweyan approach to social action, *by itself*, will prove unworkable in spaces much larger than the classrooms in which Dewey developed it and in which most educators spend most of their time.[4]

Learning From "Failure"

Overview of the Futures and Teaching to Change LA (TCLA) Projects

In chapters Four and Five, Oakes and Rogers discuss two efforts they participated in that, whatever their positive accomplishments, ultimately seemed to have little impact on the conditions of unequal power they had hoped to affect.

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[3] Dewey was always careful to emphasize that one could not define ahead of time what would count as "democratic" for any specific group or context. He understood, for example, that it is necessary for some people to be leaders and others followers at different times for pragmatic reasons. Nonetheless, nearly all of his professional life he remained committed to a democratic ideal derived from the experience of face-to-face communities, the kind of ideal described by Oakes and Rogers. In essence, his *Public and Its Problems* (1927) was an effort to reconcile this ideal with the pragmatic demands of social order on a large scale. And he understood that he had failed. He acknowledged at the end of *Public* that "perhaps to most, probably to many, the conclusions which have been stated as to the conditions upon which depends the emergence of the Public from its eclipse will seem close to the denial of realizing the idea of a democratic public" (p. 185). The one possible solution he discussed during his lifetime, that a vast number of overlapping small communities might somehow cooperate without submerging individual voices, has been shown to be practically unworkable by Jane Mansbridge (1992) among others (see Schutz, 2001a). In fact, the problems that scale create for discursive democracy of the Deweyan kind has been widely known to democratic theorists since at least the time of the Greek city states, and no one has ever been able to solve them (see Dahl & Tufte, 1973).

[4] Of course, this is ultimately an empirical issue. Certainly there are social engagement efforts that involve extensive deliberation, including the participatory municipal budget processes that have emerged in Brazil (Souza, 2001) and elsewhere, and the Study Circles model in the United States (www.studycircles.org). As far as I know, however, none of these efforts overcome the limitations of an excusive focus on the kind of Deweyan democracy described by Oakes and Rogers.

Chapter Four discusses the IDEA team's work with a teacher and a group of working-class students of color through all four years of high school in Wilson High on what they called the "Futures" project. Chapter Five examines their work with a group of teachers and through them their students on the Teaching to Change LA (TCLA) project. Since the aims and methods of both efforts were quite similar, I focus on Futures, here.

In part, the Futures project aimed at fairly traditional forms of academic achievement. The IDEA team hoped to alter "the students' trajectories through high school from one that led simply to graduation, if that, to one that led to admission and success in a 4-year college" (LP, p. 49). They hoped that "students' experience as researchers in the high school dynamics that they were also living might foster academic skills, educational insights, and greater commitment to school success." (p. 48).

The project itself, however, emerged out of an effort to engage teachers and administrators in an examination of the tracking system at Wilson High School, explicitly seeking to alter this structure. The Futures project was an extension of this adult effort and was seen by the team as another way to contribute to some future transformation of the inequalities at Wilson. Oakes and Rodgers don't really talk much about the social transformation aspect of the project until the end of this chapter, however, embodying their hope that simply learning to be scholars and encouraging the students to develop "disruptive" knowledge might, somehow, lead to some material change in their school.

The IDEA team used an "apprentice" model where "the academic core of the researchers' life work (not at all unrelated to the students' interests) provided a space for mutual engagement." Thus, they argue, their work was "never about 'helping' needy students" (LP, p. 50). The chapter's central argument is that by engaging in university-based research practices, students were able to see complex aspects of their own communities and educational experiences that they could not before. Students learned the practices of social science research at the same time as they "read excerpts from seminal books and articles from research journals." Oakes and Rodgers emphasize how "astonishing" students found these experiences as they learned things about their own lives that they had little conception of before (p. 55).

As a result of this multi-year intensive work, Oakes and Rogers report that the students "came to see and talk about themselves as 'critical researchers" (LP, p. 60). At the same time they gained access to the middle-class discourse of power and "the type of 'college knowledge that their more advantaged peers accessed around the family dinner table" (p. 53).

As individuals, the project did seem to alter some of the students' self-identities as social actors. They began to see college not simply as a way out, but as an opportunity to "prepare themselves to give back to their communities and help

recreate schools as democratic institutions" (LP, p. 61). Individual students also took on new leadership positions. "They were elected to student government, facilitated sessions at a retreat on race relations, and founded a new organization for indigenous students," among other activities (p. 62).

What they apparently did not gain, however, was a broader understanding of how power operates in a society rife with inequality. Because the students were trained to be academics they ended up acting, not surprisingly, much like academics. For example, they shared their "disruptive knowledge" with a large audience where professors agreed that they sounded like college students. "With the presentation of the results of their inquiry," Oakes and Rogers argue, "the Futures students became agents with voices." Despite barriers, "they elbowed for themselves narrow spots at the tables of power from which they would not budge" (LP, p. 62). But, as any experienced community organizer can tell you, and as the IDEA team slowly learned, having a voice doesn't equal having power. When real efforts to change the tracking system began, the students "were ignored" as they "cited evidence from empirical research and challenged their counterparts to provide data to back up their arguments, . . . [advancing] theories about why advantaged students might hold tightly to the myth of meritocracy" (p. 64).

As I noted, the TCLA project operated much like Futures, although the focus was on a group of teachers who frequently made their students part of less intensive inquiry projects similar to those the Futures students engaged in. Many of the findings of their efforts were published in the online TCLA journal they created as an avenue for communicating with a wider public. But while this journal apparently continues to be visited by a large number of people, the concrete political results of the TCLA effort were essentially the same as Futures. As Oakes and Rogers note, because "there was no organized group positioned to push forward the initial findings," no concrete policy changes resulted from the different efforts the teachers and the students engaged in (LP, p. 92).

Lessons Learned

Three key lessons seemed to emerge for the IDEA team out of the Futures and TCLA case studies. First, the Futures effort, especially, showed them that when working-class students of color are provided with extensive academic support they are better equipped to overcome the challenges they may encounter in their lives and can become successful, college-bound students. Second, both the Futures and IDEA efforts showed them that an intensive effort to engage students and teachers in inquiry projects can successfully initiate them into the complex practices and language of social scientific analysis. These particular findings are not particularly surprising, however. Many previous projects have shown much the same thing. It was not success, therefore, but failure that was most instructive. Most importantly, the IDEA team learned that while gaining inquiry skills might be empowering for

individuals, it did not translate into capacities for effectively confronting oppression.

Ultimately, the IDEA team concluded that the Futures and TCLA projects were at least qualified successes, arguing that they confirmed “several of John Dewey’s propositions for effective, socially just, democratic reform” (LP, p. 95). The only problem was that they did not go far enough. In other words, *Learning Power* argues that there was nothing inherently problematic in their approach that the addition of some more direct connections to social action might not solve. In this section I challenge this assessment, tracing out problems that seem to result, in part, from their commitment to a Deweyan model of democracy, and in part from the particular way they chose to appropriate his vision.

From my perspective three problems with IDEA’s general approach seem at least under-acknowledged in *Learning Power*. First, their efforts demanded large commitments of resources. Second, IDEA's focus on standard practices of social scientists may have actually miseducated some participants about the nature of social power while at least implicitly downplaying the efficacy of local knowledge. Finally, as I have already noted, I am concerned about the limited number of participants that can be usefully included in Deweyan deliberative projects like these.

First, both Futures and TCLA clearly required a large resource base to pull off-in terms of both material funding and access to highly trained faculty and graduate students. In the case of the Futures example, it took four years of intensive work during the school year and in the summers to produce a group of students with the specific capacities they describe. The TCLA project similarly required extensive work with teachers and by these teachers with their students. Because IDEA is led by Oakes, with a national reputation at a top research university, it is perhaps not surprising that resource challenges never emerge as a significant issue in the text. In fact, the only mention of resources I can find in this book comes when they note, with no further explanation, simply that they “secured funding” for one project (LP, 136). This luxury is not something one will find at lower tier universities like mine, however. In my University we face constant and painful trade-offs in how we will “spend” our limited resources. In fact, our own effort to teach social action skills to high school students has operated with almost no funding at all.

From an institutional capacity standpoint, then, it is not enough that the IDEA projects were able to “succeed” in some specific areas. The key question is whether such intensive approaches are *necessary* for the empowerment of students and teachers more broadly in under-resourced schools. And one hopes that they are not. Because departments like mine would find them nearly impossible to pull off over the long term. And it is hard to imagine many individual teachers successfully

following their model without extensive support from sophisticated scholars.[5]

Second, it is possible to detect a subtle (and certainly unintentional) tendency to undervalue local knowledge in this book. On the one hand, Oakes and Rogers continually emphasize their efforts to treat teachers and students as equals. At the same time, however, their words often point to the relative ignorance of those they work with. In the Futures project, for example, they argue that "although most students recognized inequalities in their lives and schools, they had no broad understanding of the historical or structural bases for inequality. Students often blamed themselves for the inequality, and most students lacked the language to describe their experiences" (LP, p. 55). Later they note that "as ninth graders, most of the Futures students viewed their regular-track courses, their relatively low status at school, and their teachers' perceptions of them (as not college bound) as a natural and inevitable outcome of their social and personal worth" (p. 65).

Statements like these seem problematically broad. Our Public Achievement team at UWM, working with a students from similar backgrounds, has found a much more complicated situation, and not nearly so much naiveté. In fact, we have been continually surprised at the sophisticated analysis students are often able to bring, with little prompting, to the conditions of their communities. Interviews with urban youth in low-income schools conducted by Michelle Fine and her colleagues (Fine, Burns, Yasser, & Torre, 2004) similarly revealed "a broad based, sophisticated, and critical understanding of social structures, the stability of inequality, and their 'place'" (p. 2212). The point is not that these youth know everything they need to know, or that there are no distortions in their knowledge. Instead, what we have found is that less work is required than *Learning Power* implies to successfully overcome these. In fact, surveys of low-income urban residents generally find that their perspectives about their life-situations are much richer than Oakes and Rogers describe. For example, Bullock and Limbert (2003) note that residents generally favor "structural attributions over individualistic explanations" of poverty (p. 705). A tendency for students to blame themselves when they fail, then, may emerge not simply from a lack of knowledge but, instead, at least partly from accurate understandings of their limited capacity to change these structural barriers and an associated need to depend upon individual responsibility for survival (Flanagan &

[5] The education literature is littered with examples of wonderful projects that are almost impossible to replicate because of the resources required. The "funds of knowledge" model for initiating teachers into the strengths of local community practices is a good example (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002). Although it seems like a productive approach, there is little or no evidence that it has been replicated elsewhere, in part because of the project's requirement that skilled ethnographers work with small numbers of teachers for extended periods of time. While Oakes and Rogers note that they "do not offer these cases as exemplary (or even replicable)" (LP, p. 42), their decisions about what was and was not "successful" is likely to inform other similar efforts.

Campbell, 2003; see Fine, Burns, Yasser, & Torres, 2004). And it would be very helpful if a less intensive, more "local knowledge" approach were effective. It would reduce the resources necessary to successfully facilitate empowerment of these students, making replication more of a realistic possibility.

Related to this tendency are indications that the interventions of the IDEA team may actually have ended up *mis*educating their "collaborators," in some ways, about their own communities. From the limited information provided, it seems that participants often learned to see the world through an "academic" lens. At least in some cases this seems to have taught both teachers and students to conceptualize and engage with social problems as academic scholars generally do--by generating and distributing particular kinds of knowledge. From my perspective there is something almost painful, for example, about working-class students of color in the Futures Project lecturing privileged students in professorial language about theories of meritocracy and thinking, somehow, that this might actually make a difference. In contrast, in our experience in Milwaukee, inner-city students of color have usually been quite clear in their understandings that no one is particularly interested in what they have to say. [6] Our students have generally been dismissive about the possible effects of simply talking with people in power. Is it possible, then, that the Futures students, especially, (since they received the most intensive "treatment") came to believe that their rational arguments might actually have an impact on the power structures on the world around them at least partly *because of* their apprenticeship into the practices of social science research?

One could imagine altering IDEA's apparent focus on standard practices of social science without leaving their Deweyan framework behind. Similar goals could be achieved without focusing so much on helping "others" see the world as scholars do. Is it really necessary, for example, for inner-city students to digest complex sociological theories of social reproduction in order for them to understand that school isn't necessarily designed for people like them to get ahead? Our experience indicates that inner-city students are quite capable of making sense of the complexities of power and domination without imbibing the practices of academic sociologists and social theorists. (Interestingly, this approach is much more like the Highlander model of collaborative learning that Oakes and Rogers embrace later on

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[6] An example from the end of the TCLA chapter (Chapter Four) seems more congruent with our experience in Milwaukee. As a part of a "public history project," groups of students presented what they had learned through their process of analysis. In this case, however, the students at least presented their findings in their own language. Unlike the Futures students, they didn't try to sound like professors. Instead, in one case, a performance "combined poetry, hip hop, and dance," communicating "both a nuanced understanding of history and a powerful demand for change" (LP, p. 92). Of course, even this engagement using more "local" language still had little ultimate impact, since it remained unlinked with any significant source of social power.

in Chapter Six, although they don't note this.)

It is also important to acknowledge that there can be very different kinds of benefits involved in efforts to empower students where they "are," and efforts to initiate students into the professional practices of scholars. Leveraging the wisdom and skills inner-students already bring with them may help facilitate a deeper conscious understanding of the structures of oppression faced by their communities, and these understandings may provide a powerful grounding for social action. But this approach will not necessarily prepare students to operate successfully in contexts dominated by middle-class, professional forms of discourse, like college classrooms. It doesn't teach them to speak or act like people in these alien worlds. There may be tensions unacknowledged by Oakes and Rogers, then, between nurturing collective empowerment and providing individual access to middle-class forms of "success," and limited resources of different kinds may force us to choose which approach we will stress at any particular moment.[7]

The final apparent limitation of the IDEA approach seems to emerge from the problem of scale. As I noted, the kind of intensive collaborative engagement Dewey and the IDEA team celebrate is only possible in fairly small scale face-to-face contexts. Oakes and Rogers are conscious of this limitation, explicitly "sharing Dewey's belief that 'vital and thorough attachments are bred only in the intimacy of an intercourse which is of necessity restricted in range'" (LP, p. 91). From their and Dewey's perspective, then, while it is important to publish one's findings, the "final actuality" of "systemic and continuous inquiry" is only "accomplished in face-to-face relationships by means of direct give and take" (Dewey cited in LP, p. 92). This helps explain why all of the intensive inquiry work described in chapters four and five were conducted by fairly small groups of individuals. And it explains why only fairly small numbers of individuals--this is especially true of the Futures project--were provided opportunities to be initiated into the rich practices of social science inquiry. I could discern few sustained efforts to link the efforts of these groups with larger masses of participants necessary for successful social action, except to the extent that they provided audiences to be presented to.

While Oakes and Rogers realize that this was a limitation of their effort, as

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[7] Other tradeoffs may also emerge when working-class youth learn to speak and act like professionals. Oakes and Rogers note, for example, that students learned that they "did not have to give up entirely their 'neighborhood' identity or become indistinguishable from middle-class students and their values and identities" (LP, p. 61). This is certainly true, as far as it goes. However, it is also the case that new practices bring with them new identities that often diverge from and conflict with prior identities. In fact, a diverse range of scholars, from Gee (1990), to Lubrano (2005), to Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine (2003), have described the enormous tensions involved in negotiating the gulfs between working-class and middle-class professional ways of being.

I show in my discussion of their next chapter they do not see this as a critique of their Deweyan approach. The catch-22 of a Deweyan model of democratic empowerment emerges in the Futures and TCLA examples, however. The process of transforming working-class kids into professional scholars was very time intensive, and could only take place in relatively small groups where each individual's unique perspective could be fully heard and actualized. Because such an intimate approach to democratic empowerment seems likely to democratically "empower" only a very small number of individuals, it seems possible, at least, that it may end up simply recreating an odd kind of elitism.

New Models for Action?

In Chapter Six, Oakes and Rogers explore different models that might provide supplements to their Deweyan vision. They begin with a famous quote from Frederick Douglass declaring that "power concedes nothing without demand" (LP, p. 93). This ability to demand, the authors argue, is what was missing from their first two efforts with students and teachers. The second epigraph, from the Highlander Center, indicates the path they intend to follow: fostering "grassroots action" by developing "the strength that grows within the souls of people, working together, as they analyze and confirm their own experiences and draw upon their understandings to contribute to fundamental change" (p. 93). There is an unacknowledged tension, however, between the perspectives that lie behind these two quotes. Douglass explicitly saw himself as a leader speaking *for* a mass of black Americans who lacked the wherewithal to speak for themselves. In contrast, Highlander follows the vision of its founder, Myles Horton, who at one point refused tell a group what to do even when they threatened to shoot him if he didn't (Horton & Freire, 1990). In other words, these quotes emerge out of fundamentally different traditions of social action, the first from a conception of representative "race leadership" (Martin, 1984)—regardless of how much Douglass encouraged individual responsibility and mass education—and the second grounded in a (Deweyan) rejection of such mass leadership.

As I have already noted, what Oakes and Rogers learned from Futures and TCLA was that their Deweyan approach to empowerment through inquiry was essentially "successful." All that needed to happen was for this work to be "augmented" with compatible visions of grassroots empowerment. In Chapter Six they look at different practices that might be grafted on to what they have already done. The first model they examine is Saul Alinsky's sophisticated vision of collective action, developed in the 1930s and 40s. This makes sense since this model, adapted in a number of ways, is the most influential among community organizers today. At the end of this section, I discuss Alinsky's approach in more

detail. Here it is important only to note that Alinsky's model, with its embrace of mass action and hierarchical leadership, is not very Deweyan. Perhaps predictably, therefore, Oakes and Rogers leave Alinsky's ideas behind after less than two pages of discussion, turning quickly to a brief discussion of his "detractors," even though they have not really taken the time to explore the possible benefits of the Alinsky tradition of organizing in any detail.

Following these critiques, they turn to somewhat more comprehensive discussions of two other influential organizers and organizations: Ella Baker, who mentored the famous Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) civil rights group, and the Highlander Center founded by Myles Horton. Not surprisingly, Baker and Horton were key developers in America of models of organizing and social action highly compatible with Dewey's vision, a tradition that Stall and Stoecker (1998) argue is also deeply indebted to "women-centered" experiences of community. Thus, Oakes and Rogers correctly emphasize Baker's (and Horton's) "insistence that leadership should be decentralized and should come from ordinary people rather than from professional organizers," citing Baker's oft cited belief that "strong people don't need strong leaders" (LP, p. 105). They contrast her efforts to call "on a sense of outrage," and to "appeal to the dignity of the community, and a sense of solidarity and shared identity of community members" with what they assert was Alinsky's "emphasis on narrowly defined class interest" and appeal "to a rational weighing of the costs and benefits of action" (p. 105). And they laud Baker's focus on "'quiet places'" and her turn away from "mobilizing large public protests" (p. 104)

Similarly, they celebrate Highlander's focus on "community leaders" over "professional organizers" (LP, p. 104) In fact, although they do not emphasize this, Highlander is one of America's best examples of the kind of fundamentally inquiry-based approach to social action they seek to extend upon, although Highlander put much less stress on initiating participants into the practices of expert knowledge. (Horton was actually much more suspicious of experts than the IDEA team [which was *made up* of experts]). Perhaps the key difference between Highlander and IDEA's approach in the Futures and TCLA projects was that, at least in Horton's time, it sought out people who were already leaders in their community--people who were already rooted, to one extent or another, in institutional and relational bases for collective action (Horton & Freire, 1990). Not surprisingly, a shift to a focus on people who are already local and organizational leaders is a key characteristic of the IDEA team's efforts in subsequent chapters.

In general, then, Baker and Horton opposed mass organizing in favor of grassroots, face-to-face educational engagements of the kind Dewey was also most familiar with. Baker argued, for example, that "there should be no distinct intellectual leadership" and that "thinking and analysis should be incorporated into

all aspects of movement work" (Ransby, 2003, p. 271). And neither Baker nor Horton was very interested in establishing formal institutions. What needed to be reformed, Baker emphasized in general agreement with Horton, were not abstract organizations but "the human beings involved. Individuals had to rethink and redefine their most intimate personal relations and their identities" (p. 369).

There is, of course, much that is admirable about Baker and Horton's approaches to organizing. Perhaps most importantly, from a Deweyan perspective, they provide rich opportunities for each participant to contribute their own unique understandings to an ongoing effort to make sense of the world around them. However, Stall and Stoecker (1998), in an article Oakes and Rogers actually cite a number of times, provide a more balanced analysis of the benefits and limitations than can be found in *Learning Power*. Stall and Stoecker acknowledge that the fluid, collaborative model embodied by Baker and Horton is especially effective at creating tight local community networks that can sustain themselves over the long term. And they emphasize how important it is that such networks be nurtured if there is ever to be sustained mass action. At the same time, however, they argue that these local, relatively intimate efforts generally lack the strong organizational structure and conflictual strength of the kinds of organizations Alinsky created. Most importantly, they believe these approaches are often limited in their capacity for effectively confronting unequal power in the public sphere. Myriad small scale groups like these, they argue, historically have usually failed to "translate into action very effectively" (p. 750).[8]

At this point it seems important to discuss the approach to organizing in the Alinsky tradition in more detail, since it is the key alternative to the Baker/Dewey/Horton approach to community-based social action in the United States. It is important not to overemphasize the differences between these traditions, however. In fact, those working in the Alinsky tradition have increasingly appropriated many of the lessons of "women-centered" organizing that Stall and Stoecker (1998) discuss, although in different ways than Baker and Horton. For example, both Alinsky-based organizations and Deweyan approaches stress the importance of "relationships."

The Deweyan model, however, envisions a broad network of unique and relatively equal individual participants, developing, in Oakes's and Rogers's terms "relationships by linking community members to one another in local groups and networks of groups" (LP, p. 98). In the ideal, Alinsky-based organizations also build their groups around relationships, mostly through what they call "one-one-

[8] Writings on SNCC, founded by Baker as an alternative to King's Southern Christian Leadership Commission, and the relatively short life of SNCC in the form Baker preferred also indicate the limitations of this tradition (see, e.g., Carson, 1995; Hill, 2004, Ransby, 2003).

one" interviews with individuals. However, instead of a flat Baker/Horton/Dewey network of dispersed but interrelated educational "circles," one can envision Alinsky-based organizations as made up of central groups of leaders guided by professional organizers and linked to a large number of less-involved individuals by relationships created in one-on-ones, resulting in a more traditional pyramid hierarchy. Whereas the ideal Deweyan model tries to include every unique individual as much as possible in a fluid planning process where everyone is a leader at different times, Alinsky-based organizations delegate planning to more established groups of leaders who try to stay in contact with the preferences of their constituents. The Alinsky approach seeks to bring a large number of people, many of whom are peripheral to the ongoing issue and action development, together in social action where they can present a united front and challenge those in power. This is something, as Stall and Stoecker (1998) note, that the "women-centered" or Deweyan model is not really equipped to do. While much of the day-to-day work in Alinsky-based organizations involves building relationships, in contrast with Baker/Horton/Dewey approaches, the overall focus is institutional. As Stall and Stoecker stress only by developing and maintaining an institutional structure with an ongoing identity can the dispersed and limited power of individuals or small groups generate the kind of sustained power and collective voice necessary to effectively contest the power of oppression over the long term.

Alinsky himself looked to the wide range of ethnic, religious, and other organizations that populated urban areas from the 1930s to the 1960s for support, often trying to find existing leaders who could bring significant numbers of followers with them. Today, in part because of the disappearance of many of these local organizations, Alinsky-based organizations have internalized many of the "women-centered" lessons discussed by Stall and Stoecker (1998) and work more intentionally to develop new leaders. In fact, while Alinsky's leaders of the first half of the century were usually men, today they are more likely to be women (Warren, 2001). The central task of an organizer, today, is not simply to find but to develop new leaders (Kahn, 1991). The point of the hierarchical structure of Alinsky-based organizations is not to exclude people, then (although it can, at times, have this result); instead it is a pragmatic response to the limited ability of a mass of individuals to participate on such a time-intensive level. Like Baker and Horton, then, Alinsky-based organizations focus a great deal of energy on education. But they emphasize a range of different levels of participation, providing training sessions for leaders at the same time as they try to make their collective actions learning opportunities for a broad range of participants, with speeches, testimonials, and more.

In contrast with the Futures and TCLA examples, but more like the efforts described in the chapters that follow, research in these organizations almost

always takes place amidst ongoing strategic efforts. Data collection is often integrated into efforts to build relational power. Survey efforts, for example, become opportunities to engage with and recruit potential members. Leaders and organizers in Alinsky-based groups do not learn to be "scholars" or "researchers" separate from their identities as activists. In fact, in my experience "research" is sometimes pursued as a thinly veiled strategy for engaging people in an issue. And it isn't unusual for these organizations to simply hire someone to get the data they need to act, allowing them to keep their limited resources focused on activities more directly related to organizing.

Paradoxically, the more hierarchical approach of neo-Alinsky organizations may actually end up looking more democratic than the Deweyan approach in some ways. These organizations have embraced a range of strategies for staying closely connected to the diverse perspectives of community residents, developing education and action strategies for including more marginal participants in a range of ways, and using these strategies as a part of a constant search for new leaders. As a result, they may end up being less elitist than groups that limit themselves to more intimate approaches that allow only a relatively small number of individuals to participate, albeit in a more "authentic" and holistic manner. They respond to the pragmatic fact that many impoverished and oppressed individuals don't really want or have the time to be involved at all levels of social action. These people want something positive to happen in particular arenas, but they don't necessarily care, or have the energy to worry much about the specifics.

What Oakes and Rogers seem to have done in *Learning Power* is to start with a Deweyan theoretical framework that fits the approach they have decided, prior to any experimentation, is *the* correct approach, progressively disregarding approaches that do not fit this vision. Probably unintentionally, they have sought out models that allow them to mostly keep doing what they have already been doing while subjecting their efforts to only limited critique. Even scholars they cite themselves (Stall and Stoecker, 1998), however, argue that the Baker/Horton approach has serious limitations. Further, the authors overlook the fact that most organizations working in the Alinsky tradition have, in fact, appropriated many of the feminist, community-based insights they describe, although in ways quite different from what Baker or Horton would have recommended. Finally, by looking away from Alinsky they obscure the fact that nearly all major grassroots organizing groups in America explicitly look to Alinsky as their key influence (Sherwood & Dresser, 2004).

Parent U-Turn

In Chapter Seven, the authors describe a group of parents who became fed up with their community’s treatment by the dominant institutions of their neighborhoods and who had achieved significant successes before they started working with IDEA. Oakes and Rogers describe their role with Parent U-Turn as that of a source of “’on demand’ research as a community service,” with a model of “*inquiry* rather than client-provider *service*” (LP, p. 113). And many positive things appear to have happened in the context of IDEA’s relationship with these parents. They note that the parents “increasingly asked us for help understanding the problems in their local schools, identifying potential solutions, and making sense of education policy and the policymaking process. And as they increased their knowledge and influence, they became more sophisticated about what they needed generally and what they could ask for and get from researchers” (p. 114)

The model of engagement in the Parent U-Turn effort, what IDEA eventually called a “parent leadership seminar,” looked much like that already described in the Futures and TCLA projects, above. As participants in what resembled a Deweyan “constructivist” classroom, parents learned a different way they might be treated as “students.” For many, this was “a revelation,” radically different from what they had experienced in school. Like the students and teachers in Futures and TCLA, the parents pursued a range of inquiry projects in the schools, efforts that helped give them the sense that they had the right to enter schools and question what was going on there. In this seminar, parents learned to access and make sense of information about their schools and “began to imagine how the information could stimulate new ideas for change and be leverage for change.” They began to see “broader patterns of racial inequality that suggested the need for wide-scale policy reform” (LP, p. 117). And this led the parents to interview a range of key policymakers and administrators in an effort to understand better. At the same time, “participatory dialogue helped the parents connect their school observations, their personal experiences, and research-based knowledge to construct complex understandings of their children’s schooling” (p. 115).

As the authors describe it, “Parent U-Turn’s thirst for knowledge led them to pressure us to include them in our summer youth seminar on the sociology of education” of the Futures project, because they “believed that they too must develop these skills” (LP, p. 118). As a part of this effort, the parents tested different strategies for gathering information about schools, “invariably” adapting methods from the research literature “to match their own experience in schools.” They created a “three-page ‘Parent Observation Check-list,’” “developed a protocol to interview principals” and “surveyed other parents about school conditions” revising

their methodology as they detected problems. After their research revealed that conditions hadn't changed much since the student walkouts of the late 1960s, the "seminar turned to social theory to address the parents' questions" about why this was so, discussing Freire and social reproduction theory. Overall, the parents "embraced critical research as a tool for breaking the cycle" and embraced a more questioning attitude towards official knowledge (p. 119).

The first action the parents took was to conduct a survey of textbook availability and then to publish this in IDEA's online journal, TCLA. But when the parents tried to engage policymakers and administrators they encountered the same kind of resistance visible in earlier chapters. After a few failed efforts, the parents found a lawyer and "filed an official complaint with the district." When this received no response, one of the parents "sent a seven-page, handwritten letter to the head of complaints" in the state that "meticulously documented 34 district violations, citing the appropriate section of NCLB in each case." This got the state involved and "negotiations between the district and Parent U-Turn . . . resulted in a detailed agreement providing students with access to information and assurances of full inclusion in district and school site planning and decision-making." And the leaders of Parent U-Turn did not simply leave school administrators alone to implement the agreement, but kept up their monitoring role. At the same time, the leaders of this group have confronted "school officials publicly when these officials do not demonstrate respect for [other] parents" (LP, p. 123). In this and a range of other ways, Parent U-Turn clearly altered, sometimes in fundamental ways, the power dynamics of their schools.

Parent U-Turn also engaged in a range of larger mobilizations for collective action. For example, because these parent leaders were well informed about a range of policy issues, when the schools unilaterally declared that they would change the school calendar to deal with overcrowding issues, they were better able to challenge the basic assumptions underlying the district's efforts. As the authors note, however, "Parent U-Turn did not come to this work as an experienced grassroots group with a well-honed repertoire of social movement strategies and tactics," and their lack of access to such strategies is evident in the approaches the group took in response to the district scheduling conflict (LP, p. 128). To gather "a sizable community presence, several members of Parent U-Turn gathered outside Stanford [school] every morning to pass out flyers as parents brought their children to school." They put up posters and one of the leaders used her bullhorn each weekend, driving "slowly along each block . . . to call on parents to refuse the district's mandate" (p. 125).

Discussion of the Parent U-Turn Project

The parent leaders of this group developed a range of admirably creative approaches to contesting inequality in their neighborhood. They were able to get the state to react and to give them power to monitor school district policies. And the group was successful at getting enough participation in a boycott and other actions to get the district to react. However, there are a range of other strategies that experienced organizers could have informed them about that might have enhanced their effort. Perhaps most importantly, organizers from the Alinsky tradition would almost certainly have focused early on in helping these leaders reach out more broadly into the community to develop a reliable organization with the capacity to turn out significant numbers of protesters on short notice.[9] Research would have been more integrated with organizing from the beginning. Further, an organizer in the Alinsky tradition would have encouraged Parent U-Turn to engage in collective actions much earlier. For example, instead of having one person write a letter to the state, a more traditional organizing approach would have involved many individuals writing letters and traveling together to the capitol to present their demands. Such engagements provide opportunities for a broad range of participants to engage in educational opportunities that, while not as intensive and academic as the ones provided in the parent leadership seminar, provide entry points for many more people to become educated and empowered amidst resistance efforts. Because the IDEA effort did not provide Parent U-Turn with access to these strategies and perspectives, as in the Futures and TCLA effort they may have inadvertently reduced the scope of community participation in the name of a particular form of intimate discursive collaboration.

None of this should be that surprising. Oakes and Rogers and the other members of the IDEA team are educators, and their approaches reflect those prominent among progressive educational scholars. As in the previous two examples, they seem to have drawn on their experience in classrooms and schools and their commitment to Dewey in their efforts to nurture empowerment in the Parent U-Turn effort. Perhaps most fundamentally, it is important to emphasize that what IDEA did with Parent U-Turn was not really a "leadership seminar." Instead, it was an "education seminar." As Oakes and Rogers acknowledge, parents' leadership skills emerged out of their personal experience in their community.

It is important to acknowledge that this focus on social science practices and theory didn't seem to be as problematic, here, as in the Futures and TCLA efforts.

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[9] It is difficult to ascertain from the text exactly how many people were actualy included in the different efforts they describe, but it appears that the core group was, as in Futures and TCLA, relatively small. The fact that the authors tend not to focus on numbers, even in an approximate sense, indicates a tendency to downplay this issue in their thinking about the effort.

And this is probably because the parents came to them as leaders already, with, perhaps, more capacity to filter what they were receiving from IDEA through their own understandings of what would be practically useful to them. Their initiation into social science practices does not seem to have confused them, for very long, at least, about the efficacy of "truth," alone, as a long-term strategy for contesting inequality.

A key question again, however, is how much the intensive intervention provided by IDEA was actually *necessary* for the empowerment of these parents. Again, did they really need to read Freire and other scholarship to understand the basic workings of oppression in their neighborhood? How much learning did they really need to be able to engage successfully with the state, for example? To say this is what the parents "wanted" obscures the fact that these seminars were apparently all the IDEA team really had to offer them. Would they have made different choices if there were also opportunities to learn actual community organizing skills as well? These questions are important not because we should choose *for* others what kind of education they need or want, but because every decision is made in a world of tradeoffs, where all of us have limited time and resources.

From my perspective, what the Parent U-Turn example shows most starkly is how problematic it is to try to teach people to be community leaders when there are, apparently, no experts in community leadership at the table. What Parent U-Turn indicates is how deficient even our most sophisticated educational scholars are in the core skills and understandings that would make our engagements with community groups most productive both for us and for them. Neither the IDEA team nor the parent leaders, from my perspective, seem to have learned what they needed to learn about the limitations of their own particular perspectives, preferences, and practices. As a result, neither do readers of *Learning Power*.

Description and Discussion of the Educational Justice Collaborative

Chapter 8, the final case study in the book, provides what seems like the most effective example of IDEA's efforts to contribute to social change in California. One key reason seems to be that with the Educational Justice Collaborative (EJC) IDEA is working with leaders of established organizations with independent power and sophisticated understandings of power and inequality geared to the practical challenges of social action and resistance. Oakes and Rogers describe the EJC as a space in which leaders of groups from "three spheres" come together: "grassroots activists," "allied groups" without "their own membership base" that engage in advocacy and legal action, and IDEA as a group of social science scholars. EJC provides a "site for reflexive dialogue among groups," where "partners discover overlapping interests and common struggles, and we explore the

potential for learning, for shared goals, and for common work" (LP, p. 139).

Although Oakes and Rogers argue that this project is simply an extension of what they learned in the prior three efforts, the differences are instructive. First of all, the position of the researchers in this collaborative seems much more equal. No longer are privileged scholars working with those with limited access to cultural or social capital. In the earlier projects, despite efforts to foster equality between scholars and students/teachers/community people, IDEA seemed to have more power to determine *how* the dialogue would be structured and what would be discussed. In the case of the EJC, in contrast, as one of their graduate students noted "the organizers are the experts, I am just the person who knows how to take information and process it into data" (LP, p. 140).

In the earlier examples, IDEA sought, in part, to teach participants how to think and act like scholars, albeit in collaboration with IDEA researchers. But this is clearly the least important goal in the EJC. Instead, the key role of the IDEA team in the EJC is that of facilitating discussions about research, providing "research translation," and doing "research on demand." IDEA convenes "'educational exchanges' in which members examine research on critical issues in education policy from their own perspectives" in response to data collected by IDEA. As convenors, they "ask generative questions and identify opportunities to provide empirical answers," and their "major tasks have been 'discovering and making known facts'" (LP, p. 139). Although the authors talk about "scaffold[ing] the development of their [the EJC members'] research skills" (p. 139), the IDEA team's teaching in this case seems not to center on transmitting the practices of social scientists. Instead they describe more straightforward efforts to teach people about "acquiring and using research tools" (p. 142). Their role seems much less intensive than it was in the earlier examples. There is no description of participants reading the kind of sophisticated social theory common to the earlier case studies.

From my perspective, these differences are actually quite positive. In fact, the EJC seems like the most promising and productive effort that Oakes and Rogers report on. In this case, they have become one relatively equal partner among other institutionalized groups with their own independent power and established discourses and practices. In my experience, this kind of dialogue, where other groups with social power press experts to translate their knowledge into forms that are actually useful to them is greatly lacking. Oakes and Rogers seem right on target when they note that "the opportunity to use research, experience, and knowledge constructed on-the-spot is an asset that is often lost in settings where experts control the agenda" (LP, p. 145). In contexts like this, the very different paradigms of understanding embodied by researchers, advocates, and activist groups come together in synergy. It is in such spaces where new framings of social problems, like the EJC's development of an "Educational Bill of Rights" can emerge. It allows

a collaboration between those who understand the "facts" and those who understand the realities of the workings of power in particular contexts.

And because, unlike IDEA, the members of the EJC are actually connected to their members or other communities through a range of different relational avenues, they seem able to spread their "disruptive knowledge" in ways that are more likely to have a concrete impact on inequality. In fact, as Oakes and Rogers note, it is the "paid organizers of the EJC groups," the kind of professional organizers promoted so forcefully by Alinsky, who have the capacity to develop new leaders, "constantly bring[ing] new people into leadership roles and conven[ing] community members in making decisions and generating a collective vision" (LP, p. 148). This is something IDEA failed to do not just in the Futures and the TCLA examples, but also in the Parent U-Turn example, since they could not advise them about effective strategies.

Given Oakes's and Rogers's focus on Dewey, it is crucial to emphasize that the EJC activities are apparently limited to the same Deweyan practices of discursive democracy described in IDEA's earlier efforts. In this case, however, the fact that this limits the number of participants does not seem much of a problem. Because these groups are leaders of organizations and groups, they bring their connections to the wider world with them to the table. In fact, the creation of such intimate spaces where leaders of different organizations might come together is absolutely criticalcou and Oakes and Rogers seem especially well equipped to nurture this kind of engagement.

Conclusion: The Dangers of Utopian Thinking

I laud Oakes and Rogers and their colleagues, unlike most in the field, for facing up to the limitations of traditional educational scholarship and for striking out in new directions. They were courageous to step into this new and largely unknown arena of community organizing and social action. Further, their willingness to face up to their limitations and to describe not only their "successes" but also their "failures" is what has made writing this review possible in the first place.

Although critical, this review is meant to support the expansion of projects like these. By identifying potential limitations in the IDEA team's general vision, I seek to encourage a dialogue about how we might support a range of kinds of social action in the future. In general, my concern is not about what they are trying to do, which I think is extremely valuable, but about how they have understood what has and has not been successful in their different efforts.

In a range of different ways, Oakes and Rogers seem trapped within the horizon of the ways of thinking prominent in educational scholarship--within a set of practices designed to educate children in schools and classrooms and not to foster

collective social action. I have been especially critical of their tendency to cling to Dewey's vision of intimate discursive democracy that emerged, similarly, out of the small-scale settings of classrooms and small schools. The fact is that Dewey didn't know much of anything about collective social action, and although he did engage in political work late in life, he had little or no sustained experience engaging with the challenges entailed in such work. It seems quite problematic, therefore, to look to his writings for instruction, somehow, on how to foster effective social action or democratic organizing. In fact, in agreement with Stall and Stoecker (1998), I have tried to show in this essay that an exclusive commitment to Dewey's vision of democratic engagement can result in a number of problematic outcomes. Not the least of these is a paradoxical kind of elitism resulting from an inability to fully include more than a small number of participants.

Another concern is with what seems like the IDEA team's efforts to apprentice their "collaborators" into the complex practices of social scientists. I worry that this focus may overlook the strengths of local knowledge while siphoning off material and social resources that might profitably be used for different and perhaps more productive ends. At the same time, there seems to be some evidence that such practices may actually miseducate initiates about the workings of power and inequality in their own communities.

From the perspective of someone who has at least some experience working with community organizing groups, what comes through in this book, especially in the early chapters, is an almost astonishing level of naiveté. It is very discouraging, for example, that it took the team working on the Futures and TCLA projects so long—years—to realize that simply disseminating research wouldn't have much impact on power inequalities in and outside of the schools.[10] Ultimately, the chapters on social action in this book show pretty clearly that Oakes and Rogers, like most educational scholars, still don't really have a very good practical understanding of the history and traditions of social action and organizing in America. Their discussions of Alinsky and Baker and Horton, for example, do not evidence much sense of the complex tensions involved in this work. In fact, one can detect a tendency to avoid a direct engagement with these complexities in favor of an exclusive commitment to the familiar form of Deweyan democracy that currently dominates the field.

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[10] Ironically, at least three decades before the Futures effort, in 1968, one of the first lessons that Chicano student leaders of a school walkout in LA learned--in many of the same high schools that Oakes and Rogers mention--was that "facts" and "research" were powerless in the face of entrenched power and self-interest. They conducted a student survey and presented it to the school board, and the school board apparently just threw it away (Rosales, 1997). It says something enormously problematic about us a field that it took a distinguished group of scholars and graduate students--who surely knew the history of the 1968 walkouts--to figure out this quite simple fact of life.

Given my respect for Oakes and Rogers and their colleagues, what this indicates to me, at least, is that we should not expect even our most sophisticated scholars to shift easily into the new ways of thinking that seem demanded by effective approaches to social action. Our pre-understandings, established by our initiation into the discourse of the field, seems likely to obscure many of the aspects of social action organizations that make them so successful.

These issues are magnified in Learning Power's final chapter, with its embrace of visions of a democratic world that seem detached from the realties of growing inequality and apartheid in our nation and world. In this last chapter, Oakes and Rogers envision "a democracy in which people of all races and social classes engage 'on equal terms' to learn from one another as they make decisions about how to live and work together" (LP, p. 157). They imagine a world in which the "logic of scarcity" is overturned, and in which "a robust public sphere" is created "in which citizens come together to identify their common interests and deliberate about how to serve them," shifting "the norms and politics that advantage the few at the great expense of the many" (p. 163). They imagine "millions of people . . . talking with one another about how they can jointly take action to improve the quality of schooling for all children . . . eager to engage with educators in defining high-quality schools and . . . ready to hold the system accountable for ensuring that quality" (p. 176). Of course, this language is leavened in *Learning Power* with talk about the collective empowerment of those on the bottom, the importance of social conflict, and acknowledgements of the challenges involved in bringing the privileged and marginalized together in anything like equal collaborations. Nonetheless, the enthusiasm in this final chapter about the possibility that the privileged and the marginalized might come together and just *be democratic* is extremely unrealistic. Nothing in the history or current situation of inequality in America gives any indication that this has any likelihood of taking place. Here, Oakes and Rogers bring to mind the utopian and ultimately ineffectual visions of a broad spectrum of middle-class progressives at the turn of the 20th Century, a group for whom Dewey was one of the most prominent standard-bearers (Schutz, in press). And, in fact, the authors acknowledge that they are entering "Utopian realms" here (p. 178).

From my perspective, one central lesson emerges out of Learning Power. As education scholars we must acknowledge that our imbeddedness in the scholarship of our field may actually mislead us about how to effectively foster social action. We have been prepared to transform classrooms and schools, not to foster collective social action. Even the key theories that inform our efforts, exemplified by Dewey's vision of democratic education, may prove liabilities. If we mean to engage in projects like these, therefore, we need to include scholars with practical experience in a range of community organizing traditions from the beginning. At the same time, education scholars who wish to assist or nurture activist groups should

probably be engaged with these groups as participants for a while before they begin. At the least, we must become much more familiar with the language and practices of community organizing and of community organizers.[11]

Ultimately, as I have argued elsewhere (Schutz, 2006), if efforts like IDEA's are to be successful we will need to develop a core of expertise about the possibilities and tensions of different approaches to social action within the field of education. And it is crucial to emphasize that this is an institutional problem, not just an individual one. As they are currently configured, schools of education lack established spaces to sustain teaching and research on non-school issues of social power. *Learning Power,* as a case study of where we "are" as a field, then, indicates that we are only at the beginning of a very long journey.

Join a discussion of *Learning Power* and this review at
http://educationpolicyblog.blogspot.com/2007/03/discussion-of-education-scholars-have.html

[11] Many groups offer week-long or longer workshops that teach the basic skills of organizing. Midwest Academy [midwestacademy.com] is perhaps the most well-known example open to those who are not already a part of an established community organizing organization.

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