WHAT'S PRAGMATIC ABOUT COMMUNITY ORGANIZING?

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In the last decade, educational researchers and scholars have turned new attention to the theory and practice of community organizing as a method for addressing education injustices.[1] While there are diverse traditions of community organizing work, by far the most influential model in US contexts is that of Saul Alinsky, whose *Rules for Radicals* organizer's bible is subtitled "A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals."[2] Alinsky was not a proclaimed pragmatist in the philosophical sense of that term, but in the "useful and practical" sense. In that vein, his model for community organizing is increasingly used, adapted, and re-formulated by educational activists of many stripes. His work is an inspiration for much community organizing work in education today, which presents on the face of it an interesting contrast to the dominance of the Deweyan pragmatism in curricular and political theorizing in education.

While it may be practical, Aaron Schutz argues that community organizing work is not compatible with a Deweyan political philosophy:

> 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… I have tried to show in this essay that an exclusive commitment to

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[1] Dennis Shirley, *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); M. Elena Lopez, "Transforming Schools Through Community Organizing: A Research Review," Family Involvement Network of Educators, Harvard Family Research Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, December 2003), retrieved April 27, 2009 from: http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/transforming-schools-through-community-organizing-a-research-review; Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers with Martin Lipton, *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Social Justice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006); Sarah Deschenes, Milbrey McLaughlin and Anne Newman (Eds.), *Community organizing and youth advocacy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass /Wiley, 2008).
[2] Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971).

> Dewey's vision of democratic engagement can result in a number of problematic outcomes.[3]

Part of Schutz's claim is uncontroversial—Dewey was not a community organizer in the Alinskyian sense. His life, scholarship and politics, while deeply rooted in the problems and concerns of his era, were often conducted at a distance considered appropriate for a middle class professional public scholar of the time period. But Schutz is making a claim beyond how Dewey conducted his political life as a scholar or activist. Schutz cogently argues in his essay review of Oakes and Rogers' book on education organizing that an exclusive commitment to Dewey's philosophical vision of democratic engagement reflects an unreflective social class orientation to political action. Moreover, Schutz asserts that a Deweyan political approach produces ineffective results when applied to community organizing for schools in working class and poor neighborhoods.[4] While Schutz's arguments are very powerful, his ultimate conclusion short-changes what Deweyan pragmatism might contribute to community organizing and thus could be read as throwing out the pragmatist baby with the bathwater.

In this paper I explore whether and how philosophical pragmatism might be a useful tool for achieving educational reform through social action work such as community organizing. I explore Schutz's arguments relevant to Deweyan democracy and revisit Dewey's democratic theory to test these arguments. The purpose is not to "rescue" Dewey from Schutz's critique, but to ask a question related to it: whether, and how, can pragmatism be a useful philosophical orientation for community organizing work in the face of today's educational injustices? My analysis points to an affirmative answer to this question. Dewey's pragmatist political theory would frame community organizing as a viable form of social intelligence and democratic experimentalism. Not unlike Schutz, however, I believe Deweyan pragmatism cannot be read prescriptively. Instead, we might understand education organizing to be a practice that helps to constitute publics for education, igniting new meanings of the idea of *public* education, a political and moral concept central to pragmatist political theory but much depleted in U.S. society today.

SCHUTZ ON THE MIDDLE CLASS BIASES OF DEMOCRATIC EDUCATIONAL THEORY

Aaron Schutz is one of the more compelling voices in educational

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[3] Aaron Schutz, "Education Scholars Have Much to Learn About Social Action: An Essay Review," *Education Review, 10*, 3 (2007, March 14), 25. Retrieved April 30, 2009 from http://edrev.asu.edu/essays/v10n3index.html.
[4] Oakes and Rogers, *Learning Power;* Schutz's review is "Education Scholars Have Much to Learn About Social Action."

theory today writing on the topic of democracy, and I have followed his scholarship and public writings on education with interest. His educational praxis is a fascinating, activist form of philosophical scholarship and public engagement that is rare in our field and most others in the academy. I focus here on Schutz's writings about Deweyan pragmatism, particularly as they intersect with community organizing and social action as a forum for making schooling more accountable to the needs of working class and poor families. For Schutz, this historical-sociological-philosophical-practical project has been at the center of much of his recent work, including research and scholarship, blogging, teaching and curricular work, and community activism.

Schutz's project criticizes educational scholarship's over-reliance on Deweyan democratic theory and its possibilities for praxis. He makes the case that Dewey's political philosophy is naïve, and is particularly so because of its social class blinders:

> As exemplified by John Dewey's writings, this vision of democratic engagement foregrounds the participation of unique individuals in fluid collaboration. In working-class settings, however, contrasting forms of "democratic solidarity" have predominated. These working-class practices give less emphasis to individual expressiveness, pragmatically stressing the importance of speaking in a collective voice. In fact, this article argues that middle-class approaches to democratic engagement, by themselves, hold only limited relevance to the life conditions of working-class children and families.[5]

This line of argument seems particularly unique and relevant to educational work for justice. In this critique, Schutz goes a step beyond the likes of C. Wright Mills and Reinhold Neibuhr, among the many who found Dewey's political theory lacking in realism or an understanding of the workings of power in intergroup relations.[6] Schutz's scholarship points to one important reason *why* Dewey's pragmatism was so politically naïve—Dewey's own social class habits and perspectives that shaped his philosophy and political life. Dewey's ideal of democratic community is overly dependent on an individual-in-community ideal in which deliberation and reflective reason are individual means towards collective decision-making and interest alignment in

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[5] Aaron Schutz, "Social Class and Social Action: The Middle-Class Bias of Democratic Theory in Education," *Teachers College Record* 110, 2 (February 2008), 406.

[6] See Terry Hoy's "Freedom and Equality," in *The Political Philosophy of John Dewey: Towards a Constructive Renewal* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), for a discussion of this line of critique against Dewey's political philosophy.

political communities.[7]

        While cautioning that his characterizations refer to "ideal types," Schutz analyzes how middle class and working class democratic action are different. He contrasts the middle-class nature of Deweyan "deliberative democracy" with a working class "democratic solidarity" that is much more characteristic of successful organizing efforts for social justice.[8] Because working class and poor families are more collective in their politics and less interested in (and often excluded from) deliberative politics, Dewey's deliberative democracy is not a powerful means towards achieving freedom and equality for all families in a public school; it is much more likely to be effective for and in middle-class settings. Worst of all, education schools are rife with ideals of Deweyan democratic community and in many ways, faculty are still blind to the social class biases within this political and educational ideal. Such unreflective adherence is sustained in teacher and administrator education programs everywhere. Schutz asserts this critique in his much-discussed critical review of *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Social Justice* by Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers.[9]

        In *Learning Power*, Oakes and Rogers discuss their work in the Institute for Democracy, Education and Access at University of California- Los Angeles. The authors utilize a Deweyan social inquiry framework to shape their application and analysis of community organizing work undertaken with students, colleagues, teachers and parents through that Institute. Schutz argues this book is an example of educational scholarship that begins with its theoretical answer in mind: John Dewey's pragmatic political and social theory. Schutz writes that "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."[10] While Oakes and Rogers acknowledge some weaknesses in Dewey's theory as it applies to community organizing and social action in urban schools, they do not deviate from Dewey's belief in social inquiry and collaborative, grassroots engagement in face-to-face relationships as the key devices for helping disenfranchised groups realize their educational goals. Such blind faith in Deweyan democracy, Schutz

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[7] Schutz, "Social Class and Social Action." Schutz also makes this claim in "John Dewey's Conundrum: Can Democratic Schools Empower?" *Teachers College Record* 103, 2 (April 2001), 267-302.

[8] Ibid., 426.

[9] Oakes and Rogers, *Learning Power*; Schutz, "Education Scholars Have Much to Learn About Social Action." A lively discussion between Schutz and various interlocutors about the review can be found on the Educational Policy Blog, where Schutz is a key contributor: http://educationpolicyblog.blogspot.com/.

[10] Schutz, "Education Scholars Have Much to Learn About Social Action," 5.

says, is typical in educational scholarship.[11]

Schutz's take on *Learning Power* is that ultimately, this text serves as yet another reminder that Dewey's vision of democratic education cannot serve us well as the center-piece of educational work on behalf of justice: "Dewey's model of democratic schooling ultimately reflects the ways of being of particular classes and cultures of his time, and… we must move fundamentally beyond the vision he developed in his lifetime if we are to be true to the spirit of his pragmatic project."[12] Thus Schutz questions not only the *uses* we make of Deweyan democratic theory in educational research, practice and activism, but the effectiveness of Dewey's democratic theory itself as part of the larger political project of pragmatist philosophy. I will explore the latter claim in the remainder of this paper.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND PRAGMATIST DEMOCRATIC THEORY

Any attempt to "rescue" Dewey from Schutz's criticism only affirms the charge that education scholars are obsessed with Deweyan pragmatism (one hates to be so predictable). I myself am disinterested in such a project, though certainly there are Deweyans who can take up the task. By and large I find Schutz's social class analysis of both Deweyan deliberative democracy and education schools insightful and accurate. What I would like to ask here is what aspects, if any, of Deweyan pragmatism are still vital and important for social action efforts to realize justice for marginalized groups in schools. These aspects might enable us to "move fundamentally" beyond Deweyan pragmatism, as Schutz prescribes, without giving up what is valuable about pragmatist political theory in general.

Let's separate the claims Schutz makes about Deweyan pragmatism from his claims regarding the ways people use this philosophy in education schools. To say that a particular interpretation of Deweyan democratic pragmatism has dominated Schools of Education seems true enough as a large generalization, though this is largely an empirical question that, if tested with an analysis of articles and syllabi in all educational theory-related departments and courses, might likely be deemed a simplification. Deweyan deliberative democracy may have been powerful in education schools during parts of the 20th century and in some places today, and given the middle-class cultural capital in schools of education, it seems unsurprising that education school faculty interpret Dewey through their own social class perspectives. Schutz calls on educators to be bridge builders across social classes, and I heartily

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[11] Claudia Ruitenberg echoes this claim in her wonderful essay, "What if Democracy Really Matters?" *Journal of Educational Controversy*, Woodring College of Education, Western Washington University. Accessed September 15, 2009, available: http://www.wce.wwu.edu/Resources/CEP/eJournal/v003n001/a005.shtml.

[12] Schutz, "Social Class and Social Action," 268.

endorse this call, but here I am more interested in exploring whether and how Deweyan pragmatism might assist in this work. To say that Deweyan pragmatism can *only* yield a middle-class, impotent kind of political action to reform unjust, unresponsive educational institutions, is the claim that I wish to more closely examine. I believe that a few key Deweyan political concepts continue to provide important building blocks for new reconstructions of pragmatist democratic theory and action.

Schutz has several problems with Deweyan democratic theory: he objects to its middle-class biases, to its assumptions that deliberations alone lead to institutional reform for working class students and families, and to the fact that Dewey was much better at describing the ends of democracy rather than the means for achieving them. Dewey preferred deliberation and force of cooperative reason as means to bringing about democratic life, and constructed his philosophy of education around this particular deliberative model. He supported labor movements, recognized the ways in which social class inequalities were detrimental to genuine democratic community, and saw conflict as endemic to human society and to democratic life—but he offered no real timely strategies for political action, and those he did offer were born of his own cultural sensibilities and usually relevant only to the historical moments in which he wrote or commented.

In examining his life, politics, and philosophy, Westbrook acknowledges that "Dewey did not have much of a strategy for making American schools into institutions working on behalf of radical democracy" and offers examples of political naiveté Dewey demonstrated in other arenas.[13] Though Dewey understood that radical changes were needed "in the means of production and distribution" he stopped short of Marxism as a solution, for both his theoretical and personal temperamental leanings led him to find the theory to be determinist and with a naiveté all its own.[14] For Dewey, revolution was a coercive rather than a cooperative force by its nature, and he kept returning to the importance of social or cooperative intelligence as the best driver of democratic life. Social intelligence as a means for democratic experimentalism is at the heart of Deweyan democratic theory. Whether social intelligence is necessarily always singularly "deliberative" in its forms, however, is a point to which I will return later.

How do we actually enact social intelligence in a pluralist society governed by capitalist structures, ideologies and institutions, where norms of decision-making and bureaucratic control have never favored the interests of the poor and working class? This "show me the money" critique runs

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[13] Robert B. Westbook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 109.

[14] The quotation is from John Dewey, "Liberty and Social Control," *Later Works* 11:125.

throughout the history of philosophical commentary on Deweyan democracy. The volume of this critique grows in direct proportion to the tremendous gaps between rich and poor classes in the U.S. Eldridge explores this critique of Dewey's political thought in his essay, "Dewey's Limited Shelf Life."[15] Dewey's failure to develop descriptions of the political skills and technologies needed to accomplish his democratic ideals was something Dewey himself acknowledged about his work. Eldridge offers this response to such criticisms:

> We could be asking for something that smacks of an ideology, a readily understandable and applicable program of action, that requires little of its adherents beyond commitment and ingenuity in implementation. But, and this is the consumer warning, what Dewey would have us do is develop in our own time and place an intelligent response to our social and political difficulties. We do need means and ends—a political technology—but we cannot take off the shelf a political technology that has been developed by prior generations. [16]

Ultimately, Eldridge suggests that the "product" of Dewey's work with the longest shelf life is the idea of social intelligence, a conceptual tool naming the human ability to produce new solutions for evolving political problems and contexts. I concur with Eldridge; the idea of social intelligence represents one of the truly mainstay ideas of a pragmatist political theory, an idea worth holding onto and adapting for use in organizing for educational reform.

Social intelligence is the tool for democratic experimentalism; the two are logically connected in pragmatist political thinking. Social intelligence is both a verb and a noun; it is the knowledge developed as a result of inquiry and democratic experimentalism as we deliberately set out to change a social situation and experience the consequences of those efforts. This is accomplished by individuals in groups, in Dewey's re-constructed understanding of the individual as a being *in* and not *outside of* association. Social intelligence applied to democratic experimentalism will always be useful, as democracy is a transitory ideal and not a stable, fixed reality. Compared to a Rawlsian theory of justice, set out to be a "formal demonstration of the stability of an imagined, ideal democracy," Dewey's democratic theory is more focused on "how we get there from here" through

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[15] Michael Eldridge, "Dewey's Limited Shelf Life," in William J. Gavin (Ed.), *In Dewey's Wake: Unfinished work of Pragmatic Reconstruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 25-40.
[16] Ibid., 26.

inquiry and participation that are "transformative" and "leading to greater reasonableness."[17]

Social intelligence applied to democratic experimentalism represents a pragmatist, nonfoundational, social approach to political life. While we may take or leave Dewey's unique brand of democratic faith as expressed in his belief in the transformative nature of political discourse, social intelligence and democratic experimentalism remind us of a core pragmatic commitment: that there is no metaphysical or pure space of democracy, justice, or equality. It is just us, struggling along, trying to get it right and failing a great deal of the time. We do so as social beings living in particular moments of history with certain kinds of intelligence and inquiry capacities.

But who is the "us"? Schutz's critique of Deweyan progressivism cajoles us to keep asking this question, and rightly so. Community organizing is a form of social action predicated upon the assumption that deliberative forms of social change in schools have not or will not work in particular social settings and conditions. It is a kind of social action more likely to be a tool suited to poor and working class families because of the dominance in school governance of middle class cultural capital and *habitus*. Community organizing is, in pragmatic terms, a form of social intelligence in democratic experimentalism, albeit one that has yet to be fully utilized, understood, or claimed as a viable form of inquiry and political work in institutions like schools, where middle class sensibilities and practices dominate.

Mark Warren's description of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation work in school-based organizing is evidence for the claim that community organizing represents a form of social intelligence working on behalf of democratic experimentalism.[18] What began in the late 1980s with initial school-based organizing in predominantly African-American communities in Fort Worth has now blossomed into the Alliance School network, over one hundred schools across the state that represent "the single largest experiment in community organizing for school reform in the country."[19] Alliance schools are in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods and are broad-based organizations that are "engaging parents, teachers, community leaders, and administrators in an effort to improve student performance and connect the local school more constructively to the surrounding community."[20] Though IAF was founded by Alinsky, the Alliance School organizing work represents

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[17] William R. Caspary, *Dewey on Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 16.

[18] Mark R. Warren, "Communities and Schools: A New View of Urban Education Reform," *Harvard Educational Review* 75, 2 (Summer 2005), 1-32.

[19] Ibid., 20.

[20] Industrial Areas Foundation, "IAF in Action." Accessed September 11, 2009; available: http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/iafaction/iafactionschools.htm.

the evolution that community organizing as a practice has undergone in the recent decades.

Alliance Schools are those entering into an agreement with a local IAF organization, which are often based in religious congregations in low-income neighborhoods. Teachers and administrators elect to enter into a relationship with an IAF organization to become an Alliance School, but from there, no prescription exists for the work to be done. Professional organizers from the IAF local groups work to organize parents as well as teachers, principals, staff and students to address a range of school issues. Warren emphasizes that "in this approach, public schools are not the object or target of outside community organizing; rather, organizing occurs in the school with all of its stakeholders."[21] The organizing occurs with the assistance of experts in organizing work, who train and empower key parent leaders; these people, in turn, work with civic, government, business and educational leaders to leverage broad-based changes that affect student success in multiple ways.

A key part of the Alliance School story for educational scholars is the role of educational leadership in these efforts. Because principals and teachers elect to partner with an IAF organization, school leaders are much more willing to work with these organizers instead of against them.[22] According to Warren, "Principals had to be interested in moving away from traditional, hierarchical notions of management toward a collaborative model, to see their role as fostering this new style of leadership that is congruent with organizing."[23] Organizing is likely to have the most long-term and far-ranging effects on improving educational quality when principals and teachers are already open to the idea of democratic governance in schooling, an idea that they might acquire at education schools through a study of someone like, say, John Dewey. But studying Dewey as the iconic über-Educational Philosopher, a "product to be consumed," in isolation from contemporary socio-economic, political, and socio-cultural realities in many poor and working class neighborhoods, would be a mistake.[24] Such a study is what Schutz is warning us about when he criticizes a naïve progressivism with its exclusive focus on deliberation.

But let us think a little more closely about Schutz's claims regarding Deweyan deliberative democracy, a practice Schutz describes as "arising from the penchant of the middle class for extended rational dialogue, its focus on the

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[21] Warren, "Communities and Schools," 20.
[22] Dennis Shirley offers a portrait of San Antonio's IAF school organizing efforts in *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), chapter 7.
[23] Warren, "Communities and Schools," 21.
[24] Quote from Eldridge, "Dewey's Limited Shelf Life," 28.

importance of individual expression, and its love of teamwork."[25] He continues:

> In Dewey's (e.g., 1916) conception, authentic democratic practices were those that encouraged individual distinctiveness amidst collective action. Participation in group action should nurture individual perspectives, not suppress them, as long as they served the shared aims of society… And unlike the bureaucrats, who relied on new systems of control as sources of order, the democrats looked often uncritically to education as the key force for transforming 'others' into discursive democrats… While the bureaucrats largely won the war over schooling, the deliberative democratic vision still holds powerful sway, especially in educational scholarship.[26]

Although Schutz discusses deliberative democracy as a singular kind of middle class practice, today it constitutes a growing and fast evolving field of research and application, with many scholars and practitioners addressing the exclusionist critiques that have been lodged against it.[27] Some deliberative democracy scholarship implies that the kind of social class analysis that Schutz offers may be overly deterministic. While Schutz's basic points about the reverberations between middle class cultural capital and deliberative processes remain, there have been clear efforts among deliberative democracy researchers and practitioners to make deliberation practices more inclusive in all kinds of ways.[28] Rather than viewing deliberation as an inherently exclusive and middle-class practice, scholars like James Bohman argue for focusing on the ways that deliberative inequalities work and fostering "political efficacy on the part of those who are deliberatively disenfranchised."[29]

By pointing to the efforts of contemporary deliberative democrats to re-make deliberation in light of social class, gender and racial critiques, I do not mean to suggest that deliberation is "the answer" to greater justice for working

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[25] Schutz, "Social Class and Social Action," 417.

[26] Ibid., 421-423.

[27] See, in particular, Iris Marion Young's attempt to reconstruct deliberative democracy in light of such critiques in *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[28] Deliberative Democracy Consortium, *Where is Democracy Headed? Research and Practice on Public Deliberation* (Washington, DC: Deliberative Democracy Consortium, 2008), see pp. 34-35. Accessed July 9, 2009; available: http://www.deliberative-democracy.net/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=93.

[29] Natasha Levinson, "Deliberative Democracy and Justice," *Philosophy of Education 2001* (Urbanna, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2002), 58. See James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996).

class and poor families in schools. Like Levinson and others, I believe both community organizing and deliberation to be "potentially mutually reinforcing" practices, distinct examples of social intelligence to be applied in the spirit of democratic experimentalism.[30] And a great many of the roadblocks to these practices in actual school communities are revealed in Schutz's telling admission that the "bureaucrats largely won the war over schooling."[31] Both control-oriented, managerial approaches to school governance and top-down accountability imperatives such as No Child Left Behind are making forms of democratic endeavor and social action in schools today more difficult than ever. Neither forms of organizing nor deliberative forums are common-place in most schools or school governance settings, and this probably isn't because principals and teachers have been reading too much John Dewey, unfortunately.[32]

CONCLUSION

Community organizing aligns with pragmatist democratic theory as easily as does deliberation in so far as both practices are based in antifoundational methods, though deliberative and organizing practices are very distinct applications of social intelligence and democratic experimentalism at work. Community organizing seems particularly effective, as Warren points out, in school settings when joined with deliberative and relational models of social intelligence. Regardless of the approach, it is social action work that seems absolutely necessary in the conditions of grave inequality that we now face in the United States. Educators cannot get an adequate sense of those conditions and proper responses to these conditions by only reading our iconic Dewey. We should instead "read his work entirely pragmatically," with a focus on Dewey's conceptual methods rather than the specific recommendations in his work.[33]

Pragmatist democratic theory tells us that democracy and justice are not found in a theory or a Constitution, from God or from the ideal of the Good; it is created in struggles on the ground, over ideas and resources and real decisions in communities. Pragmatist theorizing on behalf of schooling injustices builds upon but cannot solely depend upon the work of Dewey to help educators figure out how to "do" democracy in complex contemporary

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[30] Ibid., 57.

[31] Schutz, "Social Class and Social Action," 423.

[32] Educational theorists may be unable to avert their gaze from Dewey precisely because of the fact that the bureaucrats won and forms of top-down control persistently undermine genuine democracy and education in schools. I suspect many of us may find Dewey's hope and faith in democratic forms of life to be beguiling antidotes to such conditions, however incomplete they may be.

[33] Gert Biesta, "How to use Pragmatism Pragmatically? Suggestions for the 21st Century," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, 13-17 April 2009, 9.

conditions of inequality, top-down accountability, and a frequently polarized public. What is philosophically pragmatic about community organizing, however, is the very basic assumptions guiding the practice; that human beings think, build, strategize, and organize together on behalf of a public claim in a pluralist space characterized as "democratic," attempting something new and calling for leaders and groups to respond, evaluate, and react. These interactions can be characterized as cooperative or coercive, but will on balance strive for cooperative solutions. That human beings have these capacities to think and act in and on behalf of public ideals, based on an evolving, aspirational notion we call "democracy" is an pragmatist insight that is not widely enough understood or enacted, but is at the heart of democratic education, leadership, and social action.

We can interpret education organizing, then, as a method for public creation and development, a means for constituting publics for public education. We live in an era dominated by top-down reforms and educational discourses that have been at worst damaging and largely extraneous to efforts to equalize access to excellent schooling for all children; it is thus no wonder that we have witnessed a surge of interest in education organizing among families and citizens whose political voice and agency have been minimized in school governance. The *demos*—"the people"—must somehow be constituted in the governance of public institutions. Community organizing for school reform is one way to constitute these publics for schools.

Organizing is an effective and important strategy for education reform today because of its political potential: to help organize social intelligence in the form of active, persuasive publics. As the place of the local and the meanings of *public* education have become amorphous and often eclipsed by both increasing federal control and aggressive private interests and spheres, education organizing is a process through which these publics can be created, develop, and assert their interests in order to achieve meaningful and sustainable reform.