Home Is a Prison in the Global City: 
The Tragic Failure of School-Based Community Engagement Strategies

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Historically, schools serving impoverished families trapped in America’s urban “ghettos” have been resistant to community participation. Enhanced participation is critically needed, however, if long-term urban school-reform projects and efforts to develop more empowering, community-supporting forms of pedagogy are to succeed. This article examines the most influential and/or promising efforts to foster more authentic engagement between schools and inner-city communities. The author finds that while efforts to develop school-based models have largely failed, a range of community-based efforts remain promising. If educators, scholars, and policymakers are truly interested in improving school–community relations, then they will need to become more deeply informed about community forces and structures and more directly involved in efforts to strengthen community organizations.

KEYWORDS: community-school relations, urban education, urban poverty.

We have long known that “while an urban school is located in a community, it is not often of the community. Employees are rarely neighborhood residents. Many do not share the culture or race of their students. [And g]raduates seldom hold expectations of returning to productive neighborhood citizenship” (Keyes & Gregg, 2001, p. 32). In fact, “discussion[s] of urban communities” in education and elsewhere generally “deal . . . with their deficits” (p. 31). With few exceptions, the implicit (often explicit) question for urban schools is not how to connect with “community,” but how to keep the community at arm’s length. Over the last decade or so, however, what Anderson (1998) calls a “pervasive discourse of participation” has emerged among educators and policymakers in the United States, among whom the importance of promoting public participation in schooling has increasingly “taken on the force of common sense” (p. 572). Although this nascent movement has generated a diverse range of models and efforts, it has produced few successful examples of rich democratic participation, especially in marginalized areas. In fact, Anderson worries that the extremely limited forms of participation generated by most efforts frequently end by reinforcing the already considerable exclusionary power of the school system. Too often, the mere appearance of democratic participation can enhance the legitimacy of the status quo, reducing possibilities for the development of truly robust forms of community–school engagement.

This review extends Anderson’s (1998) and others’ concerns about the limitations of current efforts to foster relationships between schools and local communities,
focusing on impoverished urban areas of the United States. In this review, I examine what emerged as either the most prominent or the most promising efforts to improving community–school engagement, evaluating the extent to which each achieves something like what Anderson calls “authentic participation.”

Given the potential vastness of this subject, I have necessarily kept my focus relatively narrow, although a broad range of writings is nevertheless included. For example, I address only efforts that seem to have the potential to promote what one might loosely call “progressive” reform. I do not discuss efforts to promote narrow forms of test-based accountability or efforts to inject religion into schools (see Apple, 2001). I also do not examine the growing literature around choice and charter schooling, both because many effective reviews already exist (e.g., Gill, Timpane, Ross, & Brewer, 2001; Miron & Nelson, 2002) and because I am most interested in the plight of the vast majority of schools that are (and almost certainly will remain) under the direct control of large urban school districts. Furthermore, unless parents are explicitly treated as an avenue for engagement with the larger community, I do not address the expansive and already well-reviewed parent–school relations literature (Boethel, 2003; De Carvalho, 2001). And because I am interested in contemporary discussions, I focus on (but do not religiously limit myself to) literature published over the decade from 1993 to 2003.

In what follows, I begin by explaining how I will use the term “community” and what will count, for this discussion, as more and less robust forms of community engagement—drawing loosely from Anderson’s (1998) definition of “authentic” participation. And I lay out the methodology that structured my approach to the literature. Then, before I turn to the body of the review, I discuss the core challenges facing urban areas and urban schools at the beginning of the 21st century.

The section describing the urban context is much more extensive than is usual for an article of this kind. In part, this results from my desire to provide readers with a visceral sense of the challenges facing inner-city communities and to contest the dominant deficit-oriented views of inner-city cultures, practices, and persons. At the same time, the section highlights two key justifications for focusing on school–community engagement in the first place. First of all, the research on urban school systems indicates that they generally lack the capacity to achieve sustained school reform on their own. This incapacity results from constantly shifting political pressures, the “policy chum” generated by frequent administrative changes, and the internal resistance of bureaucracies, among other challenges (Hess, 1998). Efforts to root schools and school systems more substantively in the local community present one possible avenue for responding to these challenges, potentially providing schools with long-term foundations for supporting a range of school improvement efforts. As Matthews (1996) notes, a wide range of scholars and policymakers have begun to argue, in different ways, that “reforms have to start in and with the community” (p. 11) if they are to have any real hope of long-term success.

Second, and more radically, however, I argue that a careful analysis of the conditions of urban poverty in the United States at the turn of the 21st century reveals important limitations in schools’ traditional focus on individual achievement as a path to success. In fact, the evidence indicates that graduation from high school—“playing by the rules” in school—does not ensure poor students of color in inner-city areas access to middle-class jobs. And even when poor residents of the “ghetto” do achieve adequate employment, few finally escape the central city. What this
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implies is that, for the majority of inner-city children, small improvements in academic achievement are unlikely to make much impact on their futures. The point is not that academic achievement doesn't matter at all but that it doesn't matter nearly as much as many educators and policymakers would like students, families, and the public to believe.

The fact is that, unlike middle- and upper-class citizens, poor people of color in ghetto areas of the United States generally achieve empowerment not as individuals but as collectives. Essentially trapped and lacking resources, the transformation of the individual lives of inner-city residents cannot be disentangled from the transformation of their communities and their relationships to each other and to those outside. Depending on how it is pursued, then, improved school–community engagement has the potential to contribute not only to academic achievement but also to an alteration, over time, of schools’ core understandings of their role in promoting a more equal and more democratic society. In fact, this article will argue that without more substantive engagement with the local community, it will be difficult for inner-city schools ever to shift from their current individualistic focus.

Following these introductory sections, the literature review itself is organized around a loose distinction between writings on school–community relations (which foreground the perspective of educational professionals looking out from inside schools) and writings on community-school relations (which examine schools from the perspective of the “community”). I conclude with a summary of my findings and a discussion of possible implications.

“Community” and “Authentic” Participation

Defining Community

In its broadest sense, “community” refers to a condition in which people share something with each other (see Gold, 2005, for an overview of recent discussions of this term). Within this very general understanding, however, across many academic disciplines—of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and more—one can find innumerable accounts of what a community may share, such as place, culture, emotions, occupation, and so forth. Although the fluidity of the term may seem problematic to some, Lyon (1987), in his review of the development of the idea of community in American urban sociology, argues that its inherent indeterminacy is not only unavoidable but actually quite productive. “In the social sciences,” he points out, “the most important concepts are often among the most imprecise” (p. 4). Their openness allows them to serve as points of contact for multiple and often conflicting perspectives.

This indeterminacy serves my purpose well in this review. Instead of seeking to pin down a single definition of “community,” I seek to understand the often quite different ways that school–community engagement efforts conceptualize their local communities. I have begun with a very basic “spatial” understanding of the local community of public schools, focusing on the specific areas that feed them students. Because many urban schools serving the inner city have children from many different neighborhoods, “community” can encompass multiple neighborhoods—problematic, but an unavoidable reality. In the sense that I mean it here, then, “community” does not necessarily entail shared culture or even a feeling of belonging, although these aspects are relevant to some of the efforts I discuss.
Because I am most interested how ghetto areas served by urban schools are provided with opportunities for participation, only the institutions that seem rooted in these neighborhoods are treated as members of these communities. Social service agencies, for example, count only to the extent to which they are directed by and actually employ local residents in key managerial positions—a criterion that eliminates most from consideration (Halpern, 1995). Similarly, I count only locally rooted businesses as part of the local community, excluding the citywide and larger firms that most commonly partner with urban schools. Even my inclusion of churches involves some compromises, because many include members who have left the local area.

Despite limitations of this geographical approach to community (see Sampson, 2001), recent shifts in the dialogue on desegregation and urban schooling have made it increasingly important. Perhaps most important, as Orfield and Eaton (1996) and others have documented, urban school districts across the nation increasingly are shifting from the bussing strategies of the 1970s and 1980s toward a vision of “neighborhood schools,” wherein children attend (generally segregated) schools close to their homes. Those promoting this shift often draw on the rhetoric, at least, of local student, parent, and community engagement in local schools.

It is important to acknowledge that limiting our understandings of school “communities” to the local in this way is problematic, not least because school funding is generally controlled by states, not cities or neighborhoods (see Pendras, 2002; Shipps, 1997). I note examples of larger coalitions built from “locals,” but my primary focus in this article is local.

“Authentic” Participation

As different approaches for promoting community–school relations emerged from my review of the literature, I evaluated the form of participation that each seemed to promote. Anderson (1998) best captures what I was looking for in his discussion of what he calls “authentic” participation. In his full definition, he lays out five detailed criteria for participation that counts as authentic: “broad inclusion,” “relevant participation,” “authentic local conditions and processes,” “coherence between means and ends of participation,” and “focus on broader structural inequities” (p. 587). Given limited space, time, and available data, I have simplified these broad criteria into a narrower set that focuses on how the community (as individuals, as a collective, or as a culture) is enabled to participate rather than on what the participation is aimed to produce or address. To some extent, this approach corresponds with Anderson’s first three criteria, which he describes as “micropolitical” (p. 587), as opposed to the last two, which he groups together as “macropolitical,” although the latter issues often emerged in the analysis. I examined, then, the extent to which each approach achieved the following:

- Equality between school and community participants
- Breadth of participation, either through collections of individuals or recognized local leaders
- Opportunities for valuing and making use of local community beliefs, practices, and aims

Although this general vision of authentic participation informs my analysis, I do not often use the term or refer to these three criteria in the discussion that follows. Instead, I focus on the specific forms of participation achieved by each effort.
The extent to which an approach achieved some level of authentic participation guided my selection of particular examples and helped determine the space allotted to each effort.

Methodology

My efforts to locate the relevant literature on community-school relations followed a recursive process. I began with Boolean phrases such as “community and school and (connections or relationships)” and used these to search through EBSCO’s Academic Elite database (the most comprehensive electronic database of journal articles at my university), ERIC, my local library, and Amazon.com (as the most widely available comprehensive database of contemporary books that includes content descriptions). I restricted myself to published writings, including journal articles, books, and reports by established organizations such as educational laboratories and think-tanks, because these provide the best representation of established thinking in the field.

My initial searches in EBSCO alone produced more than a thousand “hits.” For each search, I read the titles and, where available, the descriptions of each database entry, eliminating those that seemed clearly unrelated to my topic—for example, those that focused on communities inside schools; where possible, I acquired or at least perused a copy of the cited documents that remained. These general searches and my reading of the actual documents uncovered new terms—such as “public relations” and “local education funds”—which I used in new searches. I also followed up references in the documents. In cases where journal articles or books contained limited information on a specific theme—on local education funds or community organizing, for example—I also used Google to search the Internet. However, given the vast amount of information available through Google, that search was necessarily less comprehensive. By the end I had read through and taken notes on approximately 300 articles, book chapters, sections of books, reports, and so forth, and perused more generally an even larger number. My understanding of the possible meanings of “community-school relations” evolved through this process.

My aim was not to review everything written about urban community-school relations, nor was I seeking to provide definitive descriptive statistics on the literature in this area. Instead, I have attempted to map out what emerged through the review process as the field’s key coordinates, highlighting both the central texts and scholars that tend to dominate the dialogue and those approaches that seem to provide the most robust examples of community participation. Overall, my effort was informed by the concept of “saturation” drawn from qualitative research (e.g., Merriam, 1998). In other words, I kept reading until additional reading seemed increasingly unlikely to add anything new or centrally important to my growing sense of the field. Although I have surely missed, or failed to include, areas that others would have addressed, I think I have constructed a fair representation of this difficult-to-define arena.

Urban Schools and the Challenges of Impoverished Urban Communities

Conditions in the Ghetto

My argument for more attention to the different ways that schools might engage with their local communities is grounded in an understanding of the challenges fac-
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ing inner-city areas in the United States. Given space limitations, I focus on the position of African Americans; a different yet in many ways similarly dispiriting tale could be told about the position of other groups in the United States, such as Latinos, especially in the Southwest (see, e.g., Bradbury, 2002; Tapia, 2000; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Waters & Eschbach, 1995).

Over the last few decades, economic and social conditions in inner-city areas have continued to deteriorate. Well-paid employment, and in fact any employment at all, increasingly has relocated outside cities, while marginal mass-transit systems have kept jobs effectively out of reach for many central-city residents, isolating youth from adults engaged in mainstream forms of employment and advancement (Holzer, 1991; Sassen, 2001; Wilson, 1997). At the same time, global economic shifts have led to the loss of well-paid jobs for low-skilled workers, creating "a highly segmented and increasingly polarized labor force" with falling pay rates for low-skilled positions (Lipman, 2002, p. 385). These new, low-paying jobs, generally in the service sector, frequently have no health insurance and are often temporary positions with no guarantee of stable employment.

Even when central-city residents find ways to reach these increasingly marginal jobs outside the ghetto, they often encounter severe forms of discrimination and harassment (Wilson, 1997). In fact, a recent study in a large Midwestern city found that a White male with a criminal history was more likely to be hired than a Black male with no criminal history (Pager, 2003; also see Johnson, Farrell, & Stoloff, 2000).2

And Black men and other minorities are much more likely to have criminal records, in part because segregated urban areas in America have been increasingly invaded by the justice system. Miller (1996), for example, argues that, in Los Angeles,

> a strong case could be made for the view that \ldots [the emergence of] violent gangs \ldots [is a direct] response to heavy-handed criminal justice approaches to complex problems rooted in poverty, unemployment, and family breakdown—birthed and nurtured in county- and state-run juvenile halls, camps, detention centers, reform schools and prisons with gang leadership routinely confirmed in the same facilities. (p. 91)

On any given day "more than a third of the young African American men aged 18–34 years in some of our major cities are either in prison or under some form of criminal justice supervision" (Donziger, cited in Giroux, 2003, p. 558).3 This huge expansion of the police state in central-city areas has progressively made "the ghetto more like \ldots prison" (Wacquant, 2002, p. 95).

The number of women directly affected by the justice system also has skyrocketed, but remains quite small in comparison to that of men. Instead, "the disciplining of women from the lower class and caste continues to operate primarily through the agencies of the social arm of the American state (namely welfare and workfare)" (Wacquant, 2002, p. 124). And with the loss of guaranteed welfare benefits, single women with children have been thrown to the vicissitudes of the market.4

Even those who seem to escape the central city often find that poverty follows them as if it were a disease they carried. One need only examine the forces of housing segregation, where the influx of African Americans and Latinos into a "better" community can "tip" this community into White and class flight, recreating the
exclusion the newcomers had been trying to escape and destroying hard-won hous-
ing investments at the same stroke (Jargowsky, 1997; Massey & Denton, 1993). In
fact, however, many central-city Blacks who make it into the middle class do not
“escape” to the suburbs but remain at the precarious margins of the ghetto (Patillo-
McCoy, 2000; also see Conley, 1999). It is noteworthy that the problem here is not
racial segregation, per se, but instead the concentration of poverty that accompanies
racial segregation in the United States (see Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999).

It is important not to stereotype central-city communities, however. For exam-
ple, although the lack of “mainstream” jobs has pushed many central-city residents
into the “underground economy,” “only a small percentage of these individuals
engage in criminal pursuits. A much larger share of the poor receive income from
legitimate work that they do not report to government authorities” (Blank, summa-
that the profound impact of scattered illegal activities on central-city areas is largely
a result of police activity.5 And although segregated, impoverished urban areas are,
in fact, more dangerous than the surrounding suburbs, there is a great deal of diver-
sity in urban areas—block to block and neighborhood to neighborhood—including
many middle-class enclaves and orderly areas (e.g., Patillo-McCoy, 2000). Yet the
focus of the media on sensational stories intensifies the impression of blanket law-
lessness, thus exaggerating the dangers even in the minds of the people living in the
central city (Blank, 1997).

The truth is that dominant conceptions of a durable “culture of violence” among
the poor are contested in the literature. Miller (1996), for example, notes that the most
“reliable predictor of future delinquency” is not a family history of crime but, instead,
“whether a boy or his father had been effectively labeled as criminals by the larger
society” (p. 114). History certainly matters, but a key determinant of criminal activ-
ity is whether one has experienced mistreatment by the justice system. Canada (1995)
further shows how tendencies toward violence as a strategy for self-defense and self-
assertion, where they exist, are actively recreated, often quite painfully, by each gen-
eration in response to the specific conditions they face. In general, then, empirical
evidence indicates that increased violence in central-city areas is “rooted in the struc-
tural differences” between “extremely disadvantaged” and higher-income areas
“rather than in race/culture” (Krivo & Peterson, 1996, p. 64).

Similar critiques have been written about the widespread perception that impov-
erished minorities “carry” a culture of poverty with them that prevents them from
taking advantage of the few opportunities that do present themselves. Instead of a
“culture of poverty,” research indicates that poor residents of ghetto communities
often develop contingent and pragmatic strategies for surviving in unreasonable
conditions. Perhaps most illuminating for educators, a recent study of a Native
American reservation before and after the coming of a casino (Costello, Compton,
Keeler, & Adrian, 2003), found that “symptoms of acting out” among children of
families that were raised out of poverty by the casino dropped 40%, falling to the
level of “those of the never-poor children, while levels among those who were per-
sistently poor remained high” (p. 2023). In other words, when conditions changed,
families and children quickly shifted to different practices.6

None of these scholars denies that a counterproductive and sometimes violent
set of practices has emerged among some in the central city. As I have noted, how-
ever, these scholars tend to stress the ways that the practices people develop in such
contexts (however they may appear from the outside) constitute adaptive responses to poverty and oppression. And even when these seem negative, there is little evidence that they generally reflect some underlying, independent, and durable community or even family “culture of poverty” or violence. Nor are the adaptations uniformly negative. What actually emerges from the literature, then, is not the degradation of central-city residents but, instead, their incredible resilience in the face of overwhelming forces of oppression, forces that the vast majority of privileged Whites in America seem oblivious to. Wilson’s (1997) research actually “reveals” the opposite of a culture of poverty. He found “that the beliefs of inner-city residents bear little resemblance to the blanket media reports asserting that values have plummeted in impoverished inner-city neighborhoods or that people in the inner city have an entirely different value system” (p. 179; see Stanton-Salazar, 1997). In fact, in his fieldwork in Chicago, Wacquant (1998) found that, “many if not most [central-city residents] adhere to the social Darwinist view that social position ultimately reflects one’s moral worth and personal strivings, so that no one in the long run can be consistently held back by his or her place of residence.” Wacquant’s perspective is complicated by studies that have frequently shown low-income people favoring “structural attributions for poverty over individualistic explanations” (Bullock & Limbert, 2003, p. 705). The lack of apparent avenues for affecting these structural barriers, however, may lead many of the persistently poor to focus on their possibilities for individual advancement, however limited, and to emphasize individual responsibility—holding, however tenuously, to a belief in the “American dream” that people can make their “dreams come true” if they only “work hard enough” (p. 706).

In other words, inner-city residents frequently deploy middle-class sense-making strategies even though they live in contexts where these have limited explanatory power. As Stanton-Salazar (1997) points out, for the privileged classes, an individualist orientation “provides an institutionally endorsed explanation for their success, while obscuring the network mechanisms that systematically engineer their advantage” (p. 31). In contrast, for the nonprivileged, the “potentially toxic character of mainstream or bourgeois individualism . . . acts to undermine the support flowing from family and community sources” (pp. 30–31). The tendency toward a culture of isolated individualism is intensified by the fact that, unlike an older generation—some of whom would have experienced social action in the 1950s and 1960s—few younger residents can construct coherent “narratives” of collective social action that they can relate to their own neighborhoods (Small, 2002).

As a result of structural challenges and the ways that residents make sense of them, central-city communities have become increasingly fragmented. Living in sometimes dangerous contexts, working many hours merely to sustain themselves or resigned to unemployment or underemployment, many residents retreat from common spaces and unreliable or oppressive institutions. Under such conditions, even personal networks with family and friends break down (Wilson, 1997). Participation in community activities plummets, eliminating public spaces for dialogue and engagement (Bauman, 1998). In many central-city areas, “aside from the fact that they reside on the same streets and even live in the same apartment buildings,” residential mobility, among other issues, has led residents to see each other as strangers, perceiving “themselves as having little if anything in common” (Noguer, 2002, p. 14).
These internal tendencies interact with the influences of outside forces. For example, the few public spaces that remain in cities have become increasingly privatized, with private security to keep good citizens "safe." At the same time, local places are flooded with global media that promote a global lifestyle for those for whom it remains out of reach, while replacing local leaders with international "stars" and "opinion leaders" touting dominant values and stereotypes (Bauman, 1998). Processes of economic globalization, along with new information and transportation technologies, have also intensified the gulf between rich and poor across the world, making inner-city residents' misappropriations of middle-class discourse and social practices even more destructive. As Bauman (2001; see Sassen, 2001) notes, the global social-class hierarchy increasingly depends on the ease and speed with which the new global powers are able to move, cutting themselves off from their local commitments at will and without notice and leaving to the 'locals' . . . the awesome task of cleaning up the debris. (p. 105)

The key point here is not that the relatively privileged do necessarily move, but that they can whenever they wish. And as they detach themselves from the local, the specific needs and challenges created by local issues become increasingly irrelevant to them. Instead of finding ways to grapple with local challenges and deprivations, they can simply deploy a wide range of strategies to keep "undesirables" from encroaching either on their suburban homes or, increasingly, on new city enclaves, trapping poor minorities even more securely in ghettos.

At the same time as the privileged have increasingly dissolved their historical connections to particular places, however, links to place have become ever more important to those who are increasingly denied the freedom to move. It is because those at the bottom are "doomed to stay local" . . . [that] one could and should expect their attention . . . to focus on "local affairs" . . . [For] it is inside the city they inhabit that the battle for survival and a decent place in the world is launched, waged, won or lost. (Bauman, 2003, pp. 16–17)

The fact is that only those able to leave when they wish, with the resources to support themselves anywhere at any time, can imagine that they are independent of those around them. The poor and marginalized have no choice but to cling to local relationships, however weak, as one of their few supports in a world where independence may be desired but is rarely realistically achievable. Again, contrary to dominant stereotypes, one of the central challenges limiting effective action against oppression in the central city is the diffusion of middle-class values of individualism and their contribution to declines in community sentiment. To the extent that urban schools fail to contest (or even support) these tendencies, they fail in important ways to contribute to the empowerment of those they serve.

Urban Schooling: Resistance to Reform and the Limits of Individual Achievement

Urban schooling in America reflects the challenges facing central cities in many different ways. Perhaps most fundamentally, the divide between teachers and fami-
lies in ghetto schools (Anyon, 1997) reflects Bauman’s (2001) distinction between the rootless privileged and the marginalized who remain trapped in particular places. Unlike rural schools where teachers often come from the same community as their students (Keyes & Gregg, 2001), urban schools populated by low-income students of color largely employ middle-class Whites from the suburbs or the wealthier edges of the city in their professional positions. With few exceptions, these lower-level members of the upper “tier,” with the capacity to leave the deprivations of oppressed neighborhoods behind, drive to school in bubbles of relative privilege, park in gated lots surrounded by hurricane fencing, and return home without having to rub too closely on the blighted arenas beyond their schools (see, e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994). The gulf is magnified by the hierarchical, bureaucratic structure of schools and, often, by teachers’ sense of themselves as professionals who resist “interference” from less knowledgeable parents and community members (Cibulka, 1996). Most poor parents and community members simply do not have the capacity to overcome these and other barriers to participation (Anyon, 1997).

Staff in high-poverty schools also tend to hold deficit-oriented views of their central-city students and communities. “While studying teachers in poor and middle class schools,” for example, Warren (cited in Thompson, Warren, & Carter, 2004) “found that 70 percent of teachers held negative beliefs about . . . [students in urban schools] and their families” (p. 6, italics added). Another study found that “sixty-four percent of the teachers [surveyed in an underperforming urban high school] agreed with the statement ‘I believe that parents or guardians are largely to blame for students’ low achievement’ ” (p. 8; also see Cibulka, 1996; Lott, 2001; Miller, 1999; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Deficit perspectives such as these are generally accompanied by negative views of students’ cultures (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Extensive research has shown, however, that low-income and minority parents generally have “reverence for education and high hopes for their offsprings’ school success,” even though they may not interact with schools in the same manner as middle-class White parents (Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari, & Guskin, 1996, p. 572; also see Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Navarez-LaTorre & Hidalgo, 1997). In part because of the barriers they face, unlike middle-class White families, poor parents tend to focus their school support efforts on home-based activities that are often unrecognized by school personnel (Boethel, 2003). And when lower-class parents choose not to participate in school activities, they often have very good reasons (Lareau & Shumar, 1996). For example, poor parents can face a terrible Catch-22 in their efforts to allocate limited time, either spending time on their children and “paying a price in terms of economic security” or “privileging work in order to keep a roof over their families’ heads” and providing less support to their children (Chin & Newman, cited in Boethel, 2003, p. 44). Many poor and minority parents also have a history of negative interactions with schools, making them reluctant to open themselves to more of the same.

In part because local communities lack the capacity to hold them accountable, urban school systems are paradoxically both resistant to and constantly in flux with change. On the one hand, the established bureaucracy and the existing teaching staff are extremely resistant to change—they have seen many fads come and go (e.g., Cuban, 1993). At the same time, the rapid turnover of top administrators—especially superintendents—leads to what Hess (1998) calls “policy churn” as each
new administrator seeks to make his or her own "stamp" on the system. Urban school systems, then, start to resemble patchworks of partially digested and often contradicting reform efforts within which most teachers keep teaching (for good and for ill) just as they have in the past (see Tyack & Cuban, 1996). More recently, this mix has been complicated by strict testing regimes that tend to narrow and simplify the curriculum, focusing teachers on helping students to pass the tests instead of learning complex material, and leading many good teachers to leave the field (Sullivan, 1997).

In contrast with the tendency for many school personnel to view the actions of low-income minority parents from a deficit perspective, an increasingly broad group of scholars understands the disconnect between schools and families (and, often implicitly, communities) to derive from "difference" and/or "power" perspectives. From a "difference" perspective, the key challenge is a "lack of congruity between the student's home environment or culture and the schools' culture that places the student at a disadvantage" (Boethel, 2003, p. 14). For example, even when teachers think they are being welcoming to parents and others, they generally select "a narrow band of acceptable [middle-class, White] behaviors" "from a range of potential socio-emotional styles" (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 42). Those writing from a "power" perspective add a focus on students' and families' lack of access to the middle-class, White "culture of power" and to networks that give influence over school activities (Boethel, 2003, p. 16).13

Partly as a result of the deficit attitudes that dominate central-city schools, practices drawn from the justice system have increasingly invaded schools, just as they have the community outside, even though evidence indicates that such strategies actually increase violence and disorder in schools (Harris, in review). Instead of reaching out to help those "who have the greatest academic, social, economic, and emotional needs" (Noguera, 2003, p. 342) inner-city schools respond punitively. As Wacquant (2002) notes, some (not all)

Expenditures on security have grown so enormous that the school security system for the New York City schools, in its number of employees, would rank as the ninth-largest police department in the nation, after Miami (Wacquant, 2002).14

In response to these challenges, relatively privileged teaching professionals in central-city schools bring with them a rhetoric of individual achievement that links with the general rhetoric of schooling in America today. Most try to help individual students achieve enough academically to find jobs or higher education for themselves and "escape" the local deprivations. As I have already noted, however,
although these may be realistic goals for many middle-class or even, to a lesser extent, poor White students, they are less relevant for those who have been forcibly marginalized in our society (and these goals imply an entirely deficit view of students' current communities).

For example, while it is constantly asserted to central-city children that staying in school and receiving a diploma is a way out of the ghetto, the truth is discouraging. As Wilson (1997) shows, employers often “redline” particular high schools in the central city—so that even one’s diploma marks one as deficient. And studies indicate that the monetary return for high school graduation for Blacks is much smaller than for Whites, amounting to less than $50 a week. Furthermore, although many African Americans may drop out of high school in their youth, the graduation rate for all Black adults today is close to the average graduation rate for all workers (Bradbury, 2002; also see Conley, 1999; Holzer, 2000; and, on Latinos, Villenas and Deyhle, 1999). Yet joblessness remains endemic (Offner & Holzer, 2002). The fact is that the “low-wage service” jobs realistically available to most graduates of inner-city high schools require only the most “basic literacies, the ability to follow directions, and accommodating dispositions toward work” (Lipman, 2003, p. 340; also see Brosio, 1998). At the same time, the percentage of jobs requiring higher levels of education “is only slowly rising,” leading to an oversupply of the credentialled, a rising tide of “overqualification” and competition (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004; Sennett, 1998) that is generally won by those with the cultural and social capital of the White middle- and upper-classes (Prakash & Esteva, 1998). Clearly, high school graduation (being a “good” student) has not significantly transformed the lives of most of those confined in high poverty urban areas—and students see the evidence of this all around them.

Despite these challenges—even more to visible to kids on the “street” than to scholars—it should not be surprising that, like teachers, as I have already noted, central-city residents who lack other realistic options nonetheless cling to possibilities for individual achievement and advancement within mainstream society (Ginwright, 2002). As Matthews (1996) notes, parents across America are “worried that their children won’t get what they need from the schools, aren’t inclined to be concerned with anything” beyond the educational basics. These concerns for individual achievement are only intensified in areas where few other options for survival appear to exist. Increasingly, parents “don’t see the public schools as agents for creating a better society—ironically at the very same time they despair over the state of the present social order” (p. 20). This tendency is only intensified for inner-city parents of color.

**Conclusion: The Need for Community Participation in Urban Schools**

The intransigence of urban school systems—the failure of so many reform efforts—has led many scholars, in different ways, to the conclusion that we can have little hope for substantive reform without more robust community participation as a key component. In response, discussions of community–school relationships have begun to bubble up in many areas of the field. These scattered dialogues hint at the possibility of an emerging consensus among an increasingly large and diverse group of education scholars who, with Villenas and Deyhle (1999), understand that caring on the part of educators, parents, and researchers “is not enough to bring about
change” within and beyond schools, and that persistent change generally can come only “when the community as a collective gains economic and political power” (p. 422; also see Anderson, 1998; Anyon, 1997; Comer, 1998; Davies, 2002; Driscoll, 1998; Gold & Simon, 2002; Henig, Huyla, Orr, & Pedesclaux, 1999; Hess, 1995; Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001; Jehl, Blank, & McCloud, 2001; Keyes & Gregg, 2001; Lipman, 2002; Matthews, 1996; Mediratta & Fruchter, 2001; Shipps, 1997; Stone, 1998; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, to name only a few). This consensus remains only potential, however, both because the field’s conceptualizations of “community engagement” generally remain quite limited, and because different scholars conceptualize community–school relations in such divergent ways that they may not talk much to each other or even realize that they could be part of the “same” conversation.

Moreover, few of these discussions have even peripherally addressed broader questions about the purposes and goals of schooling in impoverished urban areas. In fact, a failure to look beyond traditional visions of schooling and achievement has become a tendency of the field of education more generally. Those interested in education have largely abandoned the commitment to educating for citizenship and democracy that was quite prominent in previous decades (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). It is one of the key aims of this article to press the discussion of school–community relations in the direction of this broader dialogue.

As my analysis of the position of central-city residents indicates, it simply is not enough for schools to promote individual achievement as a path out of the ghetto. Of course, a focus on individual achievement and the nurturing of individual potential must remain central for educators. But there is no danger that this will be lost. A critical limitation of efforts to reform schools, however, is our tendency to focus only on individuals when the evidence indicates that, in our most oppressed areas, with few exceptions, individual success can come only in conjunction with more empowered communities. In other words, if we know that many (if not most) children will not be able to escape the central city, it becomes critical for educators and education scholars to explore more fully how survival and even “success” might become possible in areas that are treated by the privileged as the “trash heaps” of the global village (see Prakash & Esteva, 1998). At the same time we must explore how schools might contribute to efforts that contest the forces that keep individual advancement out of reach of most residents.

Of course, my point is not that any form of community engagement with schools is good. Indeed, as Matthews (1996) notes, “teachers say they have been burned by so many bad experiences with what they think of as ‘the public’ that they are reluctant to welcome citizens” into schools on almost any level (p. 23). Instead, we desperately need more research that explores how relationships between urban schools and their communities can be altered. This review represents an attempt to map out where we currently “are” in our understanding and where further examination seems critical.

### School–Community Relations

I begin my review of the literature by focusing on a diverse group of scholars who examine the potential for school–community relationships from the perspective of the school. In other words, these scholars seem most interested in how
schools might open themselves to the community and/or draw community resources into schools. In later sections, I turn to scholars who focus on the perspective of the community.

The Dominant Scholars of School–Community Relations: Epstein and Comer

Anyone who reads the literature on school–community connections quickly discovers that the two key figures are Epstein and Comer, along with their colleagues. It is difficult to find general discussions of school–community relations that do not at least look to their writings, especially Epstein’s. Thus I start with an examination of these scholars’ work before turning, in the next section, to a range of other important visions.

Joyce Epstein

As with most work on school–community relations, Epstein focuses on parents. In fact, her initial framework contained five components, all focused on parents. A sixth, “collaborating with the community,” was added only after further research (Sanders & Epstein, 2000). Epstein’s basic vision starts with a view of schools, families, and communities as overlapping circles of influence that all affect student achievement and development. For healthy students, she argues, these three influences must work together in partnership. When focused on parent involvement, Epstein’s vision is broad-based and inclusive. Fundamentally, she seeks a true collaboration between families and their schools, stressing for example, the importance of “two-way” communication and real parent participation in school decision making (see Epstein, 2001, for a summary), even though Lareau and Shumar (1996) are right to note a tendency in her work to downplay issues of differential power between parents and schools.

When Epstein and her colleagues turn to discussions of “community,” however, their perspectives narrow. For example, the “community” is not really included in Epstein’s (2001) discussions of “two-way communication” and participation in decision making—she focuses, instead, almost entirely on parents. And when she does speak about communities, she stresses, instead, the resources that they can provide to schools and the ways that communities can either reinforce “school and family goals for student learning and success” or redirect “students away from school or family goals” (Epstein, 2001, p. 475). In other words, communities are helpful to schools when they support the school’s mission and harmful when they resist or criticize the mission in some way.

Epstein’s (2001) vision of student learning is founded in the traditional “individual success” model dominant in American schooling. For example, she notes that “a family-like school recognizes each child’s individuality and makes each child feel special and included” (p. 3). Again, my point is not that it is problematic to nurture individuals in this way. However, Epstein and her colleagues make little space for other goals that might be generated through rich forms of two-way communication between schools and communities.

Epstein notes, in passing, some of the other forms of school–community relations discussed below, including “full-service” schools, funds of community knowledge, and service learning. But these seem largely peripheral to the main thrust of her argument. Epstein’s colleague Mavis Sanders argues that schools in Epstein’s National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) are making efforts to broaden
their interactions with local communities. But her discussion remains focused on Epstein's six types of school–community relations, and her focus does not, in the final analysis, diverge significantly from Epstein's (see Sanders, 1999, 2001, 2003; Sanders & Epstein, 2000).

Comer Schools/School Development Project (SDP)

James P. Comer's work is more broad-based than Epstein's. He and his colleagues are focused on comprehensive efforts to reform the instruction in schools, an effort in which family and community involvement is just one element. Nevertheless, the influence of Comer's School Development Project (SDP) on school–community engagement is second only to Epstein's.

Until quite recently, Comer and his colleagues did not discuss community engagement much as an issue separate from parent involvement. Instead, for Comer (Comer & Haynes, 1991), "parents are a natural link to the communities in which schools are located . . . [because they] bring a community perspective to planning and management activities" (p. 273). In this way, Comer's model implicitly diverts the SDP away from larger visions of community.

Comer's vision of school success and achievement—like Epstein's, except more intensively—focuses on fairly traditional constructions of individual achievement. In fact, his work sometimes seems to reflect a somewhat deficit-based view of families in poverty (see, e.g., Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996, p. 16). Comer also often looks back to a nostalgic view of community in the "pre-1940s . . . that was so supportive of young people" but that "no longer exists" (Comer, 1993, p. 1). There is little recognition of possibilities for conflict between different but equally valid school and community cultures and ways of understanding.

One of Comer's key mechanisms for developing initial connections between home and school is to hire parents to work with teachers in classrooms and to participate in leadership positions on the school's collaborative teams, thereby initiating them into the "Comer model." This is an interesting approach, in that it may allow the development of "bilingual" community members who can speak the "language" of the school and have standing there. But Comer provides only limited indications of the extent to which these representatives actually represent the larger community or are co-opted by initiation into the school's way of seeing.

My goal, here, is not to attack the SDP. Despite limitations, it is one of the richest and apparently most effective systematic school reform projects in the United States. In fact, the underlying nostalgia of Comer's vision may actually make it more palatable for school personnel and even many parents. As Keith (1996) notes, although the Comer model emphasizes

mainstream knowledge and cultural capital and thus does not incorporate the mutuality that is essential to community development; . . . [its promotion of] parental participation and the mental health model of discipline can [nonetheless] create the foundations for healthier relationships between school and community. (p. 251)

More recently, Comer has begun to address the need for more robust connections between SDP schools and the larger community. For example, with the CoZi project, the SDP has sought to integrate itself with a more comprehensive vision of the school as a center for integrated services to the community, including before-
and after-school programs. And in his recent book, Waiting for a Miracle: Why Schools Can't Solve Our Problems—And How We Can (1998), Comer looks beyond the basic SDP model, discussing the relationships between economic and institutional structures and the “ability of families” and schools “to protect and promote their members” (p. 33). He discusses the importance of a range of community-focused programs and efforts that might create the conditions for student success in school.

In fact, at one point in this book he argues for the creation of “a different kind of school—a New School—that could help put supportive community together again.” Echoing some of the more radical visions of community-school relationships noted near the end of this article, he envisions a school that, instead of being isolated, . . . could be fully incorporated into the larger local community. . . . Economic and community development, human services, recreation, and artistic expression programs could be tied to the school setting when possible. (p. 212)

However, Comer’s presentation of this New School does not go beyond relatively vague statements. In fact, most discussions of community in this book are largely unrelated to schools. And he concludes by returning to the visions of improved child-rearing practices and support for children’s development that already dominate the SDP program. Aside from the CoZi effort to create more full-service schools, and a few examples of other programs, his vision of a school truly embedded in its local community is not integrated into his basic school reform model. In fact, when he discusses specific options for improving schools (chap. 7), he does not focus on community participation as a central component. Even in this book, then, he does not stress efforts to broadly ally schools with communities.

Summary: Epstein and Comer

In general, Epstein, Comer, and their various colleagues present a vision of community either as a resource for schools or as a potential barrier to learning when community values and mores do not fit with those promoted at school. Epstein is more conscious of the need to bring school and local family values together in two-way communication. However, in her vision, the broader community is not really a key partner, and “communication” plays little part in exploring new visions of the school or of student achievement. Both Epstein and Comer seem to be moving toward the integration of more comprehensive visions of schools as centers for providing integrated services to the community. But even though Comer, at least, muses about the possibility of New Schools that might join with larger social and economic efforts, both scholars remain focused on helping children fit into the dominant culture of schooling. As in most discussions of school relationships with marginalized communities, Epstein and Comer convey a sense that the purpose of community participation is to assist the school in helping students escape the community, if possible.

Other Visions of School–Community Relations

Beyond Epstein and Comer, a wide range of conceptions of school–community connections have emerged recently in the literature. In this section I summarize what seem to be the most important and influential of these, focusing on the key
writings and scholars that inform each aspect. At the end I discuss those visions that seem to differ most from Epstein’s and Comer’s.

**Textbooks for Teachers**

A number of texts advise teachers on how to encourage school–community relationships. Most of these texts, however, do not draw from sophisticated visions of community engagement (see, e.g., discussions of Ladson-Billings and Gonzalez & Moll, below); and when they do, it is only in the vaguest terms. Most texts (e.g., Coughenour & Chrisman, 2000; Dietz, 1997; Epstein, 2001; Gestwicki, 2000) largely confine their discussion of “community” engagement to a single chapter at the end, if they include such a chapter at all (e.g., Dodd & Konzal, 2002; Edwards, 2003). “Community” appears in their titles but is addressed only marginally.

These books generally follow Epstein and Comer in viewing community largely as a potential source of resources or problems for the traditional functions of schooling. When they discuss substantive engagements with the community, they generally focus on service partnerships with agencies and businesses. Broader community “involvement” is usually at least mentioned but is rarely described in any detail.

**Public Relations Textbooks for School Administrators**

A number of textbooks describe how administrators can develop more effective “public relations” with their external environment (Bagin & Gallagher, 2001; Hughes & Hooper, 2000; Kowalski, 2004; Warner, 2000). All of these texts emphasize that the field of public relations has moved beyond one-way efforts to influence the public; it now involves two-way communication because American democracy demands that public institutions such as schools remain responsive and accountable. Most of the texts also point out that two-way communication can help administrators to see issues in new ways. And most discuss how various aspects of community can provide new resources for schools.

Fundamentally, however, these texts provide a broad range of tools that administrators can use to lead their schools’ “publics” in the directions that the administrators themselves desire. Administrators are admonished always to be honest. But they also are encouraged to frame their communications in ways that various groups are most likely to accept. They are told to learn as much as possible about the communities around their schools and to develop personal relationships with key communicators and media representatives, but mostly in order to better control the promulgation of messages and images about their schools.

Bagin and Gallagher (2001) and Kowalski (2004), more than Hughes and Hooper (2000) and Warner (2000), stress the importance of relatively equal collaborations with communities. But all of the texts emphasize the importance of controlling participation. By creating advisory groups, running focus groups, conducting surveys, and more, administrators are to make sure that all engagement takes place within structures they create and direct. All of the texts emphasize the dangers inherent in allowing independent power bases to develop. To varying degrees, the texts seem to agree with Hughes and Hooper’s (2000) assertion that dissent is not a bad thing as long as it is “sensibly and sensitively managed” (p. 18) and ultimately controlled by school administrators.
Volunteering and Mentoring

Many of the texts already discussed mention volunteering as one way to bring community into schools. However, an examination of Epstein's (2001) largely representative discussion indicates a limited sense of the kinds of relationships that might be built. This seems especially true with forms of tutoring and mentoring, which connect volunteers not to the school in general but to individual students.

Brent's (2000) study—one of the few empirical analyses of volunteering in schools—indicates that, in urban areas in particular, volunteerism provides an extremely limited tool for promoting local community engagement. Brent did find that volunteering increased volunteers' "understanding of how schools operate and also their respect for teachers and school administrators" (p. 5). This might help to reduce community distrust of schools and provide openings for richer forms of school-community engagement. However, Brent found that volunteers in urban schools were largely White (even though the students were mostly minority) and that 70% of volunteers "lived in other districts" (p. 3). Overall, "lower levels of volunteer resources were associated with higher poverty schools" (p. 7). While volunteering might help community members to better understand and respect the complexities of school challenges and structures, central-city schools have little success in involving local residents. Some benefits seem likely to accrue from the participation of volunteers from other districts, but richer engagement with the local community seems unlikely to be one of these.

Full-Service Schools

Arguments for the development of full-service schools that can provide integrated social, medical, and other services to the community are increasingly visible in the educational literature. The key scholar in this area appears to be Dryfoos (Dryfoos & Maquire, 2002), whose perspective seems largely reflective of most of the contemporary literature (see Adger & Locke, 2000; Deich, 2001; Molloy, Fleming, Rodriguez, Saavedra, Tucker, & Williams, Jr., 1995). Dryfoos’s perspective on community participation in this process is revealing. In the model she presents, even parents are not necessarily part of the initial process of developing a full-service school from the beginning, because “a key question is when to bring parents into the planning process” (Dryfoos & Maquire, p. 39). In fact, she finds “the subject of governance the most difficult to write about,” noting that her co-author (Maquire) “makes a compelling case for just ‘doing it’ ” (p. 112). Fundamentally, for Dryfoos, making connections to the larger community—beyond providing services—does not seem to be a central aim.

Dryfoos has a good point, of course, given schools’ general lack of capacity for robust community engagement. As she notes, schools struggle even to collaborate with other agencies; as a result, most of the scholarship on full-service schools by Dryfoos and others has focused on efforts to improve these relationships (see Halpern, 2003). The leadership of such agencies is rarely representative of central-city communities (Halpern, 1995), but these efforts represent at least a first step for schools that wish to engage with the world beyond their walls. Given their limited resources, it is hard to argue that some schools, at least, should not just “do it,” without local participation.
Nonetheless, other research has raised deep questions about the effectiveness of top-down approaches to service integration. Naverez-La Torre and Hidalgo (1997), for example, note that many school-service programs “have been criticized for their deficit perspective on community” (p. 8; also see Keith, 1996; Smrekar & Mawhinney, 1999; White & Wehlage, 1995). Even if rich collaboration of different kinds is often not possible, then we should at least encourage full-service schools’ efforts to pursue them and provide rich information about how such engagement can be facilitated. Schools engaged in full-service efforts also need to understand the limitations of efforts that focus only on interagency collaboration.

Community Education and After-School Programs

A few works go beyond Dryfoos’s vision of full-service schools, exploring how schools might become what are often called “community schools,” which are integrated more broadly into their communities. These works draw from a long history (Minzey & LeTarte, 1994), but in recent years the field of community education has deteriorated as funding has dried up (Parsons, 1999–2000). Furthermore, books and articles describing comprehensive community schools are broad and vague, generally failing to substantively engage the specific challenges that face urban communities (e.g., Burke & Picus, 2001; Chadwick, 2004; Decker & Boo, 2001; Minzey & LeTarte; Parsons, 1999–2000).

One arena of community education that has sustained a robust dialogue, and that has seen increases in federal and state funding, is that of after-school and before-school programs. However, the after-school literature often resembles full-service school dialogues in its focus on interagency rather than broader community cooperation (e.g., Deich, 2001; Hall, 2002; Halpern, 2003; Noam, 2002). Furthermore, most after-school programs are located in community-based agencies that have little or no relationship with schools (Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001). And at least some of the writing in this area seems grounded in an almost entirely deficit-oriented view of community, promoting after-school programs as ways to prevent kids from stealing, assaulting people, and selling drugs (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2003).

Nonetheless, increased interest in after-school programs has provided a place for at least some dialogue on richer school–community engagement (Parsons, 1999–2000). These programs, historically less professionalized than schools and less focused on measurable outcomes, have often allowed richer and more holistic engagements with children and families. And after-school staff, unlike teachers, often come from the communities that they serve (see Halpern, 2002).

Recently, the burgeoning dialogue on after-school programs has been driven by the federal government’s funding of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program around the nation. This funding has proved a mixed blessing for those interested in community engagement (Dynarski, James-Burdumy, Moore, Rosenberg, Deke, & Mansfield, 2003). Although the community learning centers (CLCs) often seem more integrated into the schools they serve than do the traditional after-school programs, this connection has exposed them to pressures to improve standardized test scores, leading them increasingly to promote “activities which then become more like the worst of what happens in classrooms rather than the best” (Halpern, 2002, p. 204). Higher pay, which attracts more classroom teachers to work in CLCs, has only intensified this shift toward traditional forms of schooling.
Student participation in schoolwork-focused centers is often quite low, and many students who choose not to participate report disparagingly that the CLCs are "just for kids who need help in school" (Dynarski et al., 2003, p. xvii). The only clear impact of CLCs on community "engagement" in schools has been to increase parent volunteering and participation in school-sponsored events, although not to any high level (Dynarski et al., 2003).

Site-Based Management

Discussions of and experiments in various forms of site-based management are prominent in the dialogue on school–community relationships. However, most studies indicate that the local community tends to be kept at arm's length. Principals—and the associated bureaucratic structure of schooling—generally remain firmly in control, limiting the impact of community perspectives (see, e.g., Anderson, 1998; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a, 1998b; Malen, 1999). The most important example of site-based management, and one possible exception to the tendencies noted above, is the experiment still going on in Chicago that started in 1988 (see Hess, 2005, for an overview of Chicago policy over time, including recent shifts not addressed here). For example, Bryk, Bebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton (1998) examined the workings of Chicago's Local School Councils (LSCs) in their first 5 years and found that, in part because the councils were empowered to hire and fire principals, many were deeply involved in school policy and programs. However, a recent review of the evidence on these councils indicates potential problems of skewed participation. Although only 11% of the students are White, 40% of the elected parent/community council members are White. Council members are much better educated than the average parent or community members in many schools, and have much more time to volunteer (Designs for Change, 2002). Positions on the councils initially were fought for, but, more recently, few parents or community members seemed interested (Reid, 2004).

Extensive research indicates that people with privilege tend to dominate settings where they “collaborate” with the less powerful (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari, & Guskin, 1996; Law, 1993). When this research is combined with the general lack of trained facilitators or effective training (central to Epstein’s and Comer’s visions), it seems doubtful that the Chicago school council experiment generates community participation that reflects the perspectives of the population of the schools’ surrounding areas (see Cooperative Notes, 2003; Krishnamoorthi, 1999; Shipps, 1997). The emergence of federations of local school councils, “forming alliances to share ideas, provide training and...strengthen councils as a whole,” as well as efforts to form “ties with community organizations that can bring additional resources to the table” (Williams, 2004, p. 1) may mitigate some of these issues, but further research is needed to document this. Overall, the Chicago experiment indicates that merely increasing aspects of “community” authority—without engaging more directly with what exactly counts as community and how different aspects of community participation may be fostered and maintained over time—is unlikely to produce sustained participation or to help a school become more rooted in its surrounding community.

Finally, the centralization of the school system promoted by the 1995 legislation in Illinois, rolling back of some of the councils’ powers, is a reminder that schools are always embedded in a larger political context. Local forms of school control
always interact with wider bureaucratic, political, and economic systems that will not simply go away. As I will argue in the section on community organizing, below, efforts to increase local control always remain tenuous without connection to networks of power beyond the local school environment. In fact, local control reforms can obscure the fact that adequate resources for schools must be addressed on the district and state levels. The extent to which the Chicago local school councils have retained what power they have seems clearly linked to their relationships with groups that have broader power, many of which participated in the creation of the LSC law in the first place.

Funds of Knowledge

The “funds of knowledge” approach developed by Gonzalez, Moll, and their colleagues (drawing on earlier work, including Heath, 1983, and Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) seeks to overcome the gulf between “school” and “community” practices and forms of knowledge. In Gonzalez and Moll’s approach, teachers conduct ethnographic observations and interviews in the homes of their students, gathering “details about the accumulated knowledge base that each household assembles in order to ensure its own subsistence” (Gonzalez, Moll, Floyd-Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, & Amanti, 1993, p. 1). A central goal is for teachers to overcome “deficit views of the working class” by illuminating the richness of families’ community-based “resources, including knowledge skills and labor, that enhance the households’ ability to survive and thrive” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, pp. 134, 133). Ultimately, teachers are supposed to bring this knowledge into their classrooms, forming “curriculum units that tap into the household funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez et al., 1993, p. 1), placing it on an equal level with more traditional school knowledge and using these familiar forms of knowledge to more effectively scaffold students into understandings of school knowledge. The “funds of knowledge” effort seeks to provide “bridges that join community knowledge and school validation of that knowledge” (p. 628). While the focus is on students’ families, families are explicitly treated as entry points to local communities.

In the different “funds of knowledge” efforts, professional ethnographers work closely with the teachers in after-school study groups, helping them to make sense of the data they gather. Not surprisingly, teachers were initially “overwhelmed with the sheer complexity of the task” (Gonzalez et al., 1993, p. 4). Only through careful collaborative work were “the households . . . [re]conceptualized as multidimensional and vibrant entities” (p. 3).

Gonzalez and Moll emphasize that teachers do not develop knowledge that can be simply transferred to other teachers through this process. Instead, it is through actual experiences with the community and through their collaborations with each other and the ethnographers that they develop a new relationship with the community and new perspectives on community practices. It is the entire process that is transformative for the teachers because “one can only learn ethnography by doing ethnography” (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002, p. 628) and one can build relationships only by engaging with the community.

Although the “funds of knowledge” project is exciting because it shows that it is possible to bridge the gulfs between school and community ways of understanding and acting and to generate more reciprocal relationships between home and school,
my description should also make clear how difficult it would be to replicate this effort in other schools and communities. The project requires long-term support of small numbers of teachers by sophisticated ethnographers who have a deep understanding of the “funds of knowledge” vision. Without this support, it is easy to imagine home visits becoming a form of voyeurism that might only reaffirm middle-class White teachers’ deficit views of their students’ communities. Extended time commitments from teachers are also necessary. Not surprisingly, then, although the project is often cited in the literature and has influenced a range of projects, a search of the ERIC and EBSCO “Academic Elite” databases for the phrase “funds of knowledge” reveals few examples of even partial replication (see Au & Scheu, 1996, on problems with partial implementation of a similar effort). Related efforts to promote closer relationships between family and school forms of literacy face many similar challenges and often seem not to engage more widely with community networks (Auerbach, 1995; Hull & Schultz, 2001).

**Ladson-Billings’s Dreamkeepers**

Ladson-Billings’s (1994) *Dreamkeepers* contains what is probably the field’s most sophisticated comprehensive vision of how some individual teachers, if not all, might connect their classrooms to central-city communities. The local community is not a separate topic in this book; instead, issues relating to it are interwoven throughout. In *Dreamkeepers*, Ladson-Billings examines the teaching of eight “excellent teachers” of African American children. She made sure that community would be central to these teachers’ pedagogies by drawing nominations from attendees of local Baptist churches, who were most likely to feel rooted in and committed to the central city.

Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that the eight excellent teachers she studied shared a set of pedagogical practices that she calls “culturally relevant teaching.” Reflecting some of the commitments of the “funds of knowledge” group, Ladson-Billings shows that culturally relevant teachers use positive aspects of Black culture to scaffold students into school-based knowledge, emphasizing how much the children already know. At the same time, these teachers use community knowledge and experiences to critique and show the limits of these dominant forms of knowledge, seeking to “arm African American children with the knowledge, skills, and attitude needed to struggle successfully against oppression” (p. 139).

These teachers strive to create a “community of learners,” a “family” in their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 69), working to change children’s tendency to “fail to see how they can succeed unless it is at the expense of others” (p. 73). The teachers also seek to help students to see community-building as a lifelong practice that extends beyond the classroom, working “hard to help them see beyond the decimation caused by federal, state, and county neglect to the real strengths of their community” (p. 73). Occasionally, these teachers even help students to act into the world beyond their classroom.

As in most writings on school–community relations, however, the resources of community in *Dreamkeepers* are generally put to the service of efforts to learn school-based forms of knowledge (albeit more critically than in most classrooms). Students are told they should not try to escape the community or denigrate it, but they are not taught much about how they might work to transform it into a livable space.
As with the "funds of knowledge" approach, the demands of "culturally relevant" teaching are daunting. First, nearly all of the teachers studied by Ladson-Billings (1994) are able to link students to the local community because they grew up in the community. Although she argues that middle-class suburban teacher candidates should be provided with an "immersion" experience in the communities where they work, it is not clear exactly how one might do this; nor is it clear how much immersion would be necessary to even begin to produce the kind of relationship evidenced by the teachers in her book (e.g., Wade, 2000; also see Ladson-Billings, 2001). Nor are most university professors prepared to provide such experiences (Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). Of course, another option would be to provide realistic avenues for community-rooted people to enter a teaching career, although this raises a range of other complications and challenges. Ladson-Billings also emphasizes how these teachers' approaches often required them to act in opposition to the established structures of schooling, frequently generating negative responses from their administrators. This is something few teachers have shown themselves willing to do for extended periods. Finally, Ladson-Billings argues that it is crucial to provide opportunities for student teachers to observe "culturally relevant" teaching, even though she could only find nine teachers (one didn't participate) who met the criteria for her study.

Ultimately, Ladson-Billings (1994) acknowledges that, given "the deep ideological biases and lack of expectations for success for African American students that exist for too many teachers, . . . as a researcher, I am cynical about the potential for change" even though "as an African American parent I am desperate for change" (p. 91).

Student Service Learning

Nearly all of the approaches discussed above (with the partial exception of Dreamkeepers) describe youth as largely passive subjects, looking only to adults as potential agents of change. Yet students—who are the future—must be an integral part of this process if the relationship between schools and their communities is to be transformed. And mere talk is not enough. As the "funds of knowledge" promoters argue, one can only learn how to work with a community through actual engagement. In the current literature, service learning is the most prominent school-based approach to involving students in their community.22

In its most sophisticated forms, service learning goes beyond simple community service. Instead, students' community experiences become opportunities to engage with important social issues. Proponents argue that service learning can provide an opportunity to learn about and address real world issues in responsible ways, and it can contribute to the development of an improved sense of community, both among the youth involved and within the communities served. . . . When set in a framework of substantive reflection . . . [it] can also motivate and empower young people to think critically about their world and act on it with a growing sense of purpose, agency, and optimism. (Claus & Ogden, 1999, p. 2; also see Yates & Youniss, 1998)

Common examples of service-learning projects include tutoring children, working with the homeless and seniors, and conducting neighborhood beautification projects.
Many, however, have critiqued the service-learning approach to civic engagement. Even Wade (2000), a proponent of service learning, acknowledges that the "goal" should not be "charity, which can potentially perpetuate racist, sexist, or classist assumptions"; instead, "ideally, students will work alongside persons who have been oppressed or marginalized for mutual support and empowerment" (p. 26). However, the literature on service learning indicates that most projects do, in fact, focus on charity (Kahne & Westheimer, 1999). In such efforts, the "objects" of service learning are experienced as clients needing services, not fellow actors and collaborators, reinforcing a deficit view of the community (Schutz & Gere, 1998). Furthermore, Kahne and Westheimer (1999) complain that, although "almost all discussions of service-learning practices emphasize the importance of reflection, . . . [f]or the most part . . . [the] descriptions of reflective activities do not include the kind of critical analysis that might help students step outside dominant understandings and find new solutions" (p. 37).

Even when service learning produces moments of critical reflection and of relatively equal dialogue between the "serving" and the "served," it nevertheless generally models a limited perspective on civic engagement. For example, Knight Abowitz (1999) notes that the discourse around service learning implies that social problems are most usefully solved through consensual dialogue. She worries that the "communitarian mythologies of service-learning prevent educators and their students from engaging the world in more critical and political ways" (p. 65). Her point is not that consensual approaches are not useful but that they provide very limited models for promoting social change (also see Kahne & Westheimer, 1999).

Looking beyond such consensual approaches, Knight Abowitz (1999) and Kahne and Westheimer (1999) explore alternative visions of citizenship that acknowledge the ways our society is split across lines of privilege and discrimination and that promote more contentious forms of political action. However, they note (and I have found) few examples of schools, especially urban schools (see Conover & Searing, 2000), that encourage students to participate in such efforts. And this should not be surprising. For if we provide youth with tools for resisting oppression, it would make sense for them to use the tools to affect the most important institution most are involved in: the school itself.

A few programs working to teach youth somewhat broader skills for collaborative social action do operate in schools (see Berg, Owens, & Schensul, 2002; Kirshner, 2006; Kirshner, Strobel, & Fernandez, 2003). Most, however, seem to focus on conducting and reporting community research and often look much like extensions of service-learning projects. As Oakes and Rogers (2006) have shown, without concerted action that can put pressure on those in power, youth (and even adult) research findings by themselves have little impact.

One of the largest school-based social action approaches, represented by the Public Achievement program, is something of an exception, and has expanded to a number of cities in various states since its beginnings in Minnesota (see www.publicachievement.org). In this program, students meet to map out the issues they are most interested in. Then college student coaches work with small groups on the particular problems that they have chosen, helping them to develop a plan of action and engage with school and community institutions and representatives. Participants have built playgrounds, challenged school policies, developed anti-drug skits, and more. However, unlike service-learning efforts, Public Achievement programs usu-
ally are brought into schools by outside agencies, restricted to after-school time, and not integrated into the regular curriculum. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence indicates that these programs can make school administrators and teachers nervous about what youth might want to do; in fact, the program apparently has been ended in some schools, in part because projects stepped "over the line." Currently, I am working with a team of graduate students in a local charter school in an effort to understand the possibilities and limitations of this model.

If we are serious about nurturing diverse forms of citizenship and promoting multiple avenues for student engagement in their communities, then it is clear that approaches such as Public Achievement should be expanded in central-city schools. Given institutional resistance, however, such efforts will probably remain marginal as long as they, like most of the approaches already discussed, depend on the altruism of schools for entrance. Despite its limits, then, service learning and related forms of community research seem to represent the most realistic and truly school-based avenues for enhancing student engagement in the community. I continue to worry, however, that the form of participation generally embraced by service learning and community research will end by teaching some students that most intractable social problems can be solved through consensual dialogue, or that they cannot be solved at all, leading them to see more contentious forms of politics as unnecessary or even counterproductive.

Summary Discussion of School–Community Relations

Many of the efforts described above clearly have potential to improve central-city schools in various ways. From the perspective of school–community relations, however, the literature is quite disappointing. In fact, community participation seems relatively unimportant to Epstein and Comer, the two central scholars in the field, except as a tool for supporting school-determined educational practices. Writings that broadly promote community engagement, such as textbooks for teachers and literature on community education, remain vague, rarely addressing the specific challenges facing ghetto schools. And public relations textbooks for administrators generally seek to insulate schools from community "meddling."

The two key structural approaches to altering schools’ relationships with their local communities—full-service schooling and site-based management—seem similarly limited. Proponents of full-service schools tend to focus only on interagency relations. And although site-based management seeks to bring community members to the table, these efforts generally fail either to foster broad community participation or to transfer significant authority from administrators.

Gonzalez and Moll’s "funds of knowledge" and Ladson-Billings’s "culturally relevant teaching" provide substantive models for how teachers might integrate their classrooms more fully into the community. However, the complexity of these approaches, among other challenges, makes their broad replication unlikely. Furthermore, neither of these models addresses the institutional structures that block community engagement in the first place.

The general failure to include students as actors in these discussions seems extremely problematic. In fact, the tendency to treat youth merely as subjects of adult authority seems likely only to increase their alienation from positive forms of community engagement while blinding adults to the immense positive energy that they can bring to a range of efforts.
Examples of more sophisticated approaches to community participation will always continue to exist in particular schools or districts. And there is some evidence that smaller schools are better able to engage the community than larger ones (Wasley & Lear, 2001). In general, however, the field of education has developed few if any effective, broadly applicable strategies or models for helping urban schools to further engage with their communities. In fact, the evidence indicates that urban schools will continue to be highly resistant to any changes that might threaten their strict boundaries.

Of course, we should not give up on schools as possible sites for change. Efforts will and must continue to encourage schools and their personnel to engage more authentically with the public. Although the approaches discussed above clearly have severe limitations, they are not entirely useless. Some, for example, have shown effects on academic achievement, among other things. However, we must honestly acknowledge how little has been accomplished through school-based efforts to nurture anything like Anderson’s (1998) authentic forms of community engagement.

Community–School Relations

If we know that urban schools lack significant capacities for reaching out to the world beyond their doors and fences, then it makes sense to seek community-based approaches that might reach into urban schools. This is a subject that education scholars have largely failed to address. In fact, little of the research on community-based engagements with education has appeared in traditional education publications. Most is available only through foundation, nonprofit, and think tank reports. I begin with an examination of community organizing, the most prominent current approach. I then discuss a range of other promising community-based models.
action as a tool for contesting oppression, but organizers focus more on building organizations capable of sustaining power. Activists often “go home” after winning a battle; organizers see each battle as one step in a long-term project.

Public Organizing for School Change

Of the many organizers in American history, the most influential today is Alinsky (e.g., 1946), who began developing his model in the 1930s (see Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987). In fact, most of the large, multistate organizations in the United States that work to nurture local organizing groups (e.g., the Association of Community Organizing for Reform Now (ACORN); the Industrial Areas Foundation [IAF], the Gamaliel Foundation, and the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing [PICO]) are deeply indebted to Alinsky’s vision. These large organizations provide training and help to promote coalitions but do not direct the actions of autonomous local groups. Alinsky, in his organizing efforts, sought to bring different (often competing) groups and organizations in impoverished communities together in response to a common enemy. Alinsky was a master at helping such groups to understand that they could gain real power only if they banded together despite their differences. Alinsky’s basic method involved polarizing particular issues into dramatic conflicts between good (“us”) and evil (“them”) and producing a continuing drama in which mass actions subjected targeted organizations to enormous pressure (see Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987).

Education organizing groups often focus on parents as a central constituency. In contrast, broader organizing groups such as the ones discussed here see education as one among many issues, and such groups usually involve a wide range of community members (see Beam & Irani, 2003); for these groups, educational change is one component of broad-based efforts to transform their communities (see Lopez, 2003).

Most multistate groups (e.g., IAF, Gamaliel, PICO; an exception is ACORN) work to develop coalitions of churches, some of the last remaining vibrant institutions in urban communities today (see Wood, 2003). In contrast with more right-wing, fundamentalist organizations, however (see Apple, 2001), church–state issues don’t usually arise for progressive congregational organizations. Because these are coalitions of multiple Christian (and sometimes non-Christian) congregations, their collaboration is based not on specific scriptures or religious dogma but on more general shared values and perspectives on human rights and needs.

Following Alinsky’s basic model, these groups choose specific, winnable issues that seem likely to energize their core constituencies. Wins on these issues show that the organizations can be effective, putting institutional powers on notice that their actions will be watched, and establishing that the community does, in fact, have the capacity to monitor and influence their decisions. By generating fear and respect, community organizers encourage administrators, politicians, and others to invite their organizations to the table next time before things escalate.

Through speeches and presentations, campaigns also provide contexts for participants to learn about the workings of power. These educational opportunities are crucial because, unlike Alinsky, who tended to focus on existing community leaders, most contemporary public organizing groups work hard to develop new leaders. Through actions combined with carefully designed trainings, community organizing has become a fundamentally educational enterprise.
Community organizing groups historically have been reluctant to get deeply involved in improving schools because the problems seemed too complex. But this stance has changed over the last decade, often with the support of various foundations (Mediratta & Fruchter, 2001). Public organizing efforts have resulted in a wide range of changes in schools. These include “new school facilities, the creation of small schools, new financial resources to schools, . . . new academic programs in math and science, . . . increased professional development opportunities” (Lopez, 2003, p. 8), and a range of measures making schools more accountable to parents and communities. Nonetheless, education remains an extremely challenging area for organizers, both because educational institutions are resistant to change and because high-quality education is difficult to define and monitor (Beam & Irani, 2003).

The congregational groups developed in Texas by the IAF include some of the most effective and best-described Alinsky-based organizations working on school reform (see Shirley, 1997, 2002; Warren, 2001). For example, one of the strongest Texas organizations, COPS, began its education-related efforts by successfully forcing the San Antonio School District to make public its budget—an action required by Texas state law but routinely ignored by the district . . . [and by defeating] an initiative to commit $1.6 million to a new administrative building . . . when thousands of children in the city were spending their days in dilapidated temporary classrooms. (Shirley, 1997, p. 53)

Local Texas organizations have also showed their ability to work together on the state level. In 1984 the IAF groups studied education through “house meetings, parish meetings, and city-wide conventions” (Shirley, 1997, p. 54), ultimately influencing the development of a major report on educational reform (SCOPE). During the subsequent legislative session, IAF leaders met with their representatives to sell their perspective on reform, garnering “new respect and visibility among Texas’ political leaders” (p. 55). Then, “in a notorious turn of events called ‘the Father’s Day Massacre,’ the House Public Education Committee gutted every substantive recommendation made by SCOPE” (p. 55). One day later, however, thousands of Texas IAF leaders gathered in a rally outside of the capital to demand a resuscitation of the reform effort. . . . Besieged by Texas IAF leaders, legislators promised to give SCOPE’s recommendations a second look, and many of the recommendations were restored and approved by the House and the Senate. The final legislation . . . increased school funding by $2.8 billion. (pp. 55–56)

This victory “showed low-income citizens that they could have an impact on public education that would improve the quality of their children’s education” (p. 56). It also showed the powerful people that they could no longer ignore these marginalized citizens.

Private Organizing

Popular writings on community organizing sometimes overemphasize the combative nature of these groups. In fact, organizing groups nearly always begin their efforts on an issue with attempts at dialogue with those in authority. Only when they have been rebuffed do these groups begin to pursue more militant strategies.
Many community organizing groups have begun to employ more collaborative, consensual, private organizing strategies. In fact, one of the central tools of contemporary organizers is the one-on-one interview in which leaders and organizers interview individuals about their interests and "passions." Through interviews, house meetings, and other strategies, leaders develop relationships with a wide range of people, learning who might be interested in various issues and what might motivate them to participate. This information is often pooled in an effort to uncover the issues that are most likely to energize the organizers' constituency. Ideally, seeming mass organizations are built from a myriad of individual, personal relationships.

The combative approaches promoted by Alinsky can be very effective in confronting resistant power brokers and taking resources from the privileged to make them available to the marginalized. However, one cannot force a teacher to teach better, and one cannot always demand that a school community become more welcoming. Accordingly, groups such as the Texas IAF have developed strategies for collaborating effectively with individual schools and for participating in processes of institutional change.

For example, Shirley (1997) describes how a local IAF group, Allied Communities of Tarrant (ACT), was invited by the principal of a middle school to work on parent involvement. The group first met with teachers to discuss their frustration with parents. Once the teachers were on board, ACT leaders flooded the neighborhood, visiting parents door-to-door, surveying their sentiments about the school and seeking out potential leaders. In a "slow but cumulative fashion the labor-intensive, face-to-face, relational approach of ACT leaders and . . . teachers began to change the attitude of many parents toward their children's school" (p. 107). At the same time, the teachers began to learn about the culture of their students and the community. Slowly, through a range of activities, parent and community involvement increased. ACT also became a mechanism through which parents could express their concerns about the school. Later on, these parents became the core of efforts to organize for a range of changes in their community. Ultimately, the project developed into the Alliance Schools Project, and many local groups working together forced the state to provide funding for similar programs elsewhere. Here, confrontational and more collaborative forms of organizing built on each other.

On the surface, an approach such as that of the Alliance Schools Project may seem similar to the approach represented by Epstein and Comer's models or even the Chicago local school council experiment; but, in reality, they are worlds apart. Participants are not simply family members or representatives of community in the abstract. Instead, they come to the table as members of an external institution rooted in the community and specifically designed to give them power. Furthermore, participants have been taught a shared language of power by IAF that gives them a common understanding of what counts as being empowered. And, unlike nearly all of the approaches noted in the "School-Community Relations" sections above, they do not depend completely on the altruism of schools.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that private efforts can conflict with more contentious public campaigns. For example, when ACORN groups focused on "protecting a specific neighborhood school," they found that this often limited their "ability to participate aggressively in local policy fights for district-wide systems change" (Beam & Irani, 2003, p. 2), in part because the schools were vulnerable to retaliation from school officials. Because of their desire to remain independent, orga-
nizing groups generally avoid running or taking responsibility for specific programs and refuse all government funding.

Summary

With community organizing, we finally begin to address Bauman and Wacquant's fears about the place of ghettos in a globalizing world. Organizing groups provide bases for the development of local political capital, allowing neighborhoods to at least begin to contest some of the forces that oppress them. Local organizing is not the only model for an activist politics. Like every approach, it has its strengths and limitations. A wide range of other models, from statewide coalitions of progressive groups to national lobbying efforts by the Sierra Club and more, provide avenues for generating power. Different approaches to local organizing also have different capacities. For example, congregational organizing does not always reach the truly poor as successfully as door-to-door organizing by groups such as ACORN. In my experience, congregational groups tend to be dominated by the middle class (see Portney & Berry, 1997), although others have not reported this (e.g., Wood, 2003). Even participation in groups such as ACORN, however, is necessarily limited to people who have adequate material, social, and personal resources to participate. Local organizing groups also often struggle to promote equal dialogue across race and class (see Law, 1993; Warren, 2001). Nonetheless, the church-based organizations that have inherited the Alinsky mantle seem to be the most promising avenue at the moment, on the local scale at least, for engaging schools and school districts. They provide a coherent set of strategies and a common language for developing political identities in impoverished and oppressed areas.

Other Visions of Community-School Relations

Deliberative Community Forums: Study Circles

As my discussion of private forms of community organizing indicates, not all community action involves polarizing battles with power brokers. The Study Circles approach is a sophisticated example of efforts to nurture collaboration and trust through broad-based dialogue. 25 Roberts (2003; also see Keith, 2004) explains that each individual “study circle is . . . a small, diverse group of 8–12 participants who meet for about two hours weekly for four to six weeks to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way” (p. 5). A coalition from a broad range of backgrounds comes together to organize the circles, led, in different cases, by different sectors of the city, government agencies, businesses, congregations, nonprofits, and so forth. Facilitators for each circle are given professional training designed by the Study Circles Resource Center (SSRC). At the end of the process, participants from various circles come together for dialogue. In this way, the study circles approach seeks to recreate a rich, public, dialogic “commons” among communities that have increasingly splintered. During the 1990s, according to the SSRC, almost two hundred communities used the study circles process and at least 85 “successfully coordinated and convened programs that resulted in local action” (p. 3).

As each individual study circle moves through the process, participants uncover “areas of agreement and common concern without expecting or requiring consensus” (Pan & Mutchler, 2000, p. 3). By having diverse members engage with each other, study circles seek to move participants beyond stereotypes, helping them to
understand the complexities of their issue as they form new "relationships across racial and other divides" (Roberts, 2003, p. 29). The process also provides an avenue for policymakers and other power holders to "interact with the public in some fundamentally different ways," moving them beyond dependence on experts and lobbyists (Pan & Mutchler, 2000, p. 1).

Study circles are not simply spaces for free dialogue, however. Each series of meetings focuses in on a specific community challenge, and facilitators encourage participants to link discussions to some eventual action. Groups have written "action guides," held "action forums that promote linkages with existing organizations and change efforts," made "recommendations to government and other decision-making bodies," and more (Roberts, 2003, p. 34).

The study circles process seems to have the potential to support the creation of coalitions across class, race, and other differences by generating new understandings and relationships. These are important achievements in a society where opportunities for rich dialogue about complex social issues have largely disappeared. Study circles might also represent a resource for community organizing groups that struggle to foster relatively free dialogue across cultural and class boundaries. In the case of schools, more specifically, participation in study circles may have the potential to help teachers and administrators overcome deficit perspectives by building relationships with community members. The process can provide middle-class, White educators with some of the cultural experiences promoted by Ladson-Billings and Gonzalez and Moll, among others.

Despite its strengths, however, the study circles process ultimately seems to imply that many of the challenges facing communities today result from failures of different groups to communicate (see, e.g., Wulff et al., 2002, p. 38; Pan & Mutchler, 2000). As critical race theorists, among others, have shown, those with power rarely, if ever, altruistically give up resources or power to the marginalized (Tate, 1997). Although better understanding between community members, power brokers, and educators can only be positive, understanding alone seems unlikely to fundamentally alter deep-rooted social and bureaucratic inequalities (see Kozol, 1991). In fact, as with service learning, I fear that in some cases the study circles may mislead participants about the possibilities inherent in consensual dialogue and may produce yet more cynicism about the usefulness of public engagement with the challenges of schooling.26

Local Education Funds

Local Education Funds (LEFs), located in districts with high numbers of low-income families, "are tax-exempt, nonprofit, community-based organizations that work to improve student achievement for all children attending public schools." With their own "full-time staff and a board of directors reflective of the communities they serve"—including community members, district employees, corporate executives, and education scholars—LEFs operate independently of the local school district. Fundamentally, they seek to "convene a wide range of stakeholders to help develop and implement local school improvement strategies" (Useem, 1999, p. i; also see Lampkin & Stern, 2003). Many contemporary LEFs trace their existence to seed grants provided by the Ford Foundation in 1983. Today there are 43 LEFs across the nation.

LEFs serve as intermediary organizations . . . between individual citizens . . . and governmental institutions, including school bureaucracies. . . . [They] were
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set up to be fast-moving, nimble, non-bureaucratic, and able to take on areas of work that posed greater organizational or political challenges to school bureaucracies. (Useem, 1999, p. 3)

Thus “LEFs are [generally] known as experimenters with educational reform” (p. 8).

LEFs engage in a wide range of activities. They send district staff to research conferences, sponsor or even run programs, partner with national reform initiatives, provide professional development to district staff, make grants, and more. Individual LEF projects are often multifaceted. For example, as part of a program in Philadelphia to “revitalize school libraries and galvanize school-based reform” (Useem, 1999, p. 6), the local LEF brokered an “experimental effort among [a range of] institutional partners... that resulted in district-wide policy changes,” while, at the same time, making “capacity-building grants to teachers and librarians and [providing] direct services to children and their parents” (p. 9). A key focus area for LEFs is the improvement of “public engagement in educational issues” (p. 10). LEFs have produced “community guides to the school budget” (p. 8), conducted voter surveys, and convened deliberative forums and town meetings, and more.

LEFs generally avoid critique of the districts they work with in order to maintain access and good working relationships. In fact, “in many instances, LEFs work quietly behind the scenes, bringing people and groups together to achieve a common purpose even when the parties may be in conflict” (Useem, 1999, p. 6). But this does not mean that they shrink “from addressing controversial issues” (p. 8). Instead, they seek to develop a strong base of relationships with a range of stakeholders so that they can act as relatively neutral facilitators of educational reform. Because they are unable to critique districts directly, however, they are limited in their ability to contest some of the most intransigent and oppressive aspects of district cultures and structures.

The few available writings on LEFs do not make clear whom they represent. Although they draw their board members from the “community,” it is rare, as I have already noted, for the people who direct prominent institutions in the central cities to come from or live there. In fact, a significant number of LEF board members and directors seem to come from the elite—including corporate executives, education scholars, and district directors—who are likely to dominate deliberations. Furthermore, as I have already noted, being a “member” of an impoverished urban community says nothing about how rooted one is in the community life that remains. LEFs frequently seek and foster public input, but it seems likely that in their day-to-day workings they remain relatively isolated from the communities they wish to serve.

Community Development

“Community development” is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of social, economic, housing, educational, and other programs designed to support community rebuilding (some related terms are “community building” and “comprehensive community initiatives”; Gibson, Kingsley, & McNeely, 1997; Torjman & Leviten-Reid, 2003; also see Schorr, 1997). Community development efforts historically have focused on providing services, ranging from health care to job training to housing loans. In its most inclusive sense, however, community development moves “beyond services” and includes discussions of “self-help, empow-
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germent, enterprising, investment, and public-private cooperation” (Crowson, 2001, p. 4). Like the study circles and LEF approaches (and sometimes even including similar projects), community development generally stresses consensus, seeking to foster collaboration among residents, agencies, corporate interests, local governments, and more (see, e.g., Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Mathie, 2002).

Because schools are one of the most important social institutions in impoverished neighborhoods, scholars such as Kretzman and McKnight (1993) argue that it is crucial to find ways for schools to contribute to broad community development efforts. In fact, education, in various forms, is key to many aspects of community development. If youth and adults are to access services, they must learn how to negotiate government and agency rules; if they are to start new businesses, they need training in entrepreneurship; if they are to buy homes, they must learn how the process works; and if they are to engage in social action, they must learn the appropriate skills. Neighborhoods also could benefit from the intellectual resources that schools represent. And schools could direct their institutional spending (on food, etc.) to locally based business. Even the school building itself can serve as a resource for community programs.

At present, the only prominent discussions of possible school engagement in community development are connected with efforts to create full-service schools and to encourage student participation in service learning and research. However, I have already noted the limited community participation generally associated with full-service schools, and Maybach (1996) complains that student service projects rarely contribute much of significance to communities. In fact, few urban schools currently have extra resources to contribute to community efforts. And even if they did, school staff usually are not equipped to deal with community members on any kind of equal or effective basis.

Sadly, many community development agencies face similar limitations. Like schools, most are positioned in a “helping” role that places them “over” the residents they “serve.” As I have noted, local service organizations, in the areas of health, banking, housing, youth, and more, often are directed by middle-class professionals who no longer (or never did) live in impoverished urban areas. Thus, despite a rhetoric of participation, community development efforts historically have fostered limited community participation (Fisher, 1994; Halpern, 1995).

Despite these limitations, community development organizations often are more diverse in their makeup than urban schools. Some exist that could help to link schools and their resources more closely with community needs and assets. And even when development agencies are not deeply rooted in the community, the boundaries between them and their communities can be more fluid than those of schools. This is especially true for neighborhood-based community organizations that frequently employ local residents and former residents in a range of leadership positions that do not require the kinds of certification demanded by schools. Thus community development groups seem to provide more promising avenues for engaging schools in the local community than do efforts operating from within schools. Much more research needs to be done, however, about how such relationships can move beyond the limits of current full-service school arrangements (Keith, 1996).

One possible way to address the limitations both of schools and of most community development groups is to bring community organizing groups into the process. However, organizers have learned the hard way how difficult it is to
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become deeply involved in guiding particular social and economic programs while maintaining their capacity to engage in contentious politics. Historically, when organizing groups have started directing programs, their ability to act politically has been constrained by fear of retaliation against their projects and funding. And groups that start providing services to clients often find that they lose their radical democratic edge (see Fisher, 1994; Halpern, 1995; Stoecker, 2001).

More effective relationships between community developers and community organizers can be developed, however. In 1990 and 1991, for example, leaders of two Texas IAF organizations, COPS and Metro Alliance (MA), secured funding for QUEST, an innovative job-training program (Warren, 2001). These groups understood that they could not directly control the QUEST program, for the reasons already noted, but they wanted, nonetheless, to make sure that QUEST followed the vision they had laid out. Their solution involved setting up QUEST as an agency independent of COPS and MA, while leaders of those organizations simultaneously “maintained a key role throughout all phases of project implementation.” Thus, “although leaders . . . took no jobs, and accepted no monies,” they were nonetheless able to remain “key players in shaping QUEST” (p. 175). In this way, IAF maintained a strict separation between organizing and community development while nevertheless giving members of their organization a crucial oversight role. Creative solutions such as this might also be used to mediate relationships between schools and community development groups.

Youth Organizing

As in the writings on school-based efforts, most discussions of community-based engagements with schools ignore youth as potential agents (for exceptions, see Ginwright, Noguera, & Camarotta, 2006, and Oakes & Rogers, 2006, both published after this review was completed). And although community organizing groups, for example, often have youth councils, reports from youth indicate that they often feel they are treated like second-class citizens by adult groups (Listen, Inc., 2004). Across the nation, however, hundreds of groups promoting new forms of social action for youth—often developed by youth—have begun to spring up. Youth-organizing groups have fought racial injustice, secured funding (sometimes millions of dollars) for projects, and challenged zero-tolerance policies in schools, among many other efforts.

Youth organizing essentially integrates the insights of Alinsky-based organizing into the field of youth development. Sophisticated discussions of youth organizing have only recently begun to emerge in the youth development literature (Ginwright, 2003; Hosang, 2003; Listen, Inc., 2003, 2004; also see Ginwright, Noguera, & Camarotta, 2006). Youth organizing often differs significantly from community organizing among adults because it usually engages more holistically with the range of needs and capacities that youth bring to the group. Staff help youth to “navigate through family crisis, health concerns, . . . classroom challenges,” and more (Hosang, 2003, p. 15). This can create tension between organizers’ roles as service facilitators and their efforts to help youth become independent leaders. Youth organizing also encompasses a much broader range of activities than adult organizing. Long-term action campaigns are integrated with social activities, art projects, service-learning efforts, and more. As one organizer notes, it “can often take a long time to develop and see tangible results. . . . The community service work we do provides immedi-
ate gratification and positive reinforcement in helping us to sustain our work” (cited in Hosang, 2003, p. 13). By participating in social action campaigns, youth learn to see themselves as actors with the potential to resist oppression, see their peers and local community residents as potential collaborators in collective action, and see their community as a source of resources and a site for building collective power for social change.

Analysis of youth organizing efforts is in its infancy, but, so far, the research indicates that this approach can be very successful in encouraging youth to “identify with a community’s problems” and getting them “involved in the civic life of the community” (Ginwright, 2003, p. 5). “Youth organizing has a particular resonance” for marginalized youth because it provides “opportunities to reengage with society on their own terms by working to change it” (Ginwright, 2003, p. 6). And evidence indicates that engaging youth in activism fosters social engagement later in life as well (Yates & Youniss, 1998).

Underfunded and often isolated from each other, youth organizers frequently struggle to provide the range of services and support necessary to nurture youth empowerment. Nonetheless, youth organizing groups provide one of the most exciting avenues for altering students’ sense of themselves and their communities. Youth organizing also provides avenues for contesting dominant views of young people as “predators” and criminals (Hosang, 2003, p. 4). And it may provide inspiration for adult organizing groups that seek to engage the most impoverished and oppressed inner-city residents.

Summary Discussion of Community-School Relations

I have placed community organizing at front and center as one of the most promising avenues for community-based engagement with schools. At the same time, however, I have laid out some of the limitations of this approach. Given these limitations, it seems problematic to me that discussions of the organizing model currently dominate the literature on community-based engagement in education funded by large foundations. Despite the clear power of organizing approaches, we must be careful not to put all our “eggs” in one “basket.”

At the right times and in the right places, the other approaches that I have discussed can be just as important as organizing. Study circles, for example, provide an important tool for engaging residents in dialogue across difference in relation to key school reform challenges. LEFs have shown they can mediate between school districts and different stakeholders, providing institutional bases for nurturing a wide range of innovative initiatives. And despite limited research, participation in a range of community development efforts seems to be a critical method of rooting schools more deeply in their local environments. Scholars, educators, and community leaders must give more attention, however, to efforts that harness the myriad resources of youth. In general, community-based efforts seem much more promising than those dependent on the altruism of schools for fostering more “authentic” forms of participation.

Conclusion and Implications

General Conclusions

Student achievement is and surely will remain the core concern of educators and education scholars. And a wide range of school improvement efforts at many different levels of the educational enterprise have, in fact, enhanced the learning of
hundreds of thousands of inner-city children across the nation. Despite many failures, real accomplishments exist that we should be proud of.

Vibrant community–school relationships can support these efforts to improve teaching and learning in urban schools in many ways. We know, for example, that teachers simply do not teach effectively when they hold inaccurate deficit visions of children, families, and communities. Nor can they scaffold their instruction on what students already know if they do not acknowledge the skills and capacities that children bring with them. More generally, teachers, parents, and community members cannot work together effectively (ensuring that Epstein’s three circles of family, community, and school overlap in supportive ways) if they do not understand each other. And I have noted that a growing collection of scholars, often from very different corners of the field, have increasingly come to understand that without robust community participation there is little hope that most comprehensive school reform efforts can be sustained over the long term.

Despite its potential benefits, however, educators and education scholars generally hold very limited visions of the community–school relationship. We seem to have decided that only efforts that emerge from inside schools are relevant to education research and policy, leaving examinations of community-based efforts to others, for the most part. As my review indicates, however, school-based efforts appear to be quite limited in their capacity for sustaining rich local relationships. Even the few urban schools that do seek richer interactions are hampered by underlying distrust and fear, bureaucratic immobility, and a severe lack of resources. Schools and school districts erect barriers with one hand while reaching out with the other.

The most promising efforts to bring local neighborhoods and urban schools together emerge from communities, not from schools. Only groups external to schools seem able to consistently provide contexts where community members can develop relatively independent perspectives and action projects that allow them to interact with schools as relative equals. As is shown by the examples of private organizing, Study Circles, and LEFs, this relative independence does not necessarily involve opposition. Instead, community-based efforts, when carefully planned, often provide the foundations necessary for rich collaboration. If we as educators and education scholars truly wish to promote more vibrant school–community relationships, then we must widen our understanding of the contexts that are part the field of education. We must learn to engage schools from the outside, not just from the inside.

Transforming the field’s limited approaches to school–community relations is not important just because of its potential impact on traditional forms of student achievement, however. Despite real improvements here and there, we still do not know how to transform education fundamentally in the majority of our under-resourced, underserved urban schools. Despite a vast proliferation of education research, high achievement remains the exception for urban schools. More productive relations with local communities can clearly make a difference but are unlikely to alter the dynamic fundamentally (see, e.g., Anyon, 1997).

Furthermore, as I argued above, even if we knew how to provide a large number of urban students with a higher-quality education, upon graduation few would be able to compete with the children of the privileged for better jobs. And even when a few impoverished minority graduates find middle-class employment, they are prevented from “escaping” the inner city because of housing discrimination, among
other forces. I am not arguing that we should tell children that achievement in school is a waste of time. But simply lying to them when they can see the truth all around them seems self-defeating.

Beyond simply improving achievement, then, community-based engagements with urban schools have the potential to make two key contributions to impoverished central-city areas. First, community collaborations can provide avenues for urban schools to participate in struggles against the exclusionary dynamics of the market, governments, industry, and the like, that prevent even accomplished students from advancing. Some of these efforts—especially those led by community organizers—have met with significant success: passing “living wage” laws, improving access to suburban jobs through mass transit, monitoring enforcement of fair housing policies, creating treatment programs instead of additional prison space for nonviolent drug offenders, and much more. At various times in our history, groups have helped to pass sweeping national legislation protecting the rights of minorities, the disabled, senior citizens, and others. Urban schools’ focus on traditional academic achievement as a path to individual success will become less of a fraud only when such battles are progressively pursued and won (Anyon, 2005).

These struggles against inequality and oppression will always remain crucial, but the painful truth is that equal opportunity for impoverished minority youth will probably not be achieved—not in our lifetimes, at least. Local, national, and international organizing efforts will continue to fight a rear-guard action against the global structures that produce inequality in the central cities. In fact, because systems of inequality constantly evolve along with efforts to contest them, battles won in earlier generations—over affirmative action, for example—must continually be refought and reconceptualized by later participants.

If we know that few children will escape the central city, and if we don’t know how to alter this reality, then educators must, second, find ways to participate in efforts to make the central city a place where one might make a home. If educators acknowledge that most of their students will not find middle-class jobs (and I would argue that most do, in fact, know this) then cynicism is avoidable only if other paths for survival and success can be developed.

Perhaps the key shift in urban schools’ understanding of their own aims would involve acceptance that for people at the lower stratum of society, strength is almost invariably gained not individually but through collectives. Central cities can only become places where one might make a “home” if they also become places with a collective sense of community and shared destiny. Only through collective struggle on the local level (and more broadly) will the “dumping grounds” of global society be able to develop even the minimal resources necessary to provide for human development. This is a radical challenge for schools, because nearly all levels of education focus on the empowerment of relatively isolated individuals.

Although collective action may not be able to give most inner-city children access to middle-class lives, it may, over time, moderate the destructive intrusions of external forces, such as the justice system, that make a vibrant community life in some areas of the urban core nearly impossible. Only by establishing roots and making commitments to their communities can youth begin to envision long-term membership in the local as a concrete option for them. One of the key ways that schools could help to provide this sense of belonging is by giving students opportunities to participate in local struggles against the forces that oppress their com-
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Communities. The research on youth organizing indicates that such efforts can successfully engage even extremely alienated youth. I have already acknowledged that we cannot expect these practices to be taught in most public schools, but in many cities there are various youth organizing groups with which urban schools might explore creative collaborations. And programs such as Public Achievement have shown that less radical approaches to student empowerment can find places in some schools.

Furthermore, if we know that traditional forms of individual advancement will remain out of reach for large numbers of inner-city youth, then none of the stakeholders involved in education can continue to allow schools—perhaps the most important and best-funded institution in central-city areas, after hospitals and the police—to avoid participating in broad community development efforts. The problem is that we know very little about what this might look like, or even the most productive areas to pursue (Keith, 1996). For example, we need more research on truly community-based full-service schools. We need to explore ways that schools might teach community members how to get home loans, how to negotiate city bureaucracy, how to acquire health care, and more. We need to learn more about how to link school activities with a range of development efforts such as community gardens and low-income housing renovation. And we need to learn how to bring scattered, isolated successful efforts to scale (see, e.g., Schorr, 1997).

We will not find a single “silver bullet” solution to the many challenges that I have raised here. As this review shows, the various community- and school-based approaches each have different strengths and weaknesses. In fact, the weaknesses of a particular approach are generally a result of their strengths. For example, public forms of community organizing are often successful to the extent that they succeed in creating fear in their targets—though this result may block more consensual collaborative efforts. Only through a diverse collection of approaches, working together, can we hope to achieve comprehensive changes in central-city areas.

Implications for Schools of Education

Traditionally, research and training for community empowerment has been housed in schools of social welfare and in social science departments such as history and sociology, not in schools of education. But social work, as a field, has become increasingly clinical in focus over the last few decades. Although there has been some movement, recently, toward community engagement, social action has largely disappeared from social work curricula in favor of training for psychotherapy and other more service-related roles (Mizrahi, 2001). And although social science departments around the nation have increasingly become interested in issues of community empowerment, those departments generally see it as their role to produce researchers and not actors—the “practical” is often denigrated in such spaces.

Therefore, because this article is most likely to be read by education scholars—the traditional audience for the Review of Educational Research—I conclude by focusing on the implications of my argument for schools of education, crucial institutional participants in any effort to transform dominant perspectives on school and community change. Schools of education are a central source of new ideas and approaches for educational reform, and are key sites for the formation of teachers'
and administrators' perspectives on the function of schooling in American society. Currently, however, schools of education do not engage much with more radical perspectives on school–community connections, in part because they lack scholars with the expertise to do so and in part because they do not understand that community should be a central part of their charge.

What this means is that schools of education cannot simply look elsewhere for academic and pedagogical support for more robust visions of community. Scholars focusing on community engagement and transformation in other university divisions will not necessarily focus on the position of the schools. Nor will they necessarily be positioned to engage usefully with more traditionally focused education scholars. This relative vacuum may represent an opportunity for the field of education, however, for developing its own domain to address issues of community in education.

Unless concrete changes are made to integrate community issues into the larger education curriculum, traditional teacher and administrator educators will probably continue to ignore these issues as largely irrelevant to their efforts. Teachers and administrators must learn, in concrete ways, how communities can and have been engaged and empowered—even if they are not trained to do this themselves—or most are unlikely to believe it is even possible. It is not necessary to train teachers as community organizers, for example; instead, they need to understand how they might link with such efforts.

Furthermore (and this is even more radical), I would argue that the tendency for schools of education to focus only on the training of those who work within traditional institutions of education is inadequate. As this review has attempted to show, robust community engagement is unlikely to emerge through the altruistic action of school personnel, even when substantial administrative powers (as in the Chicago experiment) are provided to a few parents and community members. Thus I am convinced that schools of education must begin to see the education of community actors as a new and central part of their charge.

The B.S. in Community Education offered by the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee—one of few like it in the nation—provides concrete evidence that a more expansive approach is possible. As a part of this program, students can focus on strategies for community change and can even obtain a Certificate in Community Organizing that allows students to develop specific skills for collective action. The B.S. program is focused on serving working adult students and gives lower-division credits for prior professional experience. Partly as a result of this policy, the program has been extremely successful in attracting a diverse student body, including many central-city residents, as more traditional teacher-training programs around the nation have largely failed to do. Many students across the nation could be drawn to such a program.

I have provided the example of the University of Wisconsin’s degree in community education, but there is no way to know ahead of time how various schools of education, with their diverse strengths and limitations, might best engage themselves in these issues. Clearly, change will require a range of experiments by universities and colleges. But if we agree

- That fundamental changes in relations between communities and schools can provide crucial supports for educational reform in impoverished urban areas;
That efforts to develop broad, school-based models for fostering more authentic forms of community engagement have largely failed; and

That poor, urban students and families of color can achieve empowerment on a broad scale not as individuals, but only when joined in collectives, then we cannot, with conscience, avoid exploring ways to engage more directly with the communities around schools. Only in this way might the inner city become less of a prison for impoverished youth of color.

Notes

1In the discussion that follows, I use a range of terms to refer to impoverished urban areas, including “ghetto” (after Anyon, 1997; Wacquant, 1998) and “inner city.” All such terms are problematic in their own way. For example, segregated forms of poverty in American cities may be shifting over time from the center to isolated, first-ring suburbs (Orfield, 1998). However, they provide a useful shorthand. Sometimes I simply refer to these areas as “urban,” as is common in the literature, with the understanding that many sections of cities are, in fact, quite wealthy and that some public schools that serve them do not look much like the schools that I discuss here.

2Wacquant (1998) notes that, until quite recently, ghettos in America provided some measure of protection and solidarity, while acting as a source of labor for surrounding areas. In recent decades, however, he argues that the “hyperghetto” has emerged: a dumping ground for those whom the economy no longer needs.

3The Justice Department “reported in April of 2000 [that] ‘black youth are forty-eight times more likely than whites to be sentenced to juvenile prison for drug offenses’ ” (Press, cited in Giroux, 2003, p. 558; also see p. 560).

4Despite frequent complaints about the damage done to children by working mothers and “broken,” single-parent families, a RAND Corporation study found that “whether a mother worked had a negligible effect” on achievement and that “single parent status by itself was not significant” (Thrust for Educational Leadership, 1997, p. 26; also see Conley, 1999, p. 70). The problem is not single mothers but, instead, the limited income that a single parent can bring in, especially under the conditions prevalent in central cities. The facts surrounding the increase in out-of-wedlock births are also more complex than popular dialogue suggests. Blank (1997) shows, for example, that single women are not having more babies; instead, there are more single women. For a range of reasons, often quite good ones, single women have decided not to marry. Furthermore, Emihovich and Fromme (1998) argue that “teen parenting can be viewed from some cultural perspectives as a ‘good’ choice” (p. 149). For example, having children early allows more uninterrupted participation in the labor force later on, key for those limited to working-class jobs. In any case, teen pregnancy rates actually have declined in recent years.

5Yet more tension is created by the fact that, given few other options, many angry law-abiding central-city residents find themselves demanding even more heavy-handed police action (Anderson, 1998).

6Jones and Lou (1999) argue that mainstream scholars often feed false ideas of a “culture of poverty” by problematically conflating “black culture and poverty” (p. 439; also see Lundy, 2003). Wacquant (1997) similarly complains about scholarship that generates “stereotypical, cardboard-type, folk images of urban blacks . . . that resonate with
and perpetuate historic racial prejudice under the impeccable positivist garb of survey categories and the falsely neutral idiom of policy advocacy" (p. 348).

7A recent survey in five major American cities found that "just over a quarter of whites believe there to be 'a lot' of discrimination against blacks" (Kluegel & Bobo, cited in Pager, 2003).

8Youth represent an important exception to the increasing disorganization of the ghetto. As Sullivan (1997) points out, "the young," unlike many adults in the central city, "are highly organized." She emphasizes that she is "not referring to organized gangs involved in illicit or illegal business." Although mainstream society does not "approve, condone, or accept that youth gangs, posses, street organizations, or crews are meaningful and constructive forms of associational life," she argues that these nonetheless "exist as the primary networks for inner-city adolescent social development" (p. 236). Our tendency to denigrate youth groupings in the central city, she complains, blinds us to their diversity and positive potential.

9Ahluwalia and Dodds (1998) note that, over the past two decades, poor people in areas of concentrated poverty have become much less likely than before to look to neighbors for help. Drawing on a national dataset, Roschelle (1997) found that "participation in extended kinship networks traditionally found in Black and Latino communities...no longer persist," speculating that "the interacting systems of class and race oppression may have become so severe that they prevent individuals from realizing their familialistic identities" (pp. 110, 122; also see Rankin & Quane, 2000).

10It has become popular, recently, to refer to individuals' connections with each other and with various institutions as forms of "social capital." Although the phrase has proved useful to some, I avoid it here. As Collier (1998) points out, it has taken on very disparate meanings "ranging across several disciplines" and "the subject area has yet to settle down into agreed definitions" (p. 1). In fact, in a recent review, Dika and Singh (2002; also see Sampson, 2001) argue that its meaning is often too vague to have much analytic value, noting that "the conceptual umbrella of social capital has been stretched to include a variety of social factors that do not coherently hang together" (p. 46). In the present article, instead of referring to social capital I will try to be relatively specific about the kinds of ties and organizational structures implied in various writings, discussing how these are linked to varied approaches to community building and development and examining the different possibilities that each vision offers. Different kinds of social capital represent very different kinds of resources.

11Poor parents often fear school judgments of their parenting, worrying, for example, about being reported to child welfare authorities (Lareau & Shumar, 1996).

12Ladson-Billings (1994), who acknowledges that many teachers unintentionally teach from a deficit perspective, also notes that "even though [Jonathan] Kozol has a point when he cites the need for systemic change, this does not give teachers license not to struggle against the oppressive and inequitable institutions in which they work" (p. 130).

13Although the deficit views held by educators often seem exaggerated and misplaced, it is important to acknowledge that the stresses, struggles, and challenges that accompany poverty do often degrade the social-emotional well-being of the families and children who are subjected to it, despite their best efforts to resist (see McLoyd, 1990). It is also certainly true that parents can often use help and guidance in parenting. But we must be careful not to exaggerate the limitations of poor parents (research
Schutz indicates that most parents, even poor and single ones, do a reasonably good job of raising their children, given the challenges they face) or the "wonderfulness" of middle-class families in comparison. Parent-training efforts must always remain sensitive to the fact that different cultures develop different family norms. Nevertheless, given that most schools are not ready to change in ways that would make them more responsive to the strengths of non-middle-class families, poor families may need (and may even demand) help in understanding how to prepare their children to survive in middle-class settings.

Huge numbers of students of color in inner-city schools are also increasingly suspended and expelled from schools (Giroux, 2003). Noguera (2003) reports, however, that in his experience the practice of eliminating difficult students from classrooms does little to improve the climate because other students take over oppositional roles in response to the school environment. The predictable failure of schools to educate struggling students is shown perhaps most poignantly in the tendency of states to use elementary-grade reading test scores to forecast the future need for prison cells for adults (Cushman, 1998).

Villenas and Deyhle (1999) similarly note in their review of ethnographies of Latino education that "[Latino/a youth accurately perceived] the weak connection between school and jobs [for them]" (p. 433). More broadly, Mullan (2004; see Shipp, 1997) summarizes the evidence that indicates that education has little directly to do with economic growth, pointing out that "increasing workforce skills are useless economically in the absence of the capital investment and technology to use them" (p. 3). The point is not that education does not matter—clearly, it does—but that a more educated population does not, by itself, create more jobs. In fact, education often seems to matter mostly as a source of credentials, and both the educational quality and the symbolic worth of the credentials achieved by those trapped in the central city are almost invariably deficient when compared with those of the White middle-class.

In their handbook for schools, Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, and Van Voorhis (2002) focus even less on community than in Epstein's (2001) text for teachers, although "how to involve the community" is "new" in the 2002 edition (p. 2).

Given space limitations, I do not address here the wider discussions of school public relations currently in progress in the Journal of School Public Relations and elsewhere. The texts that I have chosen certainly cannot completely capture the complex and multifaceted dialogue in this arena; however, they seem to be the most influential avenue by which this dialogue might develop a higher profile in the field of education.

A partial exception to this pattern is the report Making the Difference, from the Coalition of Community Schools (Blank, Melaville, & Shaw, 2004), which contains many examples of community school initiatives. However, relatively little space is given to rich discussion of the tensions involved in community engagement. Instead, in the example sections the focus is mainly on relatively traditional forms of parent involvement and on the kind of interagency collaboration discussed in my "Full-Service Schools" section, above.

It is notable that middle school participants in the Community Learning Centers studied were more likely to report selling drugs and smoking marijuana (Dynarski et al., 2003, p. xiii).
Youth and children alike dislike program settings that are designed to ‘fix’ them. . . Such programs, too often, only reinforce youth’s view that something is wrong with them, that they are somehow deficient, and that they are a problem” (Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001).

There are indications that the Chicago Local School Council reforms may be productive for student achievement (Rau, Baker, & Ashby, 1999). But this is not clearly related to community engagement. And “community participation” does not appear on Briggs and Wohlstetter’s (2003) list of characteristics of school-based management that seem to support achievement.

Given limited time, I focus here on discussions of service learning in K–12 settings. For a more nuanced discussion of various approaches, see Mediratta and Fruchter (2001).

This resembles aspects of the approach that Schorr (1997) recommends for replicating local successes without simply standardizing them in ways that are not responsive to the unique conditions in different communities.


Keith (2004) also points to more sophisticated approaches to community dialogue, focusing on Rojzman’s (1999) model of “social therapy” as a strategy for engaging with strong forms of group hatred and discrimination.

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