

2012

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Recommended Citation

Finn, Mary (2012) "Dewey and an “Organizing Approach to Teaching”," *Journal of Educational Controversy*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol6/iss1/11>

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ARTICLE

Dewey and an “Organizing Approach to Teaching”

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To move from a “model of scholarship where students are treated as passive vessels to be filled, to a problem-posing, relational, publicly engaged critical pedagogy that connects to public work that they hold to be meaningful...requires an organizing approach to teaching” (Sandro, 2002).

Education organizing has been added to many community organizers’ portfolio in recent years. To sustain, for the long term, the power they gain over social and economic policy and practices that are detrimental to their community, organizers understand it is essential to reduce the educational achievement gap between students of differently resourced families and to assure their members’ children are well educated. Some, such as legendary civil rights organizer Robert Moses, have gone so far as to demand a constitutional right to a quality education for all children. For Moses, it will take a grassroots movement modeled after the Civil Rights Movement to amend the Constitution and transform public schools (Perry, Moses, Cortes, Delpit & Wayne, 2010).

Education organizers’ focus on making demands of those who make policy for schools and school systems (Perry, et al., 2010) may not be sufficient, however, to achieve the desired educational outcomes; having a say in educational methodology may also be necessary. As an external force for educational change, organizers’ demands for inclusion in school policy decisions have produced positive *qualitative* changes, such as improved school climate (Shirley, 1997, p. 206). Their efforts to improve school *quantitative* outcomes, however, “such as increased student achievement and advancements in curriculum and instruction, are lagging behind expectations” (Glickman & Scully, 2008).

This paper argues that it is time to consider how bringing organizing inside the school and the classroom can extend the power of collective action by incorporating “an organizing approach to teaching” (Sandro, 2002) into educators’ pedagogical toolkits. It is proposed that integrating Dewey’s (1938) group-inquiry/problem-solving pedagogy, and his insights into the possibilities of a social-justice curriculum, with Freire’s (1970) critical and Alinsky’s (1946) popular educating/organizing for equity, can build power inside schools. Such internal education organizing offers opportunities to develop a *powerful education*, one that reduces the achievement gap and at the same time addresses social and economic inequality by bringing the schools and the community into a social movement for social rights.

Social Rights for the 21st Century

Jean Anyon (2005) agrees with Moses (Perry, et al., 2010) that it will be necessary to organize a new “civil rights” movement to achieve the reforms that can produce equity in educational achievement outcomes. “[T]o obtain [federal government] policies that could set the stage for economic and educational justice,” she says, “we need to apply the pressure that a social movement can provide” (Anyon, p. 152). The Civil Rights Movement is the organizing model she has in mind for the social movement she proposes. And she believes that educators are in a prime position to build a constituency for a social movement that demands “economic and educational change in urban communities” through their “continual access to parents and urban youth” (Anyon, p.157).

Patrick Finn (2009) argues it is a new *social rights* movement that is needed. He describes the mid-20th century proposals of the British sociologist T. H. Marshall, who traced the concept of citizenship through the history of movements for *civil rights* granted through the courts in the 18th century, and for *political rights* granted through the legislatures in the 19th century, to demand for *social rights* that Marshall believed would be gained through educational institutions in the 20th century (P. Finn, 2009, pp. 156-157).

Social rights, in Marshall’s view, included “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security [jobs, housing, food, medical care] to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992, p. 8). Education would assure all citizens their social rights because it would prepare them with the means to provide for their economic security. Without social rights to economic security gained through education, productive and democratic participation in both the economy and the shared culture would not be possible.^[1]

Few today would argue that all citizens have equitable access to an education that fulfills their social rights on a par with the powerful education received by children of the dominant elite. A powerful education prepares privileged children to know what their rights are and how to attain and maintain them through concerted efforts to protect their class interests (P. Finn, forthcoming). The majority of citizens schooled in working-class institutions, however, are encouraged to rely on individual effort for success, with the result that failure to achieve is often attributed to their individual deficiencies (P. Finn, 2009, pp. x-xi).

Kennedy (2004) cites “pernicious individualism” (p. 23) as one of the reasons the U.S. has not followed other developed countries in extending social rights more broadly.^[2] In a democracy, a powerful education for all is the proper remedy for pernicious individualism. It includes knowledge of all citizenship rights (civil, political, and social), as well as the skills necessary to attain and maintain them: the cognitive and linguistic skills associated with academic achievement that can lead to satisfying jobs and careers, taught alongside organizing for action in one’s collective self-interest, defined, as the Longshoremen’s tee shirt says, as, “a hurt to one is a hurt to all.”

External education’s organizing to include parents and community members in school policy-making has engaged a growing number of progressive educators at institutions of higher education for several years. Many have established strong collaborative ties with community organizers in various parts of the country. (See Appendix.) Extending an organizing approach to teaching and learning into the preparation and professional development of new and practicing teachers can bring the benefits of organizing inside schools and classrooms, thereby providing all students a powerful education. Internal education organizing, it is proposed, can complete the goal of increased equity in academic outcomes and ensure that all citizens are prepared to realize their right to equitable participation in the economy and the culture.

Focusing on Teaching

Philip Sandro (2002) reports being surprised to learn how closely cognitive science research on how students learn resonates “with prior writing by educators historically associated with experiential and critical education,” such as Dewey (1938), hooks (1994), Horton and Freire (1990), and Palmer (1987) (Sandro, 2002, p. 42). Ewell (1997a, 1997b) compiled this research for the American Association for Higher Education’s 1998 conference on improving learning gains among undergraduates. He concluded that, “A decade of pathbreaking research in the field of cognitive science suggests that indeed big differences exist between knowledge based on recall and deeper forms of understanding” (1997a, p. 4). New technology had allowed scientists to directly examine brain function and structure under different learning conditions and “to make inferences about how it actually processes and organizes information” (Ewell, 1997b, p. 2).

The following are among the conclusions compiled by Ewell (1997a). I have added related examples from Dewey’s writing in brackets.

- Learners actively create their own learning; they are not receptacles [or as Dewey put it, “the educator cannot start with knowledge already organized and proceed to ladle it out in doses” (Dewey, 1938, p. 82)];
- Learners make meaning by establishing and reworking patterns, relationships, connections [that is, through a “continuous process of reconstruction of experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 87)].
- Learning is continuous [for Dewey, an educative experience was one point along the means-ends continuum, where reaching every end was a step toward discovering a new end-in-view (Dewey, 1939)];
- Learning best occurs in the context of a compelling ‘presenting’ problem [which was the basis of Dewey’s proposal to teach the scientific method of problem-solving (Dewey, 1938, p. 86)]. (Ewell, 1997a, p. 4)

While many of the calls for reform in teaching methodology suggested by research on how the brain learns pertain to higher education (Bickford & Wright, 2006; Ewell, 1997a, 1997b; Kotulak, 1996; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005), k-12 educators interested in using technology to improve learning have integrated Ewell’s summary of research into a new model of learning that acknowledges the impact of brain science findings on curriculum design, teacher preparation, and classroom practice (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Callahan & Switzer, 2000). Other resources that have become available in the last decade for both higher education and k-12 faculty seeking to bring teaching into line with neuroscience research can be found on the websites for *The 21st Century Learning Initiative*; *Learning and the Brain*; *Edutopia*; and *The School Administrator* (January, 1998).

Some of the educational neuroscience^[3] authors understand that Dewey's (1899, 1916) collaborative, experience-based pedagogy predated by a century their calls for new teaching models (Cross, 1999; Ewell, n.d.; Major & Palmer, 2001; Sylwester, 1997). But few have seen the potential for revitalizing democracy that Sandro saw in the connection between cognitive science and critical/experiential education, i.e., that cognitive science research also supports "a set of approaches to teaching that are similar to what effective [community] organizers do" (Sandro, p. 42). When cognitive science is seen as providing a foundation for both progressive educators' and community organizers' methodologies, a new model of educating for citizenship in a participatory democracy comes into view.

For example, progressive educators know that in order "for learning to stick and create the capacity and interest for more learning, the inner and outer worlds of students need to be connected in the context of real life, compelling, often public, problem solving" of the sort engaged in by community and labor organizers (Sandro, p. 43). Barron and Darling-Hammond's (2008) review of research on learning for understanding underscores the continuing effectiveness of collaborative, problem-solving pedagogies. Integrated with an organizing approach to teaching, these pedagogies can provide the powerful education and active engagement that resistant, often angry students in impoverished communities need in order to realize their collective self-interest and full citizenship. Or in Ayers' (2010) words, a "more vital, muscular democratic society."

As argued below, bringing organizing inside the schools means using Dewey's experience-based group inquiry to develop the intellectual (critical thinking and communicating) skills associated with academic achievement, combined with a critical (problem-posing/problem-solving) curricular framework that forefronts the structural and social-power relations Dewey (1938) saw embedded in traditional school subjects. For Sandro, an organizing approach to education also addresses the decline in democracy that he attributed to a "growing sense of powerlessness and cynicism, a retreat... away from participation in the public sphere, a deepening culture of detachment in academia, and increasing levels of inequity and growing disparities in power among social groups in the U.S." (Sandro, p. 42).

Teaching the Scientific Method of Problem Solving

For Dewey, basing education in experience means engaging students collectively in inquiry and research using the scientific method (or as he sometimes referred to it, the "method of intelligence" (Dewey, 1938, p. 81)) to solve a problem. "Problems," he tells us, "are a stimulus to thinking."

That the conditions found in present experience should be used as sources of problems is a characteristic which differentiates education based on experience from traditional education.... Growth depends upon the presence of difficulty to be overcome by the exercise of intelligence The new facts and new ideas thus obtained become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented (Dewey, 1938, p. 79).

Using the term *scientific method* to describe experience-based pedagogy can be confusing as the term often conjures up the image of a lone scientist conducting experiments in a test-tube filled lab. There is, however, a social constructivist component to the scientific method that is often given insufficient attention by classroom teachers who miss the significance of the collaborative nature of the process. Teachers often simply walk students through the steps of problem-solving exercises: state the problem; gather data to explain the cause of the problem; analyze the data; determine possible solutions or actions; select one; act on it; reflect on the outcomes; decide on next steps. This procedure, however, may not develop the critical thinking skills and democratic attitudes Dewey and other progressives had in mind,^[4] or prepare students to act "as a dialogical community of learners" (Wirth, 1992, p. 123).

Understanding the scientific method from a social constructivist perspective means focusing on the communication and interactions among those concerned about the problem. The steps one takes to test a hypothesis, for example, must be described so explicitly that they can be replicated by others who wish to repeat the process. When like experiments confirm the findings, the hypothesis becomes accepted by the scientific as well as the larger society as an established principle. The educational significance of the method of science for Dewey was that it is a social process that depends more on interaction and explicit communication through dialogue and negotiation among members of the scientific community, and ultimately among members of society, than the image of the lone scientist may suggest.

It is this social constructivist basis of the scientific method of solving problems that is key to Dewey's group inquiry method of teaching and learning--interacting, communicating, questioning, and knowledge-building. In the classroom, the goal is to identify a real problem the students care about solving. Dewey urged teachers, the more mature and experienced individuals in the classrooms, to lead without dominating class decisions about what problem to study. He saw that this required teachers to move from directing a *class* of students to providing leadership within a *community group* of students

(Dewey, 1938). This radically new role for teachers requires community-building skills similar to those that organizers use to develop the sense of group identity or membership that is necessary for effective participation in solving group problems.

According to Sandro, “to engage community members [and students] in collective problem solving,” organizers and teachers must start with what their participants already know through their own life experiences. New experiences can then expand prior learning into richer and more organized forms of knowledge. Sharing these experiences builds community by connecting “the inner needs, passions, anger, values, motivations and felt issues and capacities of individuals with others in the community [or the classroom] that share similar sentiments” (Sandro, p. 44).

Organizers receive specific preparation in the process of community building and their tools and strategies are critical to Dewey’s group-inquiry pedagogy. Their “house meetings” and “one-on-ones” are examples of activities that can help students articulate their individual concerns and uncover their group’s “collective self-interest” (Sandro, p. 44); or as Noguera (2008) says, their critical consciousness regarding “the nature of the circumstances that constrain their lives” (Noguera, p. 40). Solving real problems in the group’s collective self-interest adds the critical element to group inquiry that makes the organizing approach to teaching powerful.

Community organizing tools can also help teachers guide students toward defining a problem that contains possibilities for both long-term and short-term learning. In *cutting an issue*, for example, organizers focus first on a problem that is *winnable*, that can be seen as but a small part of a broader issue, and that will lead to what Dewey (1939) called the next end-in-view, or for organizers, the next potentially winnable goal.^[5] The importance of reflection in this process of learning from experience cannot be overstated. For Dewey, “To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 87). Similarly, “After every action Alinsky made the [community] leaders take time to talk about what happened. They dissected, analyzed, and criticized the event until they understood the reason why they had won or lost” (Pyles, 2009, p. 63).

Selecting a problem in the group’s collective self-interest and following the steps of the scientific method of problem-solving develops academic skills because it requires extensive negotiation and dialogue among group members, from defining the problem, to determining what data to gather, analyzing what it means, deciding on actions to be taken, implementing the action, and reflecting on it. Negotiation provides practice in explicit language usage, a key component of the cognitive and linguistic abilities related to success in academic studies. Students from under-resourced families receive less practice in explicit language use in their homes and communities than do more privileged children (Bernstein, 1971; P. Finn, 2009). This makes negotiation and explicit language development through group inquiry especially valuable in efforts to equalize academic outcomes.

Explicit language practice is also involved in both the written descriptions of the steps taken to solve the problem, and in the stage where the group needs to make convincing arguments about why their collective action demands should be met. Writing to describe, analyze, and explicate leads to “essay-text literacy,” a term Gee (1994) used to describe a way new knowledge is created. This is the form of literacy that is common in the powerful education children of the elite receive (P. Finn, 2009) and can become part of the powerful education all children receive through an organizing approach to teaching and learning.

Infusing Organizing into the Curriculum Standards

An organizing approach to teaching must also incorporate clear linkages to the curriculum if the result is to be a powerful education. That is, students must be prepared to attain proficiency in academic standards as well as to demand their rights through collective action. While group inquiry can provide academic skills necessary to learn, resistant students won’t be motivated to do the hard work demanded to acquire academic knowledge unless they see a connection between the subject studied and their group’s collective self-interest. Dewey (1938) offers a potential framework for teachers to follow in developing a curriculum that combines academic knowledge and skills with opportunities to organize around issues of critical consciousness through what he called *social relations* (Dewey, 1938, p. 83), or what today might be termed *social justice*. Dewey’s example was in science, though all academic subjects offer similar possibilities.

Everyday experiences of such science topics as electricity, transportation, or food production are so ubiquitous, Dewey said, that students rarely question their experience of them. These are applications of physical science, however, that he contends have made “contemporary social life what it is in very large measure...” (Dewey, 1938, p. 79). “Acquaintance with every-day social applications” of scientific facts and laws, he wrote, “is the surest road to the understanding of ...

economic and industrial problems.” These problems “are the products to a very large extent of the application of science in *production and distribution* of commodities and services, . . . processes that are the most important factor in determining the present relations of human beings and social groups to one another” (Dewey, 1938, p. 80; emphasis mine).

For example, in sharing experiences in the study of a science topic such as electricity, the following questions help forefront the social-power relations embedded in the topic and help raise students’ social consciousness:

- How would a failure in the power grid affect our use of electronic tools and toys?
- What is a power grid and how is electricity *produced and distributed*?
- How does the production of electricity from fossil fuel, water, wind, nuclear, and sun impact the environment?
- What determines the cost of electricity and who decides when rate hikes are allowed?
- Are municipally owned power plants more equitable than those of private corporations?
- Does everyone have a right to use as much electricity as they want?
- How is my energy use affected by my social relationships with others?
- What is my group’s collective self-interest in this topic?

Group inquiry and action can start at any point in the discussion of issues raised by such questions. Research might focus on some aspect of the local consequences of such challenges as world consumption/needs are growing; power grids are outdated; coal-fired electric plants are among the biggest polluters of the environment; cost is high for the poor; melt-downs can occur in nuclear plants. Student and teacher-generated questions could include the following:

- How are jobs and wages impacted by energy policies?
- Why should students care who makes *production and distribution* decisions?
- What actions can students take to assure equitable decisions are made?
- What conflicts might arise when changes for greater equity are demanded?
- What organizing groups in our community today are actively involved in campaigns for equitable distribution of resources?
- How can we participate in their activities?
- What are the *production and distribution* concerns regarding other resources—water? oil? education?

Emphasizing the social-power relations in the production and distribution of electricity in the course of mastering the scientific process of generating electricity opens the way to questions of equity and the group’s collective self-interest in the production and distribution of other resources. Since the distribution of educational resources may seem more immediate to students than electricity, water, or oil, cutting an issue about equity in the distribution of school resources may raise issues where students’ collective self-interest is more readily apparent. When the question is whether or not the education of one’s own group is of the same standard as that of students from more affluent families, questions arise as to whether all are being equitably prepared for powerful participation in the economy and the culture.

The Futures Project, a group-inquiry-based school-reform program in Los Angeles, is one example of less affluent students’ organizing in their collective self-interest around the equity of educational resources (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). Students in the project conducted their inquiry into the different pathways that different social groups take through high school. Student researchers identified the processes by which some pathways, through Honors and Advanced Placement courses, for example, led to admission to elite institutions of higher education and well-paying careers, while other pathways led to community college or minimum-wage jobs. Not all pathways were open to all students: Students from more affluent families found their way more easily to the most socially and economically rewarding pathways.

Collective action by the Futures Project students against education that domesticates and alienates as opposed to education that liberates and empowers forged dramatic new pathways for these less affluent students. Academic success led to college entrance for 25 of the 30 students in the project. Pushback from powerful parents seeking to maintain the social and educational *status quo*, however, kept the new pathways from being institutionalized in the school's structure (Oakes & Rogers). Had the students been prepared to reach out to parents and community activists, to participate in wider school-reform organizing efforts, such structural reforms might have been implemented.

Whether students organize around energy resources or educational resources, an organizing approach to teaching provides a powerful education that infuses academic studies with organizing concepts, skills, and collaborative action. It encourages new understanding of issues of educational and economic equity by integrating a social-relations/social-justice dimension into the curriculum. For Sandro, it provides a "civically engaged form of education" that prepares students to think, to communicate, to act, and to become citizens of a participatory democracy. An organizing approach to teaching is thus a pedagogical- and curriculum-aligned form of youth organizing that

- give[s] voice to students by affirming their passions and concerns and connecting them to outlets for solving problems they care about;
- help[s] students understand the usefulness of knowledge and learning because they apply this knowledge;
- strengthen[s] students' analytic ability by helping them think critically about their interpretative framework [or lens];^[6]
- help[s] students become more powerful actors in the world (Sandro, p. 48).

Teaching and Organizing for the Common Good

For Dewey, the scientific method of problem solving exemplifies the way we think when we are making intelligent decisions about what to do as a whole society as well as what to do as classroom and community groups. He saw that "the values inherent in the scientific process—willingness to constantly test beliefs, openness to alternative ideas, and systematic analysis" (Oakes & Rogers, p. 37), "point the way to the measures and policies by means of which a better social order can be brought into existence" (Dewey, 1938, p. 81). He believed that public dialogue in the process of group problem solving "forces a recognition that there are common interests [and] brings about some clarification of what they are" (Oakes & Rogers, p. 37). The scientific method thus allows "human beings to direct their common life intelligently" and to engage in "large scale social planning" (Dewey, 1938, p. 81) for "the well-being of the whole," the common good, and a true democracy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005).^[7]

"One of *the preconditions* of a true democracy," according to Sandro, "is a decrease in massive inequalities that are seen to lead to vast differences in political power by allowing the economically powerful to disproportionately influence the modern *political* rules of the game" (Sandro, p. 44; emphasis in original.) Forefronting issues of social relationships embedded in academic subjects illuminates power inequities and lays the foundation for analysis of the social and economic structure, analysis necessary to understand how the inequitable political system is kept in place. Structural analysis also allows the conversation about reform to move to the state and national level where government distributive policy decisions are key to changes that can improve lives at the local level (Sandro; Anyon, 2005).

Employment, minimum wage, trade, and tax policies are examples of distributive decisions made at the national level that are major contributors to the hierarchical structure of social and economic relations. Such policies can steepen or flatten the social pyramid by increasing or decreasing the distance between those at the top and those at the bottom through tax cuts or tax hikes and lower or higher minimum wage laws. Connecting public education to the public good means providing students with the powerful education that gives them the means to demand changes in the government's education and economic policies that negatively impact their lives. Knowing that federal policy decisions can determine how many jobs are available (Stricker, 2007) is an example of the sort of economic literacy included in a powerful education alongside the academic knowledge and skills that prepare for those jobs and for cultural participation.

According to Sandro, structural analysis "should be part of education for citizenship and democracy" (p. 51). It helps make clear that solving the problems associated with educating the children of under-resourced families requires addressing economic as well as education policies. There are many barriers, however, to implementing an organizing version of education that includes structural understanding. Classrooms today are overly focused on competition and individual

achievement. The terms *common good* and *collective self-interest* are seldom heard. The false promise of meritocracy is too little understood. The impact of poverty is too devastating. And there is little doubt that an organizing pedagogy that illuminates the social- power relations in the production and distribution questions Dewey saw embedded in academic curricula will be seen as *political*.

Equally political, however, is the school's traditional opposition to changes to the *status quo*. If all citizens are to know their rights and how to attain and maintain them, we need an organizing pedagogy that welcomes changes in the *status quo* and integrates the necessary elements of a powerful education by

- identifying students' shared interests through building community and critical consciousness;
- defining the group's collective self-interest in a problem the group wants to solve;
- using group inquiry to collect and analyze data to understand the problem;
- connecting the curriculum to issues of social-power relations through questions of production and distribution;
- understanding the history and the larger structural aspects of the problem;
- engaging in collective action and reflecting on the action taken;
- restating the problem, taking in broader and broader democratic ends that enlarge the collective self-interest and encompass what Dewey called "the intelligent ordering of social relations" (Dewey, 1938, p. 81).

How Will Teachers Become Organizing Pedagogues?

Dewey came to understand, beginning in the 1920s, that "evolutionary social change through education" was unlikely to produce "egalitarian social relationships" due to "new forms of mass communication [that] undermine public intelligence" (Oakes & Rogers, 2006, p. 36). Realizing the common good is not a matter of reasoning or educating our way to it; collective action is also required to address class-based power differences. Group inquiry, therefore, must always be scaled up to the level of structural analysis so that in planning collective action, the common good is always in view. Alinsky and Freire were more explicit than Dewey about ways of helping oppressed groups see how their oppression was related to the class structure. Dewey's ongoing support for organized labor, however, tells us that he also saw the need to organize collectively for democratic social change.

Organizing "Alliances in Sympathy and Action"

Eighty years ago, Dewey recognized the evils of the control of public education by corporate elites who do not send their children to public schools. He urged teachers to form "alliances in sympathy and action" with other workers, many of whom were parents of school children. Teachers, he said, must remove "the illusion many of them have entertained—that their vocational interests are so distinctive, so separated from that of other wage earners and salaried persons as to justify them in an attitude of aloofness." They must see there is an identity of interest between educators and other "genuine producers of social necessities," all of whom are disadvantaged by the "chaotic and inequitable economic order of society" (Dewey, 1933b, pp. 131-32).

According to Dewey, alliances with parents and workers would also help teachers overcome their economic illiteracy, which is caused by remoteness "from the mass of people upon whom the disordered economic scheme weighs most heavily" (Dewey, 1933b, p. 133). Only "practical association with other workers ... will create common bonds and exchange of experiences and ideas" that can lead to "a common practical effort" (Dewey, 1933b, p. 134) to take control of the schools from powerful elites. Only alliances of teachers, parent/workers, students, and community activists today have the power to challenge scripted curricula and cut-backs in resources that are laying waste to our public schools.

Parents and activists who participate in community organizing actions for education change, and/or are members of labor unions, are a powerful source of support for an organizing approach to teaching. They know first-hand the benefits and the power of collective action. They will support teachers who incorporate group-inquiry and problem-solving approaches to learning into their academic subjects when they understand that an organizing pedagogy complements their experience of

power in community and labor organizing. Parents and community and union activists can also provide valuable collaborative assistance in classrooms, sharing organizing skills and strategies for building community groups and identifying winnable issues students care about.

Participating in Progressive Teacher Unions

Dewey, who held membership card #1 in the Teachers Union in New York City, saw unions as a positive vehicle for teachers to increase their power in education policy decision-making (Dewey, 1933a). Today's social-justice teachers unions would fit nicely with Dewey's vision of teachers, workers, community activists, and parents collaborating to win social rights and the resources public education needs to fulfill its obligations to a democratic society. The 1994 statement on Social Justice Unionism, reprinted in *Rethinking Teachers Unions* (Peterson & Charney, 1999), continues to urge teacher-unionists to work with community organizers to seek educational, economic, and social justice (Peterson, 2006).

Whitehome (2009), writing for a teachers union reform group in Philadelphia, sees "the [teachers] union mission as part of the broader struggle for racial equality, peace, and a more democratic society.... Class solidarity, not the narrow economic interests of one group of workers, is the defining idea of this brand of unionism." In New York City, two groups of public school educators, New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE) and Teachers Unite, have joined forces to demand "that our union [United Federation of Teachers] stand for educational justice and win social justice demands for low income and working communities of NYC...by establishing collaborating relationships with community organizations fighting for meaningful social change" (Teachers Unite, 2010).

The opportunities suggested here for teachers to become organizing pedagogues by linking with parents, workers, social justice unions, and community organizers hold promise for those individuals inclined to pursue new interests and transform their classrooms accordingly. They represent the experiential approach Anyon (2005) suggested as a way to engage teachers in social-movement organizing. Individuals who simply join a letter-writing campaign or attend a demonstration, she says, are more likely to become actively engaged in social-justice organizing than those who never have had a collective action experience.

Preparation Through Teacher Education

More promising for larger-scale preparation of organizing pedagogues are the teacher education programs in institutions of higher education. A growing number of faculty and graduate students associated with these programs have published research on the benefits of external-education organizing for equitable education reform. One indication of the strength of this new interest is the 2007 establishment of the American Education Research Association (AERA) Special Interest Group (SIG), "Grassroots Community and Youth Organizing" housed at the Annenberg Institute, which offers a platform for scholars to collaborate "to advance research and practice in education organizing and further equity in the education system" (www.annenberginstitute.org/AERA/).

Developing model teacher education programs that foster an organizing approach to teaching and learning could be the next step toward realizing the education equity that progressive educators seek. It can begin by refocusing courses in curriculum and instruction from methods of covering the required content, to preparing teachers to design curricula that address social-power relations through group-inquiry and problem-solving methods of teaching and learning. Teachers need to be prepared to teach their students how electricity is produced AND the social-justice implications of its production and distribution.

Developing courses that prepare teachers to be organizing pedagogues is a major challenge. Patrick Finn and I took a few tentative steps in this direction in the Grassroots Organizing course we designed and taught in the Teacher Education Program at Antioch University, Los Angeles from 2007 to 2009 (M. Finn, 2009). Our goal was to provide our students an understanding of the steps involved in organizing to solve a problem they cared about. Inquiry groups formed around shared concerns involving such topics as lack of teacher input in selecting professional development experiences; inequity in distribution of arts education; testing's influence on teaching methods; lack of parental participation; the role of textbook companies in mandating scripted curricula; the teachers unions' role in pushing back against testing and mandated curriculum, and the negative impact on teachers' autonomy of the "literacy police," school staff assigned to patrol classrooms to see that the scripted lessons are being taught.

Students worked through the problem-solving/organizing steps up to the point of implementing proposed actions but were frustrated by lack of time to take the action steps before the semester ended. An opportunity to participate in community- or labor-organizing activities would also have enhanced the class experience. The biggest problem, seen in retrospect, however, was the lack of connection to the curriculum and instruction methods courses the students were taking at the

same time. An ideal preparation for an organizing approach to teaching will include the following:

- a foundation course (such as ours at Antioch) in which students study education reform literature and theory while conducting group inquiry to solve a problem in their collective self-interest;
- links between such a foundation course and methods courses where students develop group inquiry units of study for their classroom that highlight the social-justice relations inherent in academic subjects;
- a practicum with union-, community-, and/or parent-activist groups that are organizing for educational and social justice.

Faculty in institutions of higher education who are members of the AERA Grassroots Community and Youth Organizing Special Interest Group (SIG), in collaboration with education and community organizers with whom they have worked over the past decade and more, are in the ideal position to design and promote such model programs. In addition, collaboration among professional educators in the Grassroots Community and Youth Organizing SIG and those in AERA’s Teacher’s Work/Teachers Unions SIG, could also strengthen the possibility of filling classrooms with organizing pedagogues by incorporating preparation for participation in teachers unions into their teacher preparation programs.

The two major teachers unions combined, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), comprised the largest public-sector union in the country in 2008,^[8] giving educators vast potential for contributing to the common good. A majority of students in teacher-preparation programs will become members of one of these unions,^[9] yet preparation for the responsibilities of democratic union membership in their teaching careers receives virtually no attention in most teacher-education programs. Collaboration among progressive educators in the two AERA SIGS that focus on organizing would be a major step forward for social, educational, and economic justice.^[10]

Conclusions

The question I have addressed in this paper is, How do we prepare future citizens to demand full citizenship rights—civil, political, and social—so all are enabled to participate equitably in the economy and the shared culture? The answer I have proposed is that we educate students in their collective self-interest by preparing teachers to be organizing pedagogues whose approaches to teaching and learning are compatible with what cognitive science has discovered about how the brain learns. These critical, experiential, powerful education approaches are found in both the group-inquiry/problem-solving pedagogy of Deweyan progressive educators and the community- and labor-movement organizing methodologies of Alinsky’s followers.

Combining these two approaches in an organizing pedagogy to provide all students a powerful education requires a new collaboration among educators and community members, one that builds on the collective action skills of parents and others involved in community and labor organizing. Such collaboration moves education organizing beyond demands for input in policy decision-making, to hands-on participation in creating democratic, participatory classrooms and schools. Finding solutions to educational and economic problems, Dewey said, must be done by people who recognize their “identity of interest” and “who understand one another and sympathize with one another” (Dewey, 1933b, p. 389). When educators form “alliances in sympathy and action” with the members of the community they serve, new opportunities arise to design curricula and activities that support social-rights organizing and that help us reconstruct our common schools, restore our support for the common good, and redeem our democracy.

Appendix: Bibliographic Note on Education Organizing

Organizing for education reform has gained considerable momentum since the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University published its report on “parent engagement in public education” (Annenberg Institute on Public Engagement for Public Education, 1998). The report highlighted examples of parent engagement, such as the citizen’s group organized by BUILD, a community organization in Baltimore in the tradition of Saul Alinsky (1946, 1971). The parent originator of MOM (Mothers on the Move), a non-Alinsky organizing group in the Bronx, appeared in a video that accompanied the report.

During the same period, the Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform was conducting research and supporting school reform in nine cities across the U.S. (Gold, Simon & Brown, 2002). The Campaign also worked with ACORN to

organize parent participants in the Local School Council movement in Chicago that gave parents control of the schools, for a time. Cross-City speakers brought their message to Buffalo in 1997. The event resulted in a new parent organization that sought similar parent input in the Buffalo schools with support of the Urban Education Institute (Johnson, Carter & Finn, 2011).

During the 1990s, Mediratta and Fruchter at New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy also surveyed parent-engagement projects. Their research began in 1994 when NYC had only three such groups. Their 2001 report, however, included information about 66 education organizing groups they uncovered in the eight cities they surveyed (Mediratta & Fruchter, 2001). Eight community organizing groups linked to education reform were reported by Mediratta (2004). Reports of research on education organizing after a move to the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University in 2006 are included in Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister (2010).

Shirley (1997, 2002) and Warren (2001) looked in-depth at the Alinsky-heritage Industrial Area Foundation (IAF) organizing in several cities in the Southwest that included school reform in the community's list of demands for increased citizen input into local and state policy decision-making. Shirley (2005) described how he used his research in Texas to integrate opportunities for teacher candidates to participate in parent organizing in his teacher education course at Boston College. Warren included what he learned from the IAF groups he researched into a course in organizing that he has taught in the graduate school of education at Harvard University. Warren's (2003) course syllabus is a compendium of resources on education organizing

Oakes and Rogers (2006) described the organizing they engaged in when it became apparent that the school reforms initiated in the University of California at Los Angeles' Futures Project and other reform efforts could not be sustained without additional resources and outside pressure. In this example, the research and technical resources of the university were put at the disposal of the state-wide coalition of community-organizing groups that argued in *Williams vs. The State of California*, that the State was required to provide all students with equal access to the fundamental tools they needed to learn—qualified teachers, adequate materials, and safe schools. The plaintiffs succeeded in winning significant concessions in 2004 when Governor Schwarzenegger decided to settle the case (Oakes & Rogers, pp 151-152).

Most recently, Su (2009) has identified differences in what she describes as the “toolkits” of four education-organizing groups in the Bronx. Two of the groups are identified as following an Alinsky-heritage focus on the structure of the organization, while the two Freirean groups put more effort and resources into developing leadership skills among the membership. These findings further explain Oakes and Rogers' decision in the Futures Project to follow the model of organizing that highlights leadership development which they see is the model most compatible with Dewey's public inquiry (M. Finn, 2009).

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Notes

[1] President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed something similar to Marshall's call for social rights in his 1944 State of the Union address, referring to his proposal as the need for a "Second Bill of Rights." FDR's list included the right to a useful

and remunerative job; to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation; of every family to decent homes, medical care and to enjoy good health; to protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment; “And finally, a good education” (<http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/011144.html>).

[2] While Great Britain and most of Western Europe moved forward with plans to extend social rights to their citizens after WWII, the proposal in the United States seems to have died with FDR. Kennedy (2004) attributes the failure to gain social rights for all to “several distinctive conditions [in the U.S.], including the absence of a working-class political party, the persistence of largely delusional expectations of social mobility, ... tensions along the racial and ethnic frontiers that have long seamed American society,” as well as the “pernicious individualism ... that runs deep in American culture.”

[3] Sousa’s (2010) term for the scientific area of study that overlaps psychology, neuroscience, and pedagogy.

[4] Problem solving, as early progressives and socialists applied it to education, sought to develop critical thinking and critical social understandings that were not to be confused with “the mental gymnastics of solving puzzles” (Teitelbaum, 1994, p. 202).

[5] An example of *cutting a winnable issue* is our experience of organizing parents in an urban community in the rust belt Northeast (P. Finn, Johnson & M. Finn, 2005). In laying out various issues parents might want to organize around, we presented the results of a survey of the educational concerns of parents in the district. Several concerns centered on school policies related to curriculum and testing. The issue our parents chose to consider centered on the school cafeteria. Their children did not like the school’s macaroni and cheese. The parents did the research, took their demands to the cafeteria manager, and got the menu changed—to their delight. They were now ready to consider issues related to busing and recess, and eventually, we hoped, curriculum and methods of teaching, issues of greater significance in getting their children the powerful education they need to guarantee their social rights.

[6] An interpretative framework (or lens) is a critical-thinking tool associated with reflecting on one’s interpretation of an experience by asking why one sees an event a particular way, and how those with other interpretative frameworks might see it differently, e.g., powerful vs. powerless; wealthy vs. poor; male vs. female, etc.

[7] Dewey believed that “men [sic] are not isolated non-social atoms, but are men [sic] only when in intrinsic relations’ to one another” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, citing ‘The Ethics of Democracy’, *EW1*, 231-2) and therefore he opposed the individualism of traditional liberalism. As a biographer summarizes Dewey’s New Liberal perspective: “Individuals can only be sustained where social life [is] understood as an organism in which the well-being of each part [is] tied to the well-being of the whole” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

[8] The National Education Association (NEA) had 3.2 million members and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) had 856,000 members in 2010 (Edwards, 2010).

[9] Seventy percent of teachers today are unionized (Coulson, 2010).

[10] There is also a role for organized labor in the promotion of an organizing approach to teaching. As the Education and Labor Collaborative (ELC) puts it, “Imagine how much easier and effective the work of unionists would be if a generation of children of working families graduated from high school with an understanding of their right and duty to be heard, the power of joining together in common cause, and the skill to speak on their own behalf. And imagine how much easier the work of teachers would be if, through unionization, the lives of working families could be improved and the resources that are needed to support their children’s education were widely available.” ELC urges progressive unionists to collaborate with progressive teacher educators “to develop teacher education programs that prepare teachers to infuse into their classroom teaching a knowledge and understanding of the [labor movement] ... and to encourage active participation in organizing campaigns to increase the power and resources of working families” (organizingthecurriculum.org/aboutus.aspx; also see Benin, Finn, M., et al., 2010.)