

Community Schools in The National Context: The Social and Cultural Impact of Educational Reform Movements on American Rural Schools

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how historical influences have transformed community schools, both rural and urban, through the decades. The social and cultural impacts of educational reform movements and how they have affected rural schools is examined, with emphasis being placed on the importance of understanding the various roles a school holds in a rural community.

INTRODUCTION

Many historians and social scientists have observed and written about how rural, agriculturally based, and locally oriented social and political institutions in the U.S. have been transformed during the past century and a half into something quite different (e.g., Cremin, 1977; Perkinson, 1976; Collins, 1979). Like transformations in the American economy, the family, the church, health care delivery systems, etc., there have also been dramatic changes in the ideology of schooling, its curriculum, and organization. Specifically, since American education was historically just as decentralized as many of our other social institutions, the story about how twentieth century schooling practices have emerged into a "system" to fit patterns approximating more modern economic and social systems has been a complex, interesting and occasionally painful one for various American communities. And this is particularly true for rural communities whose economic transformation has not kept pace with those of the larger nation; for it is in just these locations where both the human costs of social change, as well as some of its advantages stand forth in full relief.

What follows is an attempt to sort out the political, social, and economic variables that have historically played a role in rural resistance to educational reform; and complex nature of these variables make it quite clear that rural school "reform" is more than a technical exercise.

Modern forms of production and consumption frequently precede changes in existing political and social institutions; and just as frequently, resistance to the emerging logic underlying economic change is more pronounced in those communities where such changes appear less advantageous. Thus, for example, defenders of local schools have traditionally argued that local government (including school governance) is a cornerstone of American democracy; that local control of schools is an essential legacy of our heritage; and that the needs of local communities ought to be the focus of local schools. Meanwhile, the national ideology of contemporary schooling (i.e., what it means to be educated; what schooling "is good for;" who is competent to teach the children; how the state holds schools "accountable," etc.) has continuously changed and challenged "community based" arguments since the early nineteenth century. Thus, struggles over "traditional" vs. "modern" definitions of education (i.e.,

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who should get it; for how long; and toward what ends, etc.) have frequently been, and continue to be, contested between constituent groups in local communities and spokespersons for national (and now international) agendas.

For example, at the national level the new objective of education (which has actually been heard before) is increasingly championed as an essential component for "globalizing" our economy by "developing our human resources" for impersonal and far-flung "information age" occupations in an ever changing international economy (DeYoung, 1989). Defining adequately educated children as those prepared to work in an international, information age environment is a far cry from defining children as educated if they are able to read the bible, and thus foil Satan's design upon their souls. This latter objective, of course, was the first formal "community based" educational aim specified by a local government in the new world (Perkinson, 1976).

Americans like to talk about the impact of social change on traditional societies as if such topics only applied to other exotic, primitive and far away places. However, this essay suggests that such dynamics have great utility in explaining both the "evolution" of American society and its social institutions, as well as understanding where and how continued resistance to such trends can be seen. In an effort to outline how locally oriented educational institutions have continually been confronted, sometimes embattled, and usually altered by national schooling trends, we briefly trace several of the historical, cultural, and social themes involved in many rural school and community confrontations with national education reform movements. Importantly, we will argue, the seeds of current local versus national schooling issues (for example, over such topics as the "liberal" school curriculum and school consolidation) are rooted in the past. We intend to demonstrate the utility of analyzing historical developments in order to come to grips with many, if not most, contemporary rural education issues and debates.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Schooling in the U.S. before the Civil War was at best a voluntary and haphazard undertaking, with a variety of different educational experiences present in various regions of the country. For the most part, educational settings were informally arranged, and educational activities were orchestrated by families and communities with shared religious orientations. The few children who were formally educated outside of the family or the church during the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries primarily attended private academies. And these too were typically subsidized by wealthy families specifically for their own children, in cooperation with various sorts of denominational support (Cremin, 1977; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Before the Civil War, almost all educational undertakings were oriented toward creating a pious and God-fearing citizenry among the common folk, and most school curricula for colonial children were dominated by Protestant teachings. Education for occupational mobility was available for only a select few. Building good character for farm children and apprenticeship opportunities for artisans and future merchants were the accepted norm for "career" preparation of adults.

Yet, as meager as such schooling opportunities were by contemporary standards in the Northeast and Middle Atlantic states, it is clearly the case that educational opportunities for children in the South and on the western frontier were far fewer and less well developed. In the South, large plantation owners did in fact provide tutorial services for their own children, but for the growing slave population, disseminating the skill to read and write was legally forbidden. And, of course, the civilizing influences of established churches on the frontier continued to be luxuries in typically isolated demographic contexts which hampered the systematic provision of "services" sometimes available in more civilized locales of the original thirteen colonies.

In general, two social and demographic factors appear related to the popularity of the common school movement which became significant by the 1830s and 1840s. On the one hand, many leaders of the new nation were convinced that civic participation had to be fostered in America, and that such participation required systematic instruction in democracy and democratic thought. No longer, argued some, could voluntary denominational efforts at instilling Protestant piety into future Americans serve as a "system" of education (Cremin, 1977; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

It is significant that Massachusetts became the first state to create a centralized system of public instruction. Boston received thousands of Irish immigrants yearly in the late 1830s and early 1840s. The Irish, of course, were Roman Catholics and the acceptance of the common school concept coincided with the growth of anti-Catholic sentiment, symbolized by the spread of the American party and Know-Nothingism. Thus, it was during this period when the possibilities of systematic instruction in the requirements of American citizenship began to gain acceptance as an educational ideal.

Symbolizing an emerging concern for the national benefits of formal schooling, the Northwest Ordinance

of 1787 mandated (among other things) that each new state to join the Union would have to dedicate specific properties (or proceeds from the sale of state properties) to locally defined schooling efforts. Frequently, this federal initiative established subsidies for previously volunteer or subscription schools originated at the community level. Yet, because this legislation helped to foster the notion that government could or should intervene in the private affairs of citizens, and because in a number of states lands put up for sale under terms of the Ordinance were frequently already occupied by "squatters," early tensions between some rural communities and national development trends are probably traceable back at least this far (DeYoung, 1991).

On the other hand, while the Northwest Ordinance (and similar initiatives sponsored by many frontier states) helped to subsidize some local and community schools throughout the rural U.S., developments in America's growing urban areas set into motion important dynamics that would soon undercut even these voluntary and community based educational experiments found in the countryside. Specifically, many relatively stable village and small town environments in the Northeast were substantially transformed in the decades between 1840 and 1860 by the influx of former rural citizens and new immigrants seeking employment opportunities made available by the industrial revolution.

Between 1840 and 1860, the number of "cities" containing more than 5,000 inhabitants increased sixfold; going from 22 in 1840 to 136 by 1860 (Tyack, 1974). Furthermore, the total number of Americans living in metropolitan areas in 1840 was fewer than seven hundred thousand; but by 1860, more than six million citizens lived in cities. Not surprisingly, state and local political leaders were greatly alarmed by such a demographic transformation, and throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century institutionalizing various sorts of urban social services became a virtual passion of many civic leaders (Perkinson, 1976; Katz, 1971). Indeed, Orestes Brownson, a contemporary and critic of Horace Mann, argued that the system of public education put in place in Massachusetts was little more than "an arm of the general police" that served to keep "the rich secure in their possessions" (Rodriquez, 1990).

Public schools were an important institutional concern of urban school reformers who argued that systematic and simultaneous instruction in citizenship skills, English, patriotism, and good character traits had to be the cornerstone of urban schooling. Furthermore, it was believed by many urban school reformers of the mid and late nineteenth centuries that the voluntary and haphazard conditions perceived in surrounding rural

communities of the U.S. could not serve as institutional models for the "one best system."

In order to be successful, most city school advocates claimed, education had to be compulsory; teachers needed training and supervision; and the entire system required the direction of professional school administrators. None of these factors, it was claimed, described the decentralized, voluntarily attended, lay controlled and understaffed rural schools of the U.S. even where they did exist. And these observations were in essence correct, for many states had specifically encouraged the provision of education in rural locales by urging and partially subsidizing decentralized, voluntarily attended, lay controlled and minimally staffed institutions. Such rural schooling initiatives were frequently supported in state legislatures because many rural citizens remained skeptical throughout the nineteenth century of centralized government and compulsory education. And only by placing local citizens in charge of local schools could concerned state leaders insure any form of formal instruction in the countryside (McVey, 1949; Tyack, 1974; Cremin, 1977).

The common school concept was viewed as a solution to urban problems. Thus the progression of educational control moved outward from cities into the rural areas. Still, while it was generally agreed that rural neighborhoods ought to have common schools, how they were run was of little concern. Consequently, throughout most of the nineteenth century, schoolmen in small local districts had wide-ranging powers. The first break in this pattern occurred when city governments became convinced that uniform schooling experiences could not be achieved within local wards or neighborhoods composed of different ethnic groups and controlled by local political bosses. Thus, an important precedent was set: consolidating neighborhood schools into city-wide school districts under the direction of a city school board. Many began to wonder if this sort of centralization might be applied to the countryside as well.

The next significant school control reform occurred in many cities when school superintendents emerged as administrators and decision makers, rather than remaining as clerks for city school boards hard pressed to administer an increasingly overburdened school system. As the ideology of public schooling for participation in the national and metropolitan cultures became increasingly accepted, professional educators trained in school administration and leadership became the norm in many states. And, in states where industrialization occurred first and where city populations became significant, the city model of reorganizing local districts and professionalizing school leadership began

to be advocated at the state levels as well as at the metropolitan ones. Yet, even this transformation occurred relatively slowly in less industrial southern and western states, as relinquishing political control to experts and professionals was often resisted by rural residents. An angry trustee from rural Rock County, Wisconsin, wrote to the state superintendent in 1852 demanding to know why they were directed to keep a record of tardiness. He complained that "in large schools where pupils are entering at all hours, which they have an undeniable right to do, it is certainly a severe task, and injurious to the school for the Teacher to be obliged to drop all business and betake himself to his Register, in order to enter therein, every instance of tardiness" (Theobald, 1990b, 140; original emphasis). And, only as state superintendents began to have formal powers and the right to make rural schools accountable for state educational subsidies (typically after the turn of the twentieth century), were systematic pressures put on rural schools to conform to state guidelines. For example, bonus school funds were frequently granted to districts agreeing to make certain school improvements. In the early years of this century the installation of heating and ventilating equipment or plumbing systems were often required of districts eager to maximize state support. (Theobald, 1990b).

While state control and supervision of rural schools began to affect some educational operations in the Northeast by the late nineteenth century, rural schools on the western frontier and in the South lagged behind changes found in older communities in the east and north. Furthermore, southern and border states' entire state education systems were seriously affected by the Civil War and its aftermath. Not having urban based economies in the Midwest until (at the soonest) late in the nineteenth century made the claimed advantages of bureaucratized public instruction even harder to see on the frontier (Fuller, 1982; Theobald, 1990a).

In the South, rural whites typically perceived public education as charity institutions (or "pauper schools") when orchestrated by state governments, and therefore marginal farmers greatly resisted the stigma of being labeled poor by refusing to engage in "public" education. In perceiving public education as an intrusion on local community school control, many parts of the deep south, central Appalachia and the lower Midwest clearly resisted many national schooling initiatives emanating from urban centers as best they could (Fuller, 1982; Link, 1986).

In addition, the Civil War destroyed most of the agricultural economy of the South, thus making tax monies available for education a low priority in many

state legislatures. Public educational initiatives sponsored by reconstruction governments throughout the south were frequently ignored when possible, and the philanthropic efforts of various "Yankee" trusts and the Freedman's Bureau, caused many in these locales to view "public" schools as outposts of an occupying force. And, even when public schooling became socially acceptable in many southern states by the end of the nineteenth century, inequality of educational opportunity for blacks effectively excluded up to one-half of southern citizens of the U.S. (Perkinson, 1976; Link, 1986; Anderson, 1988).

Compulsory schooling for all children, paid for out of local and state taxes, instructed by credentialed teachers, supervised by career administrators, removed from lay community control, dedicated to Americanizing and providing character traits deemed desirable in an expanding urban economy for (primarily) the children of the urban poor and working class became the norm by which most metropolitan education was defined by the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, as child labor laws took hold in many urban centers, and as actual written and mathematical skills (rather than sound character traits or democratic values) became prerequisite for entry into many emerging large scale businesses, the press for further education beyond common schools captured the attention of various civic, professional and business groups (Katz, 1971; Perkinson, 1976; Trow, 1961).

A battle over the form and content of the secondary school curriculum in the U.S. occupied center stage among educators and the nation's civic leaders during the first several decades of the twentieth century. In essence, four separate "movements" were in contention over the curriculum and staffing of American schools during this period; none of which related well with traditional emphases of rural American institutions; and some were directly antithetical to existing norms of schools and communities in many rural settings (Kliebard, 1986).

One movement with designs upon the secondary school curriculum was begun by professors and administrators at universities who sought to make secondary schools preparatory to the university, and hoped to establish a primarily academic course of study for all Americans seeking education beyond the common school. A second and perhaps more powerful movement created in order to structure the curriculum of newly emerging high schools received its impetus from business groups such as the National Association of Manufacturers. In this view, the future of international trade was at stake, and industrial education similar to

that seen in Germany was seen as a desirable focus of urban high schools (Lazerson & Grub, 1974). As well, the powers behind this movement were convinced that streamlining school programs to make them more cost-effective and efficient was necessary to deal with geometrically escalating numbers of children in urban settings (Callahan, 1962).

The two other pedagogical movements popular among different groups in early twentieth century America involved various "scientific" perspectives. Few school leaders doubted the importance of scientific understanding as a guide to school improvement by the 1920s, even if the findings from such inquiries frequently contradicted each other. On the one hand, psychologists were convinced that somewhere in the divergent but emerging research on individual differences, developmental stages, inherited mental abilities, etc. there was an answer to how best to structure schooling experiences in accord with the different needs of children. In the extreme, various claimants of progressivism suggested that tradition, religion, and individual character training (the cornerstones of much rural education) were archaic remnants of a pre-scientific culture that stood in the way of "the new education."

While these four early twentieth century school reform groups typically found little common ground, interesting urban school directions were forged in the years before (and after) the great Depression which appear to have met some objectives of more than one. For example, under such slogans as "probable destiny" and "social efficiency," pupil placement programs were instituted that sought to locate and train students for occupational "slots" in emerging American industries. As the reader will note, such an emphasis depended on both a belief in the value of rational future planning and upon cost effectiveness. So too, the notion of comprehensive high schools, where both an industrial and pre-college curriculum could be taught in the same institution, appears to have reconciled the divergent interests of college presidents and business leaders (Kliebard, 1986; Trow, 1961; Ravitch, 1983).

Without specifically profiling the multiple education disputes, nor other curricular compromises of urban school reformers in the early twentieth century, it appears clearly the case that multiple school reform efforts of this period all pointed out problems or called for solutions either irrelevant or in opposition to policies and practices of most remaining rural schools. For example, while Collins (1979) argues that some colleges in the U.S. were strongly supported by small town leaders in the countryside, strong populist beliefs among other rural Americans no doubt engendered skepticism

over the desirability of defining rural secondary schools as feeders to even further education, paying additional taxes for their support, and accepting Carnegie Units as cornerstones of the rural high school curriculum. Which may help to explain why many rural high school attendance rates, even in twentieth century America, lagged behind those in metropolitan areas.

It is important to note that where local economies did enable the rise of a small town merchant and professional class, there were more positive perceptions about the utility of expanding the town high school. As in America's urban areas, it appears likely that rural elites were able to use local high schools to foster upward social mobility for their children (as did the urban middle class), but the limited evidence we have suggests that many farm children did not use rural high schools in this manner (Hollingshead, 1975; Theobald, 1990a).

Thus, many rural citizens probably viewed with some suspicion the two increasingly accepted curricular foci of metropolitan inspired secondary school: academic preparation (i.e., a concentration on foreign languages, philosophy, algebra, etc.) and training in "industrial arts." While there exist few discussions about which communities or regions of the U.S. more readily accepted the instrumentality of schooling for city occupations or advanced education, it seems likely that ready acceptance of this instrumental view of schooling depended on the perceived utility of such "training" for locally available occupations. And where local economies remained at "pre-modern" levels (e.g., in extractive industries and subsistence agriculture), local schools and communities were probably more reluctant to accept emerging instrumental views of schools and their possibilities.

The twentieth century transformation of education toward secular curricular content and scientific pedagogic assumptions also affected rural school and community relations. Many rural schools, for example, were closely related to local churches in the nineteenth century, especially in the South, Appalachia, and the Midwest (DeYoung, 1990; Link, 1986; Fuller, 1982). Furthermore, the common school movement was infused with Protestantism and given respectability outside of urban areas because it was linked to the national Sunday School movement of the early nineteenth century (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Yet, the liberal sentiments of many nineteenth century school reformers probably offended some of the more conservative church leaders in rural communities, and certainly the twentieth century scientific convictions and learnings of the various "progressive"

educational reformers conflicted with both the social and educational philosophies of many rural communities. For example, the 1925 Scopes trial took place over teachings in a biology class in rural Tennessee, and other state legislatures in the rural South and the Midwest saw battles in the 1920s and 1930s between rural legislators and representatives from metropolitan regions over teaching the theory of evolution in their local public high schools (Ginger, 1958; McVey, 1949).

The Country Life movement, begun by President Roosevelt's Country Life Commission in 1908, flourished briefly in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Its supporters were infused with enthusiasm for an agricultural way of life that was perceived as all too rapidly disappearing. Agreeing with some sentiments of many rural residents, Country Lifers (many of whom were from the city) believed that if the beauty of nature and the proud (but romanticized) notions of an agrarian society could be reinforced via institutions like the school, while at the same time the rural infrastructure could be enhanced (via electricity, roads and water projects), then fewer rural residents would abandon their farms for the "attractions" of city life.

Of course, the major factor undermining agriculture in rural areas was not the attractiveness of the city, but rather the mechanization of agriculture and development of national commodity distribution systems. Such developments both reduced rural farm labor requirements and forced former rural residents to seek work in off-farm occupations. Thus, most rural residents were pushed off their farms for economic reasons, not social ones. Yet, Country Lifers underestimated the power of market forces in their programs to stem the cityward flight of rural Americans.

Efforts to consolidate the smallest and most inefficient schools were frequently viewed as desirable by Country Lifers, and they greatly favored formally organizing community events. In many cases, of course, the inefficiency of small schools was not a prime concern of communities surrounding one and two room school houses, and certainly was not important enough to have the state government remove neighborhood children to some other location. Nor was formally establishing projects, groups, and timetables received enthusiastically in some rural locales; rather more traditional informal, spontaneous, and socially oriented functions remained the preference of many rural communities (Fuller, 1982; Theobald, 1990a).

In essence, the Country Life movement appears to have lost steam because many in the country remained continually confused about its intent, and why those from the city appeared to be leading it. Further-

more, other educators were convinced that country schools had little long term utility for the nation, as the future of America depended on its industrial and metropolitan future, not on its agrarian past (Cubberly, 1914). Even John Dewey, whose educational philosophy was frequently championed by Country Lifers in education, suggested that science, technology, and solving the problems of industrial life ought to be the primary aim of school reform for the twentieth century, not romantically calling for a return to pastoral values of the countryside.

Still, like the former one and two room schools before them, rural high schools increasingly became the focus of community social and sports activities throughout the twentieth century. In an era preceding television and movie houses, and in locales where competition between community churches was frequent, many rural high schools functioned to fill the social void created in early and mid twentieth century small town life. Rural high schools sponsored athletic teams, plays, parades, public dances, and sports club activities. Frequently, town identification appears to have been associated with the success of the local basketball, football, or baseball team; a success which became known statewide through annual state tournament activities. And just as frequently, it appears as though many high school PTAs ran and were encouraged to run many if not most of the non-instructional activities of rural high schools (Moss, 1980; Peshkin, 1978).

Other extra-local initiatives besides state schooling subsidies, recognized athletic activities, and federal Vo-Ag programs appear to have strengthened the status and prominence of rural high schools before the cold war period. For example, many Depression era programs like the Works Progress Administration and the National Youth Administration appear to have instituted community improvement projects in the countryside, and school building improvements appear to have been favorite New Deal projects throughout the nation (DeYoung, 1991). Later, efforts to recycle metals, grow vegetables, and sell savings bonds to help the war effort appear to have been targeted at many local communities through their rural high schools. Vo-Ag teachers in rural high schools, for example, appear to have been seen as important agents for teaching students and their parents in small towns about how to tend and harvest their "victory gardens" during WWII (Moss, 1980). Finally, continuing education opportunities for adults occasionally became attractive in some rural locales, and various "community education" advocates aggressively championed formally expanding the already multiple functions of rural high schools in the

1950s (Butterworth & Dawson, 1952; Olsen, 1954). Thus, under the sponsorship of local communities, state departments of education, state athletic associations, and various federal programs; small schools and especially small community high schools attained an important measure of status in rural America. Importantly, while curricular strength was not unimportant, the social and community based functions of such schools was perhaps the key to their acceptance and popularity in the countryside. As David Tyack argues:

During the twentieth century . . . the small-town high school, like its predecessor the one-room school, became "a new focus of community life and ritual." There residents came to social and athletic events, listened to debates and orations in which contestants recited speeches which they had brought ready-made for the occasion, and attended graduation ceremonies which became rites of passage into a wider world. As "symbols of community 'modernity,'" the town high schools gave local people the feeling that they had access to a mass society while they still enlisted local loyalties and integrated rural people in social networks. Thus they became institutions valued in themselves, quite apart from the goal of teaching students certain skills and knowledge (1974: 25-26, emphasis added).

The focus of educational reform in the U.S. during the past four decades has been upon maximizing the teaching of "skills and knowledge," required for an urban based national economy, while at the same time reducing costs. Thus, providing a cultural and social site for rural communities (which Tyack emphasizes above) has not concerned academically oriented professional educators. In fact, the data suggests that eliminating the identification of rural schools with rural community concerns became a favorite target of school reformers since the late 1950s.

Faced with growing pressures to become even more cost effective following the Depression, the number of school districts in the U.S. continued to decline between 1930 and 1980 from 128,00 to 16,000 districts. During the same period, the actual number of schools also declined from over 238,00 to 61,000; which is all the more surprising given the geometric explosion of school attendance figures in the U.S. throughout the twentieth century (USDE, 1984, p.62). Significantly, changes in both the national infrastructure and educational ideology brought about the possibility and per-

ceived desirability of these dramatic school consolidation figures.

While efficiency advocates had argued continuously during the first three decades of the twentieth century for school consolidation, many rural schools were still so isolated as to be impossible to close (DeYoung and Boyd, 1986; Sher and Tompkins, 1977). Yet, following WWII, state and federal highway building projects, and lower gasoline, rubber and automobile prices increasingly made transportation a cost effective "solution" to maintaining dozens and dozens of small one and two room schools in many rural school districts (Fuller, 1982; DeYoung and Boyd, 1986). Parenthetically, of course, the emerging era of the automobile and the trucking industry continued to undermine many local economies at just the same time.

Yet, the penetration of modern transportation systems and the increasing dependence on a modern cash economy (including the acceptance of cost-effectiveness as a rationale for institutional maintenance) were factors still less dominant in many more isolated rural American communities. Increasingly, for example, improving school physical structures to bring them into accord with state building codes required the replacement of local parent volunteer efforts with paid staffs. Simultaneously, of course, efforts at keeping maintenance costs down (by, for example, hiring fewer maintenance personnel) meant the desirability of fewer district schools on the part of administrators at the central office.

Not surprisingly, this cost-effective, modern logic conflicted (and still conflicts) with a logic of local community control. That is, as local communities accepted and became further enmeshed in a cash driven economy rather than one based on barter and exchange of services, they at the same time lost control of their ability to retain institutions they may originally have built and maintained. And this is particularly true in rural districts with comparatively less taxable property. Thus, most of the available historical and contemporary literature on rural school consolidation profiles state school boards and county superintendents cost-effectiveness arguments against local citizen groups more concerned about a school's location than about its "modern" amenities or curricular offerings (e.g., Peshkin, 1983; Dunne, 1977; DeYoung and Boyd, 1986).

While struggle and debate over ever expanding efforts to consolidate rural schools increased, an equally important assault on local and community school curricula was seen in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union, coupled with the failure of the U.S. to match this feat, ushered in a

new wave of school reform even more explicitly identifying children as "national resources" in the race for space and international preeminence. In particular, teachers and school administrators who were identified as "Progressives" (including advocates of "community schools") were vilified either as ineffective, or as known complicitors in the rise of socialism (Kliebard, 1986; Ravitch, 1983).

Whichever the interpretation, cold-war school reformers were convinced that national pride and leadership could only be facilitated if the community-based and liberal teachings of former educators could be replaced with an emphasis on a pre-college and scientific school curriculum: a curriculum only partially emphasized in smaller rural high schools.

The pressure to further consolidate remaining small high schools reached virtual crescendo proportions following Conant's (1959) analysis of the ills of American secondary education (Mason, 1972; Sher, 1987; Spring, 1990). Significantly, Conant was then president of Harvard University; and once again a spokesperson from both an urban setting and from higher education articulated a position very different from earlier rural viewpoints on the utility of advanced education.

In essence, Conant was one of many academics and emerging policy-makers convinced that the identification and training of a national pool of talent ought to be the aim of public education. And in his study of schools achieving academic "excellence," Conant argued that only high schools with at least one hundred students in each senior class could possibly qualify, as only a school of such size could offer enough college preparatory courses for advanced education.

One increasingly popular strategy for "improving" schooling in the 1960s was to follow Conant's suggestion and further consolidate small high schools with fewer than four or five hundred students. Importantly, and relevant to themes traced in this essay, the emerging conventional wisdom continued to champion school consolidation on both cost effectiveness and curricular grounds. In essence, the argument for large high schools was that community based education and secondary school programs with vocational agricultural emphases diverted youngsters away from more rigorous academic undertakings. Furthermore, it was claimed, school teachers themselves were weak academically. Attempting to provide primarily local career training, in even the best rural high schools, meant that advanced college preparatory courses were probably not available; likely existed in a climate that was not conducive to advanced academic instruction; and would

not urge local youth to develop their talents for careers in science and technology which were useable in distant labor markets (Ravitch, 1983; DeYoung, 1989).

SCHOOLS AND MODERNITY

Most of the preceding discussion has attempted to suggest important shifts in the form and content of American education during the past 150 years using a loosely historical rubric. Implicit to most of this discussion has been the suggestion that changing values and attitudes toward schooling have been an important category underlying the story of this educational transformation. Also, much of the previous discourse has suggested that forerunners of modernist perspectives on how rural schools should be organized and what they should teach either came from urban areas, or represented an emerging national consensus on the mission of public schooling.

Given the current national climate to reform public education by concentrating on curricular excellence, it is important to note that only three decades ago many sociologists and economists were celebrating the perceived strengths of modern American schooling. That is, since at least the 1960s and up until most recently, American economists and sociologists have been convinced that public schooling in the U.S. is responsible for both our high national Gross National Product and the modern values which are purported to underlay it.

The notion that public institutions ought to engage in the advanced training of local talent of jobs existing in far-flung communities is a "modern" one, where individuals are perceived as career oriented and in quest of comfortable "lifestyles" in cosmopolitan places. Such reasoning very clearly conflicts with older rural American notions of the importance of place, local and lifelong community interaction, local kinship attachments, and intergenerational stability (Perkinson, 1976; DeYoung, 1989).

Some "Human Capital Theorists" have been convinced that our modern schooling practices and emphases ought to be exported around the world as the model upon which other nations should develop their economies. Prominent sociologists like Talcott Parsons (1959) and Robert Dreeben (1968) articulated an interpretation of contemporary modern schools as functional to the larger American society in both curricular and values transmission. In much of this work, sociological interpretations of the personal requirements necessary for Americans to participate in modern mass

society were detailed, and these works articulated how contemporary education in the U.S. helped to foster the modern personality traits, values, and norms such authors found paramount.

Dreeben, in particular, gave a detailed presentation of how the modern American school system socialized children into an impersonal occupational world; dominated by individual independence, driven to achieve to external standards of excellence; subject to universalistic occupational performance criteria; and focused on constantly changing topics in which the rules for attention and reinforcement were contextually defined. Importantly, Dreeben argued that were it not for the modern school, dependence, ascription, particularism, and diffuseness (i.e., traditional and family norms) would underlay the socialization of American youth. For our purposes, most of these latter norms are frequently the ones which have been criticized by generations of educational reformers who have targeted "problems" of many rural schools; and they were explicitly identified by Dreeben and Parsons as inappropriate for modern nation building.

Taking functionalist sociologists one step further, modernity theorists of the 1960s and 1970s perceived the unfolding of human social life as one in the process of modernization, and one in which modern institutions played a crucial role. Social scientists who worked in this area claimed that the modern public school was one of the most important formal institutions for bringing about the individual modernity demanded for sociocultural and political progress. In addition to exposure to the form and content of formal schooling, other modernizing influences included the mass media, living in or near cities, and work in a factory or other complex organization (Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Black, 1966).

A representative working list of modern personality characteristics ostensibly related to individual modernity and contributed to by participation in formal schooling is available in works like those of Alex Inkeles and his colleagues (e.g., Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Inkeles & Holsinger, 1974). For example, Inkeles et. al. argue that "modern" individuals are (among other things): open to new experience; accepting and ready for social change; able to reflect on issues and form independent judgements; interested in acquiring information and facts; oriented toward the future as opposed to the past; have a sense of mastery over the environment; believe in the value of future planning; have an appreciation of technical skills; and have high educational and occupational aspirations.

According to those who argue for the utility of individual modernity perspectives, persons locked into

more traditional societies are typically less interested in new experiences; uninterested in social change; more likely to form and hold opinions based on the beliefs held by others in the tribe and or kinship systems; uninterested in acquiring knowledge for its own sake; value the past more than the future; are more fatalistic than optimistic regarding the human ability to control future events; place less value on occupational specialization and competence; and have low educational and occupational aspirations. Inkeles and his colleagues, in general, agreed with Dreeben and Parsons: the contemporary model American school represents a modern institution much concerned with, and effective in, helping children to transcend their personal and local community worlds along the way to full participation in modern American society.

For the most part, the combination of modern schooling practices, mass media influences, expanded occupational opportunities and proximity to metropolitan areas appears to have rendered moot what we have described as the contradictions between older traditional, decentralized, religious and agriculturally based lifestyles of rural America versus contemporary metropolitan American and what various sociologists and anthropologists have outlined as the norms and values it requires. Significantly, even though rural schooling practices and the perceived traditional lifestyles of their surrounding communities were frequently criticized for always being "behind the times," rural schools continuously been reformed during the twentieth century; and have apparently "successfully" socialized most rural children with the skills, norms, information and values required for modern metropolitan occupations and civic participation.

Migration patterns out of rural America slowed during the past several decades, even reversing temporarily during the early 1980s. Although 1990 census data reflect that outmigration is again occurring at a rapid rate, rural schools have not disappeared; and in fact almost half of all U.S. school districts can be classified as rural. Furthermore, even though rural school districts are typically smaller than metropolitan ones, and even though many of these rural districts lie close to metropolitan areas, between twenty and forty percent of American children currently attend schools classified as "rural" (Stephens & Perry, 1990).

The observation that rural schools continue to exist, however, is probably not the reason that recent scholarship on their occasionally difficult situations is available. Rather, in many cases state and federal policies have increasingly placed higher accountability standards on such districts at the same time that local

ability to pay for increased program support has eroded (Stephens & Perry, 1990; State Research Associates, 1988). In other words, school reform remains ongoing; and resistance to the ever encompassing logics of curricular instrumentality and cost effectiveness remain visible in some rural communities where other interpretations of the place of local schools is still alive. Furthermore, in some rural locales, poverty and isolation make school reform issues and concerns increasingly problematic. That is, in rural communities where the structure of opportunities and the beliefs of local community leaders appear consistent with modern views on the instrumental utility of schooling, resistance to the twentieth century school reform appears relatively mild. Yet, poor and isolated communities and school systems are frequently sites of debate and concern over modern schooling practices; and battles to reform such rural schools often have multiple dimensions.

CONCLUSION

Most educators and academics interested in the plight of rural schools in the U.S. assume that understanding and "improving" rural educational opportunities rests primarily on providing educational equity (e.g. Sher & Tompkins, 1977; Stephens and Perry, 1990). In many respects this is true, for as school fiscal and academic accountability mandates increase, most rural school systems are unable to pay for increased costs from local resources. Particularly in depressed or isolated communities (or counties), local bond issues and efforts to expand required educational services is difficult when local property and use taxes are all that is available to generate additional income (DeYoung, 1991; WVDE, 1989; VEA, 1990).

However, as we have taken great pains to point out in this essay, an important and related complexity to understanding the "problems" of rural education in the U.S. has to do with understanding, addressing, and building upon some of the decentralized cultural factors that remain important in many rural American communities. The "data" suggests that all rural communities have not disappeared, and that many of their needs have not been addressed by national education reforms insensitive to their existence. The degree of rural school reform (and resistance to such reforms) may also be explained by how and when the communities they are part of have been affected by twentieth century economic, political, and social developments; and relatively, to what extent local communities have been drawn into the national culture.

Historically, one room schools, small graded schools, and later community high schools provided social activities, meeting places, venues for celebrating local rites of passage, and opportunities to exercise social solidarity in the face of larger impersonal organizations in other regions, other states, or the nation at large. Typically, underlying values in small and decentralized rural American communities emphasized religious piety, family and community importance, intergenerational stability, and attachments to place.

Continuing throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pressures to reform the mission of local schools have explicitly emphasized cognitive skill training within a cost/effective setting. At the same time, of course, emphasizing how increased knowledge could lead to better occupational possibilities outside of local communities implicitly undermined more traditional "teachings" of families and, frequently, churches in rural America.

While localist, Protestant, agricultural, place bound, and kinship oriented values have been replaced in many rural schools, in other places they have not. We submit, places where older traditions and values openly conflict with national and modern ones are those places with long-term histories of economic depression and/or isolated communities only partially reached by other socialization institutions of the national culture. Contrary to the opinions of some, the tragedy of rural schools in such places is not just financial, it is also cultural: for many depressed and isolated communities and schools are surrounded by images of a national culture only marginally available to them; and a local culture which relies on a national economic and political structure which views them as archaic and outdated.

If rural school improvement is to be seriously pursued, particularly in depressed or isolated communities, more in-depth understandings of the cultural and social functions of schools in such places needs to be seen in those who would improve (not just "reform") them.

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