The Quiet Reform in American Education: Policy Issues and Conceptual Challenges in the School-to-Work Transition

ROBERT L. CROWSON, KENNETH K. WONG, and AHMET AYPAY

A quiet reform has gone almost unnoticed in the many policy debates about improving America's schools. Labeled "The School-to-Work Revolution" by Lynn Olson and others, this little-noticed movement offers, at last, a solution to the constraining historical dualism between academic and vocational training. There is a new enthusiasm for and focus on the preparation-for-employment side of American secondary education. However, although reinvigorated, the school-to-work revolution remains heavily threatened by our nation's reputation for low-quality vocational education and by some long-unresolved tensions with regard to social mobility and political control. This article discusses the need for additional theorizing about and policy-minded attention to the revolution and observes that valuable opportunities for improvement in job preparation are at hand in an increased national interest in economic development.

POLICY DEBATES rage, as active as ever, about how best to teach reading, vouchers, bilingualism, national standards and national assessment, the overall quality of American education, school desegregation (particularly the retreat therefrom), and the promise/performance of charter schooling. It is interesting that there has been much less debate and hardly any public discussion of a remarkable policy consensus with regard to that which Lynn Olson (1997) labeled "The School-to-Work Revolution." To be sure, the revolution

EDUCATIONAL POLICY, Vol. 14 No. 2, May 2000 241-258
© 2000 Corwin Press, Inc.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

is not without opposition and warnings of a shaky future, but the opposition (no less than the policy's promotion) thus far has been rather muted, and there has been little success in waylaying the reform (see Zehr, 1999). Despite some tensions, it would appear that agreement continues to outweigh conflict at present in discussions of a policy direction (and policy implementation) for schooling toward employment (see Berryman & Bailey, 1992).

Why is there a modicum of policy consensus and indeed a quiet reform in the school-to-work arena when so much of the American reform movement remains undecided? What are the distinct implications for theory, policy, and administrative practice from this relatively unnoticed (at least publicly unnoticed) reform movement—and what are its chances (as a fairly quiet revolution) for achieving a measure of lasting change? What intriguing policy issues and opportunities, yet barely identified and little discussed, can be gleaned from this silent reform and its struggle toward widespread acceptability and implementation?

BACKGROUND

Much credit, in the development of a consensus on the school-to-work transition, goes to the long-term work of the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Family, Work, and Citizenship (see Melaville, 1994; Olson, 1997). The work of Ray Marshall and Marc Tucker (1992) in *Thinking for a Living* also played a critical role. More directly, policy legitimization and support have arisen from the 1990 amendments to the Carl Perkins Act funding vocational education, and, later, the provisions of the School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994. There has also been an outpouring of specific plans and designs endeavoring to move the school-to-work consensus toward full implementation. Two exemplars are a report of the Council of the Great City Schools (1997) labeled *A Marshall Plan for Urban Schools* and a set of Chicago Public Schools' (1997, 1998) policy documents on high school redesign. The common policy ingredient in each of the plans and the heart of the school-to-work consensus has been a set of provisions designed to dissolve the historical dualism between vocational and academic learning in secondary education. *A Marshall Plan for Urban Schools*, for example, made no mention of vocational education, emphasized the importance of raising academic expectations for all students, called for all students to explore "the world of work," and placed a direct "call to action" to the business community to partner with the public schools. The Chicago high school redesign plan reflects that district's comprehensive efforts to transform high schools through uniform academic standards and the creation of more career and academic specialty programs.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The central thrust in this and similar documents, then, is a movement away from old-style, vocational tracking toward high academic standards for all students, school-to-work learning for all students, and a new sense of connections to business and employment environments (see Arum & Shavit, 1995; Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997; Cohen, 1997; Hull, 1997; Muller & Shavit, 1998). It is a policy compromise between academicism and vocationalism (dissolving the dualism) and offers a new alliance with business.

The school-to-work revolution also seems to fit well into a recognition that the economic well-being of the entire community is fundamentally connected to the viability of public schooling (see Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999; Fainstein & Markusen, 1996; Kerchner, 1997; Weeres & Kerchner, 1996). Schooling trends provide clues to how the future labor force will differ from the existing, predominately White work force. First, future workers will be increasingly diverse and will be graduates of the public schools. Second, urban schools need to be restructured to produce a high-quality, diverse work force. The economics of it all are increasingly well appreciated by urban mayors, who in growing numbers are either pursuing or accomplishing takeovers of the school district bureaucracies in their respective cities (see Hess, 1999; Wong & Jain, 1999).

With business and political ties, the quiet revolution in preparation for work could catch on well in secondary education across the nation. It is a reform movement that just as easily could quietly wither and disappear. There should be at least some optimism, though, "simply associated with time," observes W. Norton Grubb (1997, p. 180). Efforts to integrate academic and vocational education are only about a decade old—a short time for a change of such magnitude. With welfare reform and a strong economy, there is currently an encouraging upswing in concern for the future of the non–college bound and a renewed interest generally in a better understanding of the school-to-employment transition.

Nevertheless, this quiet reform has been only marginally implemented to date and only marginally engaged in the theory building, the pedagogical transformations, and the added political/policy strategizing that may be needed for effective and lasting implementation. Blustein, Phillips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg, and Roarke (1997) warn of some danger, in that both the scholarly and the practitioner communities have sufficiently neglected work-bound youth over the years to have produced little basic understanding of key constructs and assumptions in the school-to-work domain of inquiry. In a discussion to be returned to later in this article, it is particularly "the neglect of pedagogy," argues Grubb (1997, p. 162), that may be the fatal element.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

A BIT OF HISTORICAL BAGGAGE

If quiet is to become lasting, it may be necessary to build both theory and practice around the full understanding of a troubled policy past in the school-to-work arena of public education. Gary Orfield (1997) reminds us that our nation has long valued education as "preparation for work and getting a better job and life opportunities" (p. 3). He goes on to observe, however, using a quote drawn from Robert Glover and Ray Marshall (cited in Orfield, 1997), that "America has the worst approach to the school-to-work transition of any industrialized nation" (p. 8). In his own research in the state of Indiana, Orfield found schools across the state to be "profoundly deficient in all critical respects in providing a reasonably clear and effective path toward work for the substantial majority of their students who will not receive college degrees" (p. 4). "Students not going on to college in Indiana," added Orfield, "need the most help, experience the most risks in the job market, have the worst information, and tend to receive the least assistance" (p. 28).

Indiana is not an outlier. A 1991 report by the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) noted that about one half of U.S. youth do not go on college, and only about 20% of U.S. youth complete a 4-year college degree (GAO, 1991, p. 2). For those noncollege individuals attempting to enter the workforce in the United States, there is little assistance: "Many flounder in the labor markets . . . jobless or obtaining jobs with few opportunities for advancement" (GAO, 1991, p. 2).

Despite a robust economy, unemployment and underemployment remain high for persons just out of secondary school, and problems of unemployment increase exponentially for those who fail to complete high school (Stern, Finkelstein, Stone, Latting, & Dornsife, 1995). The school dropout rate nationwide remains "stubbornly high," observes Schnaiberg (1998, p. 7), and dropout is particularly elevated among Hispanic students across the nation (Schnaiberg, 1998). Recent labor shortages, particularly in services occupations, have produced some added teen job opportunities, even for younger persons (14- and 15-year-olds). Nevertheless, employment with career potential and a sense of future remains elusive for those with inadequate schooling (Stern et al., 1995). And, an extremely bleak picture still characterizes the nation's inner-city communities where, as noted by Wilson (1996), a decades-long depletion of low-education job opportunities (in what amounts to "a sea of unemployment") has made it extremely difficult "to sustain basic neighborhood institutions or to achieve adequate levels of social organization" (p. 54).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Worst Approach: Some Deep Roots

We can quite reasonably blame America's worst approach to the school-to-work transition on an institutionalization of apathy or neglect, on a historical combination of social class and racial prejudices, on a general sink-or-swim attitude in the United States toward job hunting and job placement, and/or on an information-constrained mismatch between educators and employers. However, a deeper explanation would find some roots in two historically unresolved issues in the nation's school-to-work policy making—issues deeply embedded in American beliefs about the linkages between education and work and issues fully represented (if not yet resolved) in today's plans/designs for secondary school reform.

First, the American high school has been much constrained as a transitions-assisting institution by a long and often heated debate with regard to its role in social mobility. In an early inquiry into the effects of tracking, Aaron Cicourel and John Kitsuse (1963) observed that the modern comprehensive high school "is a highly organized effort . . . to identify and develop the talent distributed among its student population" (p. 148). In *The One Best System*, David Tyack (1974) similarly found in the 19th-century development of the vocational education movement a "simple realism [that] decreed the public schools should prepare some students directly for subordinate roles in the economy while it screened out those fit for further training in higher education" (p. 189). At no point has the heat around this issue been greater than in the famous Washington-Dubois debate—long a symbol (until some recent revisionism) of ongoing limits on the opportunities available to and the talents of African Americans (see Spring, 1990).

Amid such findings, it was Gary Orfield's (1997) discovery in Indiana that only about one seventh of that state's students take vocational training, and most of them do not see their education as leading either to a job in the field or to further training in that vocation. Nationwide, schools specifically designated for vocational education enroll less than 0.5% of America's public school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

It was Orfield's (1997) added finding that if vocational preparation did not lead effectively to a job and career, it also did not lead effectively to education beyond high school. He reported, "Within two years of high school, our follow up survey showed 38% of those in the college preparatory program were not in college, compared to 69% of the vocational-technical students" (p. 18). In short, the high school as school-to-work transition has been hamstrung by a debate about its opportunity effects, by a debate about mobility much

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

rooted in racial tensions, and by evidence of only limited credibility as a viable key to both career and further education.

Second, the American high school has been constrained by a deep ideological and political controversy about the direct control of vocational education. Paul Peterson (1985) succinctly summarized some turn-of-the-century roots of this debate, as follows:

> Businessman were . . . so insistent that public schools offered little of commercial value in their instruction that they sought to create vocational schools separate and apart from the public school system.
>
> Labor rightly suspected that vocational education separated from public schools could come under the close administrative control of industrial interests. (p. 16)

Labor feared, claimed Peterson, that America's youth would be indoctrinated against unionism and trained only for particular jobs in factories. Alternatively, well-organized business interests pushed "aggressively for a separately administered system of vocational education" but were opposed by labor in advocating "the principle that vocational education was to be an integral part of the public system of education" (p. 16).

Labor won the day, observed Peterson (1985), in a protection of interests that coincided well with those of public school administrators. Peterson wrote,

> Had vocational education been set up under separate administrative auspices, secondary education would have been divided between classical and vocational. And the segment with the greatest growth potential would not be in the hands of public-school administrators. A rival competitor for public loyalty and taxpayer resources had to be destroyed at its very conception. (p. 16)

Furthermore, concluded Peterson, "research on vocational education . . . has shown that its curriculum never took the form most desired by large-scale corporate interests" (p. 17). Although semiskilled workers for repetitive tasks were a business interest, the public schools "had an organizational stake" in moving toward more prestigious job training for skilled craft employment (often under trade union affiliation and management) (p. 17).

It was within this context that the example of the German system of youth apprenticeship first received American attention. A 1905 report of the Committee on Industrial Education for the National Association of Manufacturers urged "copying the German vocational system of education [as] necessary for improving America's position in international trade" (Spring, 1990, p. 212). Although traditional academic education "fulfilled the needs of the abstract-minded," went the argument, practical courses and "continuation schools"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were deemed to be needed for "the intermediate class" and for those who had left school and gone to work (Spring, 1990, p. 213).

It is interesting that in a modern-day appraisal of the once again popular apprenticeship model, Thomas Bailey (1993) observes that "not enough is known about the nature of the learning that takes place on the job," and, alternatively, that efforts should be made to "achieve many of the benefits of apprenticeship with less reliance on employers" (p. 9). In short, the act of fostering improved interactive links between schooling and employment continues, as early in the 20th century, to be bound by control-minded caution and by a lingering distrust between the key parties of employer, laborer, and professional educator. Bailey continued to urge that we "strengthen the relationship between school on the one hand and work and community on the other without having to absorb the workplace into the core of the educational system" (p. 9).

The notion of worker as learner is illuminated by Fred Block (1990), who mapped employment trends in terms of the levels of skill required for various job categories. Job categories that require the highest level of training and self-learning increased from 51.9% of all jobs in 1970 to 60.3% in 1987 (pp. 91-93). Clearly, the historical schism between school knowledge and workplace experience needs to be reconsidered.

REEXAMINING AND REVITALIZING CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION

The Great City Schools' *Marshall Plan*, as noted earlier, fell well short of absorbing the workplace into the core of the educational system, but it did suggest that the core of the educational system (academic excellence) and the core of the community (e.g., employers, parents, social service organizations, community groups, elected officials) must be newly mobilized together to improve public schooling. The key to the quiet reform, it is widely recognized, may well be lodged in its success in dissolving a number of historical dualisms in secondary schooling—including the dualisms between vocational and academic learning, schools and the profit-minded business community, and social mobility encouraged versus social mobility constrained (Berryman & Bailey, 1992; Olson, 1997).

As reform mindedness meets the baggage of history and its attendant dualism, we note that a solid sense of conceptual framework has been missing thus far in the policies for employment literature. There is, to be sure, implicit theorizing of solid importance behind a renewed policy emphasis on academic standards and quality, behind a call for expanded community

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

service and career learning/experiences for all youth, and behind the desirability of better partnerships between school and workplace. But, without a much clearer and more explicit sense of theory, opportunities abound for strains to develop between work-transition goals and workaday reality, as well as for a resurfacing of historical dualisms with regard to tracking and pedagogical control.

For example, a prevailing assumption is that enhanced youth employability calls for added attention to the development of workplace skills and to skills standards (see Bailey & Merritt, 1995). There is much legitimacy attached to this assumption—in evidence that job-specific skills do enhance one's employability (Arum & Hout, 1998; Muller & Shavit, 1998). Another reality, however, is summarized by Miller and Rosenbaum (1997), who note that "although economic theory and employers blame youths' labor market problems on skill and work habit deficiencies, hiring employers do not use information related to these attributes" (p. 498). Their finding, instead, is that employers tend to distrust outside information, trust their own employees, and rely heavily on their own "social infrastructures" (close, existing personal relationships) in deciding whom to hire.

A second and related example starts with an observation by William J. Wilson (1996) that individuals in job-poor, inner-city neighborhoods are highly unlikely to learn about employment openings from working kin or friends; thus, alternatively, employers are unlikely to receive the inside information they look for with regard to prospective inner-city workers. Furthermore, both Wells and Crain (1997) in St. Louis and Orfield (1997) in Indiana discovered that African American graduates from racially integrated schools are more likely to be hired by White-owned businesses than are similar graduates of all-Black, inner-city schools (Wells & Crain, 1997).

In short, the school-to-work transition contains nuances and subtleties (plus not-so-subtle ties) that extend far beyond the commonly discussed elements of the school-to-work revolution. Questions of social infrastructure and other structural features/opportunities (e.g., integrated schooling) are not well addressed in policies, programs, and plans for employment transitioning to date. Such major turn-of-the-20th century issues as *mobility* (denied or constrained) and *who's in control here* could easily return to doom the revolution without some deeper and more fundamental policy theorizing than has been attended to thus far.

Considerable progress toward some newly appropriate theorizing, we believe, can be gleaned from the recent work of Mary Driscoll and Charles Kerchner (1999). Drawing heavily on the pathbreaking inquiry of James Coleman (1990) and Pierre Bourdieu (see Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), Driscoll and Kerchner extend the concept of social capital

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

formation toward a larger theoretical understanding of "the productive role of neighborhoods" and a "revitalization of American cities." Their key contribution lies in examining anew, for educational policy making, the potential integration of social and economic forces.

It is interesting that the need to integrate social and economic (particularly economic development) policy is a theme that has also received separate emphasis recently among urban planning professionals (see Fainstein & Markusen, 1996; Halpern, 1995). Fainstein and Markusen (1996) argue that a long-standing failure to integrate has been an urban policy blind spot, leading to "policies that evolved into separate, piecemeal social services segregated from new local economic development policies" (p. 143).

The construct employed by Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) is to view communities as zones of production—wherein the social forces associated with developing cultural capital (with schools as key institutional players) and wide-ranging economic forces (from job creation and economic investment to civic leadership) can come together in innovatively associated sets of relationships. The authors summarize as follows:

> We believe we are now at a turning point, in both theory and in the organization of city schools in the United States. In the shift from industrial to post-industrial America, which has strong parallels in the earlier transition form an agricultural to an industrial society, Americans have grown increasingly interested in developmental strategies and theories to guide them. There is a thirst for open-system and ecological ideas that show how social and economic sub-systems interact to produce both growing metropolitan economies and vibrant, livable neighborhoods. (p. 396)

Frankly, a deeper level of theorizing about the educational policy and administration implications of social and economic integration is largely yet to come. Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) urge an intellectualizing of both school and community as much more than physical facilities and places and as more than collections of professionals and families, toward the sense of a coherent set of relationships and the embeddedness of schools in communities. Similarly, Fainstein and Markusen (1996) urge a move away from traditions of urban planning that have focused heavily on property-led economic development—toward the greater consideration of broad social purposes and programs of broad scope.

If these suggestions are to be given new credit and serious attention—and they appear to warrant such—then much more fundamental theorizing must be addressed to just what it means to engage in social and economic integration at the school/community level and how this goal is to be achieved. From a Durkheimian perspective, there would necessarily be a social control

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

element to be considered, with questions as to just how deviancy is to be handled and how a community's division of labor (into a wide variety of roles, institutional ties, and professional specializations) becomes adjusted (see Durkheim, 1951, 1984). Strong institutional ties between educators and nearby employers are not characteristic of the United States although school-business partnerships are growing in number. Who controls whom and with what standards remains at issue.

Alternatively, from the symbolic interactionist perspective of a Margaret Mead, a system of shared understandings, meanings, and expectations (and value consensus) would be at the heart of any consideration of social and economic integration (see MacKinnon, 1994). That there indeed remains a gap in values of sizeable proportions has been noted by Robert Reich (1991), who observed that needed occupational skills of adaptability and customizing are still served by a "standardized education designed for a standardized economy" (p. 227).

As a third approach to social and economic integration, Bourdieu (1985, 1989) and others (e.g., Berger & Luckman, 1967) would draw our attention to questions of primary and secondary socialization, legitimization, and the power of *habitus*, or social environment. Virtually all educational systems differentiate between academic and vocational education, note Muller and Shavit (1998), and, unfortunately, this differentiation serves as well as legitimizes inequalities of educational and occupational attainment. Finally, in his own recent consideration of social integration mechanisms, Philip Selznick (1992) offers as a basic source of integration "the creation of social entanglements or commitments" (p. 232). These, says Selznick, are heavily rooted conceptually in such community forces as shared history, a shared sense of identity, interdependence, mutuality and plurality, and autonomy plus participation. Again, as already noted, community-level partnerships between schools and businesses are growing in number but remain nascent and ill defined. A review of the effects of career magnet schools by Robert L. Crain et al. (1998) found "considerable implementation failure" (p. 4).

Although they are a set of established as well as newer insights into the topic of social integration, these considerations of control, values, socialization, environment, and entanglements evolve into substantively different and more difficult questions anew under a press to integrate both social and economic forces. To what extent should or would community-level economic development (with its motives of profit, property, employment, capitalization, and growth) drive the social? To what extent might or can social capital formation (with its concerns for such elements as human welfare, individual health, families, individual opportunity, lifelong learning, and civility) be incorporated effectively into the economic development of a community? As

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Fainstein and Markusen (1996) point out, only in the area of welfare reform has the nation even made a beginning toward blending social and economic initiatives—and, at this point, very little is known about how to bring such a blending to full fruition.

Toward the School-to-Work Transition as Community Development

We would suggest that an opportunity unlike any before for both theory and practice is currently presenting itself in urban America—an opportunity for a natural test of new thinking about the school-to-work transition and about an integration of social and economic policy making in both education and community development. It promises to be a test of whether the United States will continue to display the worst approach to job preparation. It also promises to be a test of whether new Marshall plans for the schools and new designs for high schools can overcome the deep historical baggage surrounding vocational education and adapt to new realities of community-level social and economic integration: a major challenge to be sure, for as Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) point out (echoing Reich), "schools appear most explicitly engine-like when they engage in vocational education" (p. 398).

The opportunity has arisen significantly from the Clinton administration's proposal to emphasize educational initiatives (i.e., education zones) as a central element in the nation's empowerment zones and enterprise communities program of urban revitalization (see Liebschutz, 1995). The empowerment zones and enterprise communities thrust has not thus far touched heavily on the public schools (Cohen, 1997). Nevertheless, there is a background of preparation for such involvement through trends in school outreach and in the continuing-to-develop movement to use school sites for coordinating children's and family services. An extension of the services notion to the much larger concept of community development recognizes that "a child's development is also much affected by broad-based community conditions and investments that go beyond 'care,' such as housing quality, parks and recreation opportunities, employment and training, law enforcement, etc." (Boyd, Crowson, & Gresson, 1997, p. 86).

There are strains and difficulties aplenty in moving from a services orientation in school outreach toward a community development or zones of production approach. Community development stretches far beyond the narrowness of a professionalized delivery of assistance toward a larger conceptualization of community ecologies and closer connections to the family and neighborhood clientele (see White & Wehlage, 1995).

The community development (or zones) notion is also constrained heavily by issues rooted in questions of social and economic integration raised

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

earlier. Enterprise zone thinking, for example, is heavily characterized by a market orientation and by a language of revitalization through self-reliance, incentives to labor, subsidized local development, and tax-based incentives for business (Boyd et al., 1997). To services professionals with deep Progressive-era roots in helping to save families from the ravages of market forces, the renewed emphasis on a restoration of market mechanisms in low-income communities offers some disturbing signals (see Skocpol, 1992). At issue, from each side of the social and economic dyad, can be widely differing assumptions about (a) market forces versus services-delivered routes toward the development of social capital, (b) the entrepreneurial spirit of a community against the caring spirit of a community, (c) the private sector renewed against a public sector reaffirmed, and (d) development interests in a community against welfare interests (Boyd et al., 1997; Driscoll, 1998).

The differing assumptions and strains between the various forces come home to roost in questions of pedagogical reform (Grubb, 1997). Thus far, observes Grubb (1997), the drive to integrate vocational and academic curricula has been dominated by the use of curriculum materials "off the shelf," which offer "applied academics" (p. 168). Such practices allow "work to determine the academic curriculum," with "academic content of relatively low level and power" (p. 169). Such constrained thinking is also thoroughly represented in experimentation to date in adding education zoning to empowerment and enterprise projects. Receiving mention thus far as lighthouse cases in school-to-work transitioning are (a) the Youth Fair Chance program in New Haven, CT, which offers an under-one-roof center for education-, social-, and job-training service to young adults aged 14 to 30; (b) the Community Learning Centers at 37 sites in Chicago, where literacy programs, social services, recreational and cultural activities, technology education, parenting skills education, and employment assistance are combined for both youth and adults; (c) Detroit's GM/Ser Casas Program to train high school students in manufacturing, engineering, and skilled trades; and (d) Philadelphia's Life Long Learning and Training Center (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1998).

Thus far, the stress for education in most experimentation has been on a provision of added social services to targeted neighborhoods, after-school and weekend youth development offerings, and job-readiness training/assistance. Such activity is a far cry from the full involvement in community revitalization that Boyd et al. (1997) have envisioned as a matter of "enterprise schooling"—wherein the local school would "be a fully active player in a developmentally oriented network of public/private community institutions from banks, to churches, to employers, to 'activists' " (p. 92).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

However, again, we believe there is an opportunity available to educators as never before to blend a rethinking of and a reemphasis on the school-to-work transition into a movement of significance in community-level revitalization in America. Although deeply productive and blended social/economic linkages between public education and empowerment zones/enterprise communities now range from nascent to nonexistent, the timing may nevertheless be appropriate for schools to begin seriously and courageously to build as well as benefit from good neighborhoods (Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999).

There are few models thus far of fully integrated education and enterprising; however, some efforts well worth watching are beginning to surface. Among these are (a) joint ventures under way in New Orleans, Louisiana and Santa Ana, California, under ongoing examination by Louis Miron (1998); (b) Akron, Ohio's Enterprise Community, evolving in close cooperation with the Goodyear Corporation (see Wood & McGaughy, 1999); and (c) the community development work of the Industrial Areas Foundation in Texas, as reported by Dennis Shirley (1997). Powerful models, as they do surface, will need to engage as never before in "a broader role as a full player in the much larger, full-scale economic, social, human capital, and pedagogical development of [the] community" (Boyd et al., 1997, p. 91). Such a thrust has been well represented at a broad suggested policy level in the "de-categorical" thinking of the federal government—with new pressures on schools in high poverty environments to "go comprehensive" in their models for reform. Thus far, going comprehensive is far from evident in active implementation, but at least there is some experimentation. And, who knows? We might some time down the road begin as a society to move away from "employer hiring practices that largely ignore schools" (Wong, 1997, xiv).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Education for employment is a topic that is finally achieving the attention it deserves. It is hoped that some old issues in vocational education are being set to rest in a set of reform proposals that move away from differentiated and tracked high school curricula toward high academic standards for all students and school-to-work learning for all students. Closer ties to and a partnership with employers are also central.

Reforming the school-to-work transition will be a tough, uphill battle, however, for the wounds from past policy making and neglect run deep, and despite the assistance of up-to-date legislation (the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994), changes in practice thus far appear to be more tinkering than substance. Indeed, it is a thesis of this article, following the lead of others

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(particularly Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999, and Fainstein & Markusen, 1996), that without a change in approach that is deeply substantive, a significant reform of the school-to-work transition is most unlikely. Despite a nationwide clamor for an improvement in job skills, the research evidence is that employers place much more trust, in deciding whom to hire, in the networks and social relations they have already thoroughly established. As Bailey (1993) put it, the key task for employment transitioning is less to train than to strengthen mightily the relationship between school, work, and community.

The timing for such strengthened relationships is fortuitously at hand in a new emphasis across urban America on community-level economic development. A parallel and somewhat earlier effort, very often involving the schools, has also discovered the worth of outreach into neighborhoods and communities with an array of (capital-creating) social services to families and their children. Under federal legislation that focuses on zones (of enterprising, empowerment, and now education), these economic-development and social-development thrusts have an opportunity to blend together into a new conceptual foundation for school-community relations, a theoretical foundation with regard to the concept of social and economic integration. This is not a change in conceptualization that will come easily to the schools, and there is evidence that very few of the persons who are busily developing Marshall plans and designs for high schools have thought much about the theoretical underpinnings of their school-to-work reforms.

There is evidence that an even deeper level of political and policy-relevant theorizing has yet to even begin to wrap itself around vocational education reform. This is a level of theorizing captured well by Kerchner's (1997) contention that schools are basic industries in their communities—with economic and social products that are essential to urban stability, growth, and development.

Much the same argument is developed by Claus Offe and Volker Ronge (1997), but from a theory of the state perspective. Think of every citizen in the economy as "a participant in commodity relationships," argue Offe and Ronge (p. 61). In an economic world that is never sure if each particular commodity offered for sale will actually find a buyer, it is possible for the state either to engage in inaction (laissez-faire) or to subsidize those who are losers or have dropped out of the commodity exchange (using welfare). The more recent approach, however, is to attempt to create the conditions under which individuals "can function as commodities," for example, (a) by increasing the "salability of labor . . . through measures and programs directed toward education, training, regional mobility, and general adaptivity" (p. 62); and (b) by engaging in "public infrastructure investment . . . designed to help broad categories of commodity owners (both labor and capital)" through the means of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"urban and regional development" (p. 63). Although a better term than *commodity* might be asked for, the central message is that educational reform bears rethinking in a deep and fundamental way—as both a creator of conditions for individual successes in the labor market and a central force in "public infrastructure investment."

At the very least, at a policy level, summarizes Wong (1997, pp. xvi-xvii), some key integrative and conditions-creating steps that could be taken immediately in the workplace domain would be to (a) clarify the terms and purposes of school-to-work transitioning; (b) institute some policy coordination among major actors (e.g., schools, employers, government agencies, unions); (c) assist in closer connection between schools and employers; and (d) root out actively the continuing employment effects residues of segregation and discrimination. The trick is that such closer connections must also of course avoid deepening historical chasms with regard to control and inequality, a separation of schools from their communities, and a tradition of not very effective work preparation pedagogy. With success, the nation with the worst approach might soon realize that "it is in our national interest to begin some serious efforts to improve the transition from school to work" (Wong, 1997, p. xvii).

NOTES

1. By far, the most determined opposition to an altered school-to-work emphasis in public education has been mounted by Phyllis Schlafly (see The Phyllis Schlafly Report, www.eagleforum.org). Schlafly claims that the reform of vocational education is an effort to train children for specific jobs, not to educate a workforce; furthermore, the reforms are part of a larger, federal effort to control the schools and to centralize planning for the domestic economy. Despite such conservative opposition, the policy debate has remained very quiet, as evidenced at least in part by much talk thus far of improving education but a decided lack of media or candidate attention to school-to-work issues in fall 1999 Presidential election campaigns.

2. There is a rich history in the integration of academic and vocational education that goes back many more decades, of course. Indeed, the basic idea is quite Deweyan, as W. Norton Grubb (1997) has pointed out. To Dewey, the community and its variations in employment should be the starting point, not the academic subjects. English, mathematics, the sciences, and so on should be brought to the process of learning as reflections of occupational endeavors—not the other way around.

REFERENCES

Arum, R., & Hout, M. (1998). The early returns: The transition from school to work in the United States. In Y. Shavit & W. Muller (Eds.), *From school to work* (pp. 471-532). Oxford, UK: Clarendon.

Arum, R., & Shavit, Y. (1995). Secondary vocational education and the transition from school to work. *Sociology of Education*, *68*(3), 187-203.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bailey, T. (1993). Can youth apprenticeship thrive in the United States? *Educational Researcher, 22*(3), 4-10.

Bailey, T., & Merritt, D. (1995). *Making sense of industry-based skill standards* (Report). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, Institute on Education and the Economy.

Benz, M. R., Yovanoff, P., & Doren, B. (1997). School-to-work components that predict post-school success for students with and without disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 63*(2), 151-169.

Berger, P., & Luckman, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality*. Garden City, NY: Anchor.

Berryman, S. E., & Bailey, T. R. (1992). *The double helix of education and the economy*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Block, F. (1990). *Postindustrial possibilities: A critique of economic discourse*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Blustein, D. L., Phillips, S. D., Jobin-Davis, K., Finkelberg, S. L., & Roarke, A. E. (1997). A theory-building investigation of the school-to-work transition. *The Counseling Psychologist, 25*, 364-394.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1985). The social space and the genesis of groups. *Theory and Society, 14*(6), 723-744.

Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory, 7*(1), 14-25.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in education society and culture*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Boyd, W. L., Crowson, R. L., & Gresson, A. (1997). Neighborhood initiatives, community agencies, and the public schools: A changing scene for the development and learning of children. In M. C. Wang & M. C. Reynolds (Eds.), *Development and learning of children and youth in urban America* (pp. 81-103). Philadelphia: Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education.

Chicago Public Schools. (1997, March). *Design for high schools*. Chicago: Chicago Board of Education, Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Development.

Chicago Public Schools. (1998, April). *Design for high schools*. Chicago: Chicago Board of Education, Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Development.

Cicourel, A. V., & Kitsuse, J. I. (1963). *The educational decision-makers*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.

Cohen, D. L. (1997, May 3). In the zone: Efforts aim to link economic gains, school reform. *Education Week, 15*(32), pp. 1, 8-9.

Coleman, J. S. (1990). *Foundations of social theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Council of the Great City Schools. (1997). *A Marshall plan for urban schools*. Available: 1301 Pennsylvania Ave., N. W., Suite 702, Washington, DC, 20004.

Crain, R. L., Allen, A., Little, J. W., Sullivan, D., Thaler, R., Quigley, D., & Zellman, G. (1998, December). The effects of career magnet schools. In *IEE BRIEF, Institute on the economy, 22 (pp.* 1-4). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Driscoll, M. E. (Ed.). (1998). Professionalism vs. community: Is the conflict between school and community about to be resolved? *Peabody Journal of Education, 73*(1).

Driscoll, M. E., & Kerchner, C. T. (1999). The implications of social capital for schools, communities, and cities: Educational administration as if a sense of place mattered. In J. Murphy & K. S. Louis (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration* (pp. 385-404). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Durkheim, E. (1951). *Suicide*. New York: Free Press.

Durkheim, E. (1984). *The division of labor*. New York: Free Press.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Fainstein, S., & Markusen, A. (1996). The urban policy challenge. In J. C. Boger & J. W. Wegner (Eds.), *Race, poverty, and American cities* (pp. 142-165). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Grubb, W. N. (1997). Dick and Jane at work: The new vocationalism and occupational literacy programs. In G. Hull (Ed.), *Changing work, changing workers: Critical perspectives on language, literacy, and skills* (pp. 159-188). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Halpern, R. (1995). *Rebuilding the inner city: A history of neighborhood initiatives to address poverty in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hess, G. A., Jr. (1999, September). Expectations, opportunity, capacity, and will: The four essential components of Chicago school reform. *Educational Policy, 13*, 494-517.

Hull, G. (Ed.). (1997). *Changing work, changing workers: Critical perspectives on language, literacy, and skills*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kerchner, C. T. (1997). Education as a city's basic industry. *Education and Urban Society, 29*(4), 424-441.

Liebschutz, S. F. (1995). Empowerment zones and enterprise communities: Reinventing federalism for distressed communities. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism, 25*(3), 117-132.

MacKinnon, N. J. (1994). *Symbolic interactionism as affect control*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Marshall, R., & Tucker, M. (1992). *Thinking for a living: Work, skills, and the future of the American economy*. New York: Basic Books.

Melaville, A. (1994). Forgotten no more: The contribution of the William T. Grant Foundation Commission Reports on non-college youth and the transition from school to employment. In A. J. Pautter, Jr. (Ed.), *High school to employment trasition: Contemporary issues*. Ann Arbor, MI: Prakken Publishers.

Miller, S. R., & Rosenbaum, J. E. (1997, November). Hiring in a Hobbesian world: Social infrastructure and employers' use of information. *Work and Occupations, 24*(4), 498-519.

Miron, L. F. (1998, November). *Joint ventures between public schools and city government: Implications for community development*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools Planning, Pasadena, CA.

Muller, W., & Shavit, Y. (1998). The institutional embeddedness of the stratification process. In Y. Shavit & W. Muller (Eds.), *From school to work: A comparative study of educational qualifications and occupational destinations* (pp. 1-48). Oxford, UK: Clarendon.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1998). *Statistics in brief. Overview of public elementary and secondary schools and districts: School year 1995-96*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvements.

Offe, C., & Ronge, V. (1997). Thesis on the theory of the state. In R. E. Goodin & P. Petitt (Eds.), *Contemporary political philosophy: An anthology* (pp. 60-65). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Olson, L. (1997). *The school to work revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Orfield, G. (1997). Going to work: Weak preparation, little help. In K. K. Wong (Ed.), *Advances in educational policy: Vol. 3. The Indiana Youth Opportunity Study: A symposium* (pp. 3-31). Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Peterson, P. E. (1985). *The politics of school reform, 1870-1940*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Reich, R. (1991). *The work of nations: Preparing ourselves for 21st century capitalism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Schlafly, P. (1999). School-to-work and goals 2000. *The Phyllis Schlafly Report, 30*(9), 1-6.

Schnaiberg, L. (1998, February 11). U.S. report tracks high dropout rate among Hispanics. *Education Week, 17*(22), p. 7.

Selznick, P. (1992). *The moral commonwealth: Social theory and the promise of community*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Shirley, D. (1997). *Community organizing for urban school reform*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Skocpol, T. (1992). *Protecting soldiers and mothers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Spring, J. (1990). *The American school, 1642-1990* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Stern, D., Finkelstein, N., Stone III, J. R., Latting, J., & Dornsife, C. (1995). *School to work: Research on programs in the United States*. London: Falmer.

Tyack, D. B. (1974). *The one best system: A history of American education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (1998). Education and the empowerment zones and enterprise communities: A briefing book. Washington, DC: Office of Housing and Urban Development.

U.S. General Accounting Office (1991). *Non-college youth and the workforce*. Washington, DC: Author.

Weeres, J. G., & Kerchner, C. T. (1996). This time it's serious: Post industrialism and the coming institutional change in education. In R. L. Crowson, W. L. Boyd, & H. Mawhinney (Eds.), *The politics of education and the new institutionalism: Reinventing the American school* (pp. 135-152). Washington, DC: Falmer.

Wells, A. S., & Crain, R. L. (1997). *Stepping over the color line: African American students in White suburban schools*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

White, J. A., & Wehlage, G. (1995). Community collaboration: If it is such a good idea, why is it so hard to do? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 17*(1), 23-38.

Wilson, W. J. (1996). *When work disappears: The world of the new urban poor*. New York: Knopf.

Wong, K. K. (1997). Preface: Meeting the challenge of workforce preparation. In K. K. Wong (Ed.), *Advances in educational policy: Vol. 3. The Indiana Youth Opportunity Study: A symposium* (pp. ix-xvii). Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Wong, K., & Jain, P. (1999, March). *Mayors and schools: Integrated governance and educational accountability*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, GA.

Wood, J., & McGaughy, C. (1999, Spring). *Preliminary investigation of Akron's enterprise community: Linking education to community development*. A report of research, Department of Leadership and Organizations, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, 37203.

Zehr, M. A. (1999, May 19). Debating the direction of vocational education. *Education Week, 18*(36), 27.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.