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This work is discussed in various books, including Libr@ries: Changing information space and practice and Literacy in the information age: Inquiries into meaning making with new technologies, enacted through projects such as Youth Community Informatics, and in the development of computer systems to support collaboration and community action, such as Quill, the Inquiry Page, and Community Inquiry Labs (iLabs).

Abstract:
Informed by Progressive education reforms of the 19th and 20th century, progressive movements in librarianship, the social responsibility movement within ALA, and recent collaborations of ALA's youth-focused divisions, the authors link historical precedents with current examples, ideas and practices to inform initiatives in education and literacy programming. Progressive librarians and educators share a history of common goals; the article explores how these histories connect with current examples of inter-institutional collaborations among educators, school libraries, public libraries, universities and community organizations.

A featured example is Youth Community Informatics (YCI), a program that promotes collaboration and sustainability among existing youth focused programs in schools, libraries and 4H clubs. YCI bridges the gap between simple access to technologies and using them for community action. Collaborative programs in which public libraries, school libraries, teachers, community organizations, and universities connect to form new services or teaching models connect learning to life in an integrated way. These programs are developing innovative approaches to teaching students, promoting literacy, encouraging critical thinking and community connectedness. This work encourages further development of innovative, inquiry-based approaches to information and media literacy curriculum within schools, libraries, and community contexts.

Building a Strong Web: Connecting Information Spaces Across Communities

Introduction

As professionals working with youth in community settings we acknowledge the need to do more with less funding, and the increasing needs of those whom librarians, teachers and program providers serve. But beyond funding, the fundamental needs of our communities remain our core motivation. Students still need to be inspired to learn. Kids and adults need places in the community to support their social and intellectual life. Libraries are one of those places. Schools are another.

It seems natural that these institutions would be building and maintaining collaborative partnerships, leveraging the resources of each entity toward common outcomes. But more often structures of professionalization and institutionalization have blocked connections between learning and life that make possible individual and community growth. Research has identified barriers to the formation of sustainable collaborations between the formal education system and public libraries (Fitzgibbons, 2001; LaMaster, 2005). In the worst cases, the school and public libraries have a competitive approach, providing similar programs and services to the same group of young patrons (LaMaster, 2005).

We argue that building strong collaborations among schools, public libraries, university programs and other organizations within our communities is paramount to our combined futures and our collective goals of literacy, universal education and community empowerment. For this discussion, we revisit the Progressive movements in the history of education and librarianship in the United States and consider how those ideas can be renewed in generating or strengthening partnerships across the various entities in

communities today. Examples of this Progressivism in practice are seen in the formation of community schools and in university-community-school connections, leading us to envision new roles for school libraries, public libraries, non-profit organizations, universities, and community members. One contemporary example is the Youth Community Informatics project, launched in 2007 between the University of Illinois Extension 4-H network, the Graduate School of Library and Information Science and various community partners.

Historical Precedents in Progressive Education

The idea of placing the school at the heart of a local community's life is not new. Making universal public education a reality has dominated social and political discourse since the 18th century. The work of such "architects of universal schooling" as Horace Mann, William Harris, and many others, made broad access to a common school education a reality (Cremin, 1964). Early progressive educators such as Francis Parker proposed practical shifts in the ways that teachers taught and students learned. Parker's child-centered approach was influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but emphasized "the learning of self-control or inner discipline, which he defined as the child's ability to postpone reward and learn to contribute responsibly to the community" (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 24).

Parker had been heavily influenced by his study of John Amos Comenius, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, Johann Herbart as well as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and others. He balanced that education theory with a child-centered teaching practice developed through direct experimentation with teaching methods (Semel & Sadovnik,

1999). Parker's work connected with John Dewey in Chicago, where both ran experimental schools. Their careers intersected at the end of Parker's career and at the beginning of Dewey's. Parker helped develop the curriculum for Dewey's laboratory school. Dewey considered him the "Father of Progressive Education." (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 25).

Perhaps the most recognized philosopher of education, John Dewey began the Chicago laboratory schools at the University of Chicago during his tenure there from 1894-1904. Dewey is cited widely by scholars in education, but notably also by progressive librarians (Drury & Masters, 1998). In his 1902 address to the National Council of Education, "The School as a Social Center," Dewey outlined core concepts which shaped the Progressive education movement in the U.S. Confronted with unprecedented social changes brought on by the industrial revolution and early communications revolutions, formal educational institutions were no longer able to "support the ever-expanding industrial economy by establishing meritocracy and preparing workers for their vocational roles" (John Dewey Project, 2002). Progressive educators were interested in making schools "more effective agencies of a democratic society" by encouraging diversity and "critical, socially engaged" citizens (John Dewey Project, 2002). This was a fundamental social change which meant re-envisioning the school as an interconnected gathering point in the social life of communities, and a re-ordering of curriculum goals away from attempts to "achieve cultural uniformity, not diversity, and to educate dutiful, not critical citizens" (John Dewey Project, 2002).

John Dewey and other early Progressive academics, educators and activists envisioned the school as a community center integrated with the entire community in

order to build knowledge, to contextualize learning in local community issues and problems, and to maintain and pass on knowledge. For teachers, librarians, and anyone associated with the US education system today, these goals will likely resonate, and they paved the way for later reforms up to the present.

Models of Community Schools Today

Learning takes place everywhere, not only in the classroom but also in many informal settings outside of school. We learn from family, friends, at community centers, in libraries, after-school programs, youth groups and more informal places like neighborhood parks, volleyball courts, restaurants, as well as in schools and universities. The key to this community centered education is the collaboration across these places of learning, connections between school, families, libraries, community based-organizations, religious groups, and other cultural and business groups (Longo, 2007). However, the lack of capacity for such collaborations has caused youth to disengage from those ordinary experiences of community as classroom. Today education becomes tantamount to schooling, disconnecting learners, particularly students, from life in their cities, neighborhoods and communities (Bruce, 2008). This disconnection of learning and real life within school has been called "democracy at risk" (Macedo, 2005); people are turning away from public spheres and losing bonds with their communities (Putnam, 1995).

Since the mid-1980s, a new twist on an old idea in U.S. education reform has been taking shape in the form of community schools (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007). Partnerships between university academics, public schools and a broad range of

community organizations have been exploring models of Progressive education practice, attempting to build more democratic public schools and more engaged citizens. Current efforts in all types of schools-- charter, magnet, parochial, alternative, community, or full-service-- are reviving an agenda that started in the early 19th century to provide universal, democratic, meaningful education for all members of our society. The ebbs and flows of that effort are threaded through the literature of education, philosophy, library science and others. Common throughout are the goals of reforming policy and practice for democratic access to information, education, and for the promotion of social responsibility.

Teachers and students in community schools often use resources, people and places in their community as the focus of course inquiries using community issues as impetus for study, research, and social action. Opening school programming to community members of all ages before and after "school hours" and on weekends is a common example of how community schools reach out to their communities holistically. Community schools position themselves as central connecting points in communities for all social and community service organizations, making the school the center of educative and intellectual life in the community.

There are many models of community schools, from the highly localized to national, rural to urban, and advocates assert the necessity to avoid "cookie cutter approaches." But common to all is a shared vision supported by a leading alliance, the Coalition for Community Schools, for "the shared responsibility of schools, families, and communities for the education of all our children" (Harkavy & Blank, 2003, p. 211). The

literature on community schools certainly makes it sound appealing, but how does it really play out in practice?

Compiled research by Joy Dryfoos (2000) has shown "the positive impact of community schools on student learning, healthy youth development, family well- being and community life." (Harkavy & Blank, 2003, p. 213) This community-centered perspective broadens the role of public schools in the community. The collaborative approach to improving education is the vision of the current US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. Duncan's work as the superintendent of Chicago's public schools, 2001-2009, brought a more holistic approach to dealing with the issues students, teachers and administrators face in schools today.

Beginning with a pilot program in the late 1990s, Chicago schools began exploring how richer connections between local schools and the resources in surrounding neighborhoods and communities could improve education of students in particular. The goal of the Full Service Schools Initiative (FSSI) project was "to test a research-based framework for expanding school-based and school-linked services that would broaden support for children's well-being and school readiness and complement other CPS core strategies" (Swanson, 2005, p. 56). The pilot evaluation found that full-service schools "increased access to programs and services, reduced mobility, reduced truancy, [and] increased test scores" (Swanson, 2005, p. 56). Successful results from the FSSI project led to a broader initiative for the "design and implementation of one hundred community schools in Chicago" (Swanson, 2005, p. 56). The Campaign to Expand Community Schools brought private and public institutions together to support the initiative.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides more discretionary funds to the US Department of Education than ever before, which will more widely promote the kinds of education reforms modeled in the charter schools and community schools that Duncan and Mayor Richard M. Daley helped build in the Chicago Public School system. This holistic and integrated approach to education provides an important framework for expanding our conception of libraries as community institutions allied with the educators and social activists.

Libraries and Community Schools

How are libraries involved in the current community schools movement? The traditional link between libraries and classrooms can be strengthened by the school media specialist, who has new tools to integrate resources across disciplines and between school and society. School librarians can collaborate with teachers to acquire resources directly needed by the students and should play a central role in promoting and teaching critical literacies to students (Drury & Masters, 1998). School librarians should be an integral member of the school staff, both providing resources to support classroom education serving as an expert subject area teacher in the library. The school library literature supports this perspective of leadership within the school, emphasizing collaboration with teachers (Doll, 2005).

As civic and community spaces, public libraries continue to play an important role in the continuity of education for students when school is not in session. Public librarians and youth services specialists can continue to forming more partnerships with other community programs and local schools as a resource to students, teachers, and

community organizations. The traditional practice by many libraries of keeping a vertical file of local community referral resources places the library in a longstanding community-based role as a connecting organization for many resources and organizations. Joan Durrance and Karen Pettigrew (2002) studied libraries that have updated this service to the digital age, through involvements with freenets, website hosting for community organizations, or other means. One might envision libraries providing an online community presence to continue this practice, but relinquishing 'gatekeeper' or 'publisher' responsibilities to individuals from the community themselves in a more distributed work model.

Finally, public and school libraries are social and community spaces where education happens, whether formally or informally. The need for diverse public spaces where community members can come together to educate one another dialogically along with established educational institutions was an idea from the Free Schools movement as a way to acknowledge dissent and difference as legitimate and use that diversity for positive community engagement. Activists such as Paul Goodman and George Dennison built the Free School movement in the 1960s, taking Dewey's ideas in a more radical direction. Free School ideology supported the idea of education as "a vital public function in a democratic society", taking place in public community spaces and encouraging community members and interest groups to actively "monitor state policy, formulate their own positions, and be represented in an ongoing dialogue with other social movements over state policy" (Miller, 2002, p.169). This suggests using a consensus building process between stakeholders in schools, community organizations, libraries, and policy makers in the local, state and federal levels.

In this time of increased economic pressures on schools and other public institutions, people come together to do the hard work that education and intellectual freedom demand. How can meaningful partnerships be built and sustained between schools, public and school librarians, families, educators, colleges, community activists and others, to continue serving the public good? The core youth services divisions of the American Library Association (ALSC, AASL, and YALSA) began to build collaborations at the policy and leadership levels in the 1990s (Fitzgibbons, 2001). But the precedent for strong collaboration between school and public libraries can be traced back to the late 19th century (LaMaster, 2005). Partnerships and collaborations allow organizations with similar goals to leverage their resources with more integration and effectiveness. We suggest further that this perspective both supports the core services of public and school libraries, and also allows for the inclusion of community members, non-profits, academics and university programs and other organizations in local communities to work toward commonly formed goals. This mash-up of perspectives in search of common goals is a return to common themes in both the history of the U.S. education system and in the history of U.S. librarianship. Building an awareness of prior successes and failures and our knowledge of common philosophical foundations are important when beginning new cross-institutional collaborations.

Education and Librarianship – Visioning Futures

Following on the work of those that have come before us, we're faced with re-imagining how library and information science (LIS) and education in the academy can contribute to the restoration of the ecological relationship between community and education. The

resurgence of the community schools movement presents an opportunity for both educators and librarians to reach out to a broad range of community organizations, public and social services in the service of educating students, parents, and the communities surrounding the school. We argue that the histories of progressive education and of progressive librarians are philosophically and pragmatically connected, focused on the resources and practice for education of all students and communities. This is consistent with Dewey's initial vision of the school as a social center, linking the university with K12 schools and with society in general (Dewey, 1966).

In 1992, Ernest Boyer revived Dewey's idea of schools as social centers in higher education:

> At one level, the scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems… Campuses would be viewed by both students and professors not as isolated islands, but as staging ground for action.
>
> At a deep level, I have this growing conviction that what is also needed is not just more programs, but a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger charity of direction in the nation's life as we move toward century twenty-one (Boyer, 1992, p. 92).

Further supporting the idea of broad university-community-school partnerships, the Center for Community Partnerships, led by Ira Harkavy at the University of Pennsylvania, is an example of the academy's commitment to collaboration with schools and communities for educational improvement at all levels of the education system.

University-Community Connections

Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy and John Puckett describe three revolutions in the history of American higher education, which began with the end of the Cold War and culminating in fall of the Berlin Wall. Since that time they point to an increased emphasis on public and community engagement in higher education institutions. They argue that achieving "Dewey's Dream" will require leadership in civic and community engagement and collaboration with local public schools and communities from higher education institutions. (Benson et al., 2007)

The basis for this research has been in the University of Pennsylvania's involvement with local schools in West Philadelphia beginning with the formation of a comprehensive school-community-university partnership initially known as the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC) (Benson et al., 2007). Beginning with a "school-based community health program" Penn academics worked to pilot a program that they hoped would eventually lead to a "mutually beneficial collaboration with the entire range of Penn's schools, departments, institutes, centers, and administrative offices", not simply an effort of the school of education (Benson et al., 2007, p. 89). An undergraduate course in anthropology was converted to "an action-oriented, strategic problem-solving, academically based community service seminar" (Benson et al., p. 89) and others which followed began a trend in long term change to Penn's undergraduate programs. Penn students work toward building resources for community schools and organizations through service learning opportunities and practice "communal participatory action research ... with students, teachers, parents, and other community members" (Benson et al., 2007, p. 104-105). And though these positive successes make

Penn's efforts laudable, Harkavy and Benson balance this success with discussion of the real challenges and obstacles that their work has entailed.

> It became clear that educational change could not be accomplished by focusing only on schools and schooling. We increasingly realized…that school and school system change are intrinsically connected to community change and community mobilization and that effective community change depends on reforming the local public schools into 'good' public schools (Benson & Harkavy, 2001, p. 54).

Community mobilization occurs when entities collaborate in recognition of their interrelated goals. The ecological relationship between education and community encourages significant collaborations across the various individuals, groups and institutions in the community. We now look to an example of Library and Information Science practitioners and academics working to build upon these progressive ideas by building meaningful university–community partnerships.

University-Community Collaborations in Library and Information Science

The Youth Community Informatics (YCI) project is another example of the university working to connect with the community in the field of library and information science (LIS). A three-year grant funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), YCI has promoted activities that help underserved communities address their needs through the use of information and communication technologies. Youth at partner sites have explored documentary film making, created radio programs about community issues, archived local cultural documents and artifacts, and created community asset

maps using geospatial technology. YCI activities have focused on enhancing the educational experiences of youth and not solely on technology skill development.

YCI staff used educational literacy activities in small chunks called <u>inquiry units</u>, structured around five points of the Inquiry Cycle: Ask, Investigate, Create, Discuss, and Reflect (Bruce, 2009). For example, the activity *Information Spaces in the Community* asked participants to research and learn about various information spaces used by community members. These spaces included libraries, the student union, a bus stop, and a non-profit community center. The inquiry unit was first used with a group of teens and adult volunteers in June 2008 at the YCI Youth Forum, a two day workshop held on the University of Illinois campus. Since then it has also been adapted and used with different groups of varying age levels. An abbreviated outline of the activity is included below to provide some context.

Ask: How do people in the community get the information they need to learn, solve problems, and conduct their daily lives? This leads to the question: What are the information spaces in the community?

Investigate: Participants go out into the community in small groups (6-10), each with a group leader. Each group visits between one and three information spaces.

In each space, they meet with people involved, listen, and discuss. They explore the space, make a video about it using a Flip video camera, and determine geo-coordinates using a hand-help GPS receiver. This investigation takes at least 30 minutes per site, but could be extended to a half-day or multiple visits.

Create: Participants return to a computer lab, where they make a GIS site using Google Maps and mark the coordinates of the places they visited. This could include the

path they followed. They upload their video, music, and text. In some cases they might make a podcast or slide show about their findings.

Discuss: Participants share their findings and the product they create with others.

Reflect: Participants think about issues of journalism, democracy, careers, technologies, etc. Some questions they consider include:

- o   What were the unexpected events, the surprising findings?

- o   How do different information centers compare?

- o   Do all community members have equal access to these information spaces?

- o   What kinds of information are available? What kinds are missing?

- o   How useful are the digital technologies for recording our findings? What other features might be helpful?

Engaging in this kind of community-focused research has encouraged the development of participants' technology skills, problem solving and cooperative work strategies, writing techniques, public presentation skills and much more. The activities used diverse technologies, but it is important to note that the focus has been on learning about the community, asking questions, and sharing findings with others, not on the technologies per se. The most effective use of these technologies in libraries and similar settings would likely involve embedding that use in a larger, purposeful context. That context in turn could be a way to help connect participants with other resources, such as books and structured activities.

In *Experience and Education* Dewey wrote, "The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Education and experience cannot be directly equated to each other" (1938, p. 25). For Dewey, meaningful learning comes from experience through reflective thinking. But Dewey's experiential learning goes beyond merely "learning by doing." The inquiry process aims to transform situations, not simply acquire knowledge or skills; it involves embodied action in the world as much as it does thinking (Bruce, 2009; Bruce & Bishop, 2002).

We are concerned with the kinds of knowledge, values, and norms about community that youth produce with technology. Through inquiry-based activities youth not only construct meaningful learning but also connect their lives to the community and focus their learning on community change. This process empowers the participants and provides a model for future approaches to problem solving, research, and collaboration. By focusing on a project, issue or problem, participants learn to use technology as a means to contribute to their community's knowledge base and to bring about persistent community change. This follows Dewey's argument that people should become part of the process of authority, going beyond being mere recipients of services (Dewey, 1988, p.295).

The YCI project is nearing the end of its second year (May 2009) and continues to work to enhance the capacity of collaborations across schools, libraries, community centers, universities, and other various groups in Illinois communities. Our mission is not to start new programs, but rather to bring existing groups into conversation with one another and to provide support to broaden their current programming and impact. While

we currently work directly with a group of youth at each of seven sites, each project also infuses local community- and school-based activities in a way that affects many times that number.

Exploratory programs like YCI form bridges among libraries, schools, extra-curricular enrichment programs, community organizations, and the academy. We know that collaboration with groups outside school can take extra time and effort, but they result in worthwhile partnerships that have the potential to expand educational opportunities for students and connect their learning to the wider world.

Conclusion

We need a vision of learning and democratic participation that is grounded in community-centered, inquiry-based learning. We need to find ways to support asking meaningful questions related to actual life, investigating through multiple means, active creation and expression of those investigations in public forums, discussion of our diverse ideas and active community engagement that is based on reflective practice. Those ideas have been present in the progressive education movement, in community schools, and have meaningful exemplars like Youth Community Informatics, Chicago's Public Schools, and the Center for Community Partnerships. Taking these ideas seriously should lead us to a re-conception and critical analysis of our current professions and institutions.

When we examine the history of American education, reform efforts have sought to address the underlying structures of power in the education system and in society in general to effectively teach people "of all ages and classes" (Dewey, 1902, p. 73). Each

successive wave of reform built on the previous ones, whether acknowledged or not.

Historians of progressive education have pointed to a number of factors which led to

acceptance or rejection of progressive education reform at various times since universal

education became a reality, not least of which are political and bureaucratic climates

within the government, within schools and from cultural values in general (Cremin, 1961;

Graham, 1967; Ravitch, 1983; Semel & Sadovnik, 1999). But as our country is poised to

begin broad reforms in our education systems once again, the democratization of

educational opportunity remains a critical issue for our schools and our communities.

Progressive education practices of community schools can become possible models for

education reform. School libraries already are playing important roles in community

schools, and public libraries also are community hubs. They provide spaces dedicated to

information access, education and literacy and should continue to do so. But there is a

greater need for more community engagement and connection between libraries, schools,

university programs, community organizations, local governments, etc. to build and

maintain partnerships that can help better achieve the goals of educating and empowering

one another. We hope that the active and sustained effort of librarians, teachers,

administrators, parents and community organizations to build the inter-institutional

collaborations will help combat the barriers to universal and equitable access to

information, education, and literacy.

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