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The infusion of corporate values into progressive education

The infusion of corporate values

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Professional vulnerability or complicity?

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Abstract *Examines the history of educational administration in the USA during the Progressive era (1890-1940). Using Callahan's Education and the Cult of Efficiency as a starting point, examines school district-based administrative practices that offered viable alternatives to the business-oriented, "scientific management" reforms that tended to dominate much of the educational dialogue and innovation of the early twentieth century. Offers cases studies of three superintendents who creatively resisted the ideology of efficiency or who skillfully utilized administrative structures to buttress instructional reforms. Using archival records and other historical sources, first examines Superintendent A.C. Barker in Oakland, California between 1913 and 1918 and Superintendent Charles Chadsey in Denver, Colorado during the years 1907-1912. Then analyzes the tenure of Jesse Newlon during his superintendency in Denver from 1920 to 1927. Using the conception of "authentic leadership" and the frameworks of the ethics of care, critique, and professionalism, argues that these administrators demonstrated how leaders grounded in notions of scholarly skepticism, democratic engagement, and the compassionate care of children were sometimes able to avoid the excesses of the ideology of "efficiency".*

Callahan's (1962) trenchant critique of American educational administration captured the spirit of discontent brewing in the early 1960s. At a time when the disparities among local school systems in the USA were becoming increasingly evident – especially as demonstrated by the poor performance of large, centralized, inner-city schools – Callahan offered a compelling explanation for the disappointing quality of the nation's schools. Unlike the critics of the 1950s, who had identified the "soft" pedagogy of the progressive educators as the source of failure, Callahan's analysis depicted the pedagogically inclined progressives as heroic figures who held the dike against the fierce currents of short-sighted, efficiency-obsessed administrators.

If American educators had lost their focus on high-quality instruction, Callahan argued, it was not because of progressive educators' instructional experimentation. Rather it was due to school administrators who had become overly enchanted by prevalent notions of "scientific management" and had adopted, inappropriately, many of the techniques and values of the business-industrial world (Callahan, 1962, p. 54). Because of outside pressures for demonstrable evidence of educational efficiency, Callahan (1962, p. 52) argued, local superintendents became "vulnerable" to the whims



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and standards of local business leaders and thereby lost sight of their core instructional mission. Callahan not only offered a bold, new interpretation of the social forces that had influenced the history of education in the twentieth century, but he also coined a phrase – “the cult of efficiency” – that continues to represent the ongoing American struggle of balancing high-quality educational practices with demands for accountability and efficiency.

Education and the Cult of Efficiency demonstrates how, from 1910 to 1930, the standards of the business world spread across the country like an ideological wildfire and how corporate terminology was increasingly adapted into the vernacular of school administrators. Callahan studied a wide array of historical sources, and his book offers a marvelous portrait of the influences of the era and of how reformers talked, functioned, and interacted. However, despite this impressive compilation of evidence, Callahan, by necessity, left several areas relatively unexplored. I propose to examine three of these relatively undeveloped themes in this paper.

First, while Callahan did focus on administrative rhetoric, or as Tyack and Cuban (1995) might call it “policy talk”, he offered less evidence of the specific practices, or “policy actions”, that were adopted by local schools and districts during the 1910s and 1920s (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p. 5). We are left with more information about national rhetoric than about local policies. Second, although Callahan (1962, p. 1) viewed his study as describing “a story of opportunity lost and of the acceptance by educational administrators of an inappropriate philosophy”, he offered few illustrations of the kinds of alternative educational arrangements that might have characterized the flip side of the corporate coin. And finally, he touched on, but did not develop, the ethical dimensions and consequences of the adoption of business values by educators across the country. This third theme is especially important, because at the heart of *The Cult of Efficiency* lies a story of deep conflicts between beliefs and ideologies. Indeed, the Progressive era in American education, usually considered to cover the period from the 1890s through the 1930s, marked a time of major social and economic turbulence in the USA; and as a consequence, educators were called on to make fundamental transformations in the ways children were treated and educated.

These gaps in Callahan’s analysis of the era between 1910 and 1930 give rise to three questions: “What was the ‘lost opportunity’ of the Progressive era?” “Is there any clear evidence of potential policy alternatives to efficiency?”; and, if so, “what are the implications for our understanding of educational ethics in both the past and the present?” In developing answers to these questions, I focus on what Callahan called “the neglect of the instructional side” of education due to a fascination with business ideology. Specifically, I examine the kinds of instructional reforms that local educational administrators put into place in the first three decades of the twentieth century, and I look at practices that offered potential alternatives to a strict focus on educational efficiency.

Using archival records and other historical sources, I explore Callahan's speculations about the lost opportunities of the era, and I look at the kinds of strategies that superintendents used for setting local policy, developing district curricula, involving teachers in curriculum development, and educating schoolchildren with differing academic "abilities".

Historians are often keen to make two points about the study of the past: first, no particular human actions, events, or decisions were ever "inevitable"; and second, despite our analytic distance, we must endeavor to view the world through the eyes of those whom we are studying with humility. These admonitions imply that although we must recognize the limitations of the intellectual world that progressive educators inhabited, we can also ask whether school administrators had available to them any viable practices that might have served as alternatives to business-minded efficiency or to solutions like formalized curricular tracking that limited future choices for so many children. The decisions made by progressives had far-reaching ethical consequences. As Oakes (1985) and others have pointed out, curricular tracking ultimately served – intentionally or unintentionally – as a mechanism that sharply limited what students were allowed to learn. I contend that a close look at the educational environment of the early twentieth-century reveals that potential solutions indeed existed at the time that were distinctly different from those eventually adopted by so many local district administrators.

The proposition being advanced by this article, then, is this: somewhere during the first two or three decades of the twentieth century, a window of opportunity opened for school leaders in districts across the country that few seized. The great challenges of the day for these educators was to educate the large numbers of children entering the schools and to do so in a way that kept students in school, offered them new approaches to learning, and prepared them for the new demands of the twentieth century. I believe that the administrators discussed in the following three case studies provide illustrations of authentic leaders who acted with vision, who treated students with dignity, who considered new knowledge and reforms with healthy skepticism, and who skillfully implemented district-wide programs grounded in their own educational principles.

I utilize Begley's (2003) conception of "authentic leadership" as the foundation for its use in this paper as applied to Progressive era administrators. As Begley (2003, p. 1) describes it, authentic leadership serves as "a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration". While we must keep in mind that it is inappropriate to apply our own ethical frameworks directly to the actions of those who lived in the early twentieth century, I suggest that we might still learn a great deal through analyzing educators' responses to the various policy alternatives available to them and to the values of their own time. Therefore, Begley's (2003, p. 1) corollary that authentic

leadership is “knowledge-based, values informed, and skillfully executed” offers, I believe, an avenue for discussing how educational administrators made use of the existing knowledge, contemporary values, and their own skills.

After briefly establishing a context for the discussion of the rise of progressive education, I focus on educational developments in the years between 1907 and 1917, looking at how superintendents in two cities – Oakland, California and Denver, Colorado – experimented with educational innovations in the time period during which the widespread acceptance of corporate practices in many American school districts was just beginning. Both cities found themselves dealing with challenges common to early twentieth-century urban school systems: rapidly rising school enrolments, concerns about the large numbers of students who were not learning at “normal” speed, and adapting educational practices considered obsolete and ill-suited to children. This discussion is followed in the second part of the article, by a continued consideration of developments in Denver during the 1920s. Closer examination of the educational policy context of these cities, also leads me to argue that Callahan’s presentation of the debate as representing a dichotomy – between efficiency and quality or between business methods and instructional practices – tends to distract us from understanding the more subtle nuances associated with the realities of educational practice and decision making. Administrators in Oakland and Denver understood and used the language of efficiency, but they also developed practices that did not necessarily conform to the broad ideology embedded within the efficiency movement. In so doing, these educators also demonstrated what today we would call the ethics of care, the ethics critique, and ethics of professionalism (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001). As I shall show, the administrators described below offered unique models of the ways in which educational leaders could democratically engage their teachers, academically assist their students, or thoughtfully reflect on their district’s administrative policies. These historical case studies thereby remind us to challenge our own taken-for-granted notions of educational practice and to question the belief that any kind of administrative practice was, or is, inevitable.

The context for the rise of progressive education (1890-1913)

“In order to reach the desired end”, said Rice (1893) of his visit to an elementary school in New York City, “the school has been converted into the most dehumanizing institution that I have ever laid eyes upon, each child being treated as if he possessed a memory and faculty of speech, but no individuality, no sensibilities, no soul”. In too many schools, Rice worried, the instruction offered schoolchildren was stifling, uninteresting, and often Draconian. While these descriptions might sound like Callahan’s critiques of efficiency-oriented schooling in the 1920s, Rice’s comments were actually published in a popular journal of the 1890s (Rice, 1893, p. 31). Rice was not alone in his concerns. On

the west coast of the USA a team of evaluators analyzing the performance of the Portland, Oregon public schools found a “rigidly prescribed, mechanical system, poorly adapted to the needs of either of the children or of the community”. The survey team argued that this kind of “uniformity of subject-matter, both in kind and amount, can mean in practice only that the attention of teachers, and all concerned in educating children, is focused on definitely prescribed matter to be learned – not on the diverse needs of the children to be educated” (Cubberley, 1915, p. 130). Furthermore, in Chicago, Illinois, factory inspector Helen Todd was saddened to find that many immigrant children preferred factory work to schoolwork. “Nothing that a factory sets them to do is so hard, so terrifying, as learning”, she lamented. “This ought not to be so”, she concluded, “but these rusty, heavy little minds . . . need a kind of education that we do not give” (Todd, 1913, p. 76).

Throughout the country, many Progressive era reformers complained that a misplaced dedication to nineteenth-century academic practices meant that teachers emphasized the repeated and rapid recitation of facts over knowledge, that far too many children in urban systems repeated the same grades (often several times), and that school systems were unprepared to work with the “new” type of student, usually immigrant or working class children, who were attending school for the first time, and in growing numbers.

The point is that in order to comprehend fully the rise of the efficiency movement in the twentieth century, we need an understanding of the nineteenth century context from which it emerged. In fact, some Progressive era educators specifically sought to overcome the “false efficiency” of the late 1800s, feeling that much of the instruction offered to children at the end of the nineteenth century was rigid, formalistic, and emphasized drill and rote memorization. For example, after observing an elementary school mathematics lesson, Rice (1893, p. 38) complained that “[i]n no single exercise is a child permitted to think”. “He is told just what to say, and he is drilled not only in what to say, but also in the manner in which he must say it”.

Solutions to these kinds of problems varied. Some educators continued to argue for uniformity of academic standards – that Americans needed a common tradition of culture, values, and citizenship. Others wanted a more flexible, differentiated curriculum that would offer several levels of curricular content better designed to “meet the needs” of students with differing abilities. Most urban districts of the Progressive era ultimately opted to implement a “one best system” of education, as Tyack (1974) has called it, a blueprint for school systems that entailed administrative restructuring along corporate lines, business principles of budgeting, intelligence testing to classify and sort students according to “ability”, and curricular tracking designed to meet the needs and “intelligence” of these students.

In retrospect, we know that IQ testing and the concomitant differentiation of the curriculum drastically reduced the academic options for many minority,

immigrant, and working class children. At the time, however, these practices offered beleaguered administrators working in crowded school systems an easy explanation for student failure as well as an immediate solution for the problem. Many educators were too easily convinced that such sorting was natural and appropriate. These practices were legitimized by legions of academics, educational “experts”, and school leaders who actively advocated for the adoption of efficiency measures. Stanford University’s Ellwood P. Cubberley, for example, distributed his gospel of administrative reorganization through textbooks, lectures, and his frequent evaluations of local school systems. Furthermore, Cubberley’s colleague, Lewis Terman almost single-handedly spread the widespread belief that IQ tests demonstrated the deep differences between children. Terman’s attitude toward those who dared disagree with him was one of disdain. Instead of facing reality, he wrote, such critics misguidedly focused on “the miracles that skillful teachers work with morons and on the . . . illumination of the world by gleams of light struck from dull minds” (Terman, 1922, pp. 58-9). Other academics were equally forceful in making their case about curricular reorganization. These “administrative progressives”, as Tyack (1974) calls them, eventually carried the day and saw their recommendations soon become accepted practice.

A.C. Barker: Oakland, California, 1913-1917

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, many cities across the USA experienced a threshold moment when school administrators began to discuss the creation of “modern” schools and adoption of “progressive” practices. In Oakland, California this transition came with the appointment of a new superintendent, A.C. Barker, in 1913. Barker expressed his desire to alter “the traditional idea of education”, and he exhibited great curiosity about the educational reforms taking place in most other cities throughout the country (Board of Education, 1917, p. 35). Barker’s strategy in Oakland can be seen, in part, as an effort to blend local experimentation with nationally recognized innovations. Oakland was in need of some kind of change, if only because between 1910 and 1915 enrollments increased by 34 percent as waves of new students continued to wash through the Oakland schools. The new policies Barker introduced in Oakland sought to accommodate the growing numbers of new pupils and conformed, he said, to “best modern practice”.

Barker hoped for a new era of cooperation between researchers and school systems. When the National Education Association (NEA) annual meeting was held in Oakland in 1915, for example, Barker welcomed the audience by announcing that one of the most important functions of the NEA should be “to evaluate the educational theories of the moment” in order to help districts adapt “to the rapidly changing social, industrial, and economic needs of the times”. “I do not mean”, he was quick to point out, “that this body should be a clearing

house for the fads of professional educators of 'merely national fame,' but that it shall give approval to the soundest educational opinion of the country" (Barker, 1915, p. 35). Barker called both for research that was connected to conscientious experimentation and for school districts that carefully considered research findings, as opposed to districts that engaged in the frenzied adoption of reforms.

In the first two decades of the century, local leaders might easily have felt overwhelmed by the flurry of "progressive" reforms advocated at the national level. Barker's concern about distinguishing between "fad" and "sound opinion" offers a glimpse into the frustration he must have felt at wading through the many innovations that steadily accumulated at educational conferences. How, then, did Barker himself distinguish between fad and sound opinion, and what specific types of reforms did he feel conformed to the best modern practice? His notion of progress entailed improvement along four main lines:

- (1) the construction of new school buildings;
- (2) the adoption of new types of programs and schools tailored to the needs of students (the junior high was one example);
- (3) the creation of a district research department; and
- (4) the reorganization of the business department.

Barker was not immune to concerns about accountability, and he therefore reorganized the district's business department in 1913, according to "well known principles of management". A year later he also implemented a "modern budget system", the type of which had been "authorized by the United States Commissioner of Education" (Board of Education, 1917, p. 5). Barker's creation of Oakland's research department put Oakland in the forefront of the movement to establish a research component within school districts. Some progressive leaders suggested that local research departments could provide their administrators with cover against external demands for efficiency, but under Barker district researchers also set out to learn something substantive about reforms taking place across the nation.

Barker was clearly less interested in organizational retooling than he was in curricular and programmatic change, and he developed two strategies for sorting through educational innovations: he looked at reforms established in other systems with a critical eye, and he asked his research department to analyze these initiatives. His efforts to establish the junior high school in Oakland serves as an illustration of both. The junior high, at the time, an institutional attempt to meet the needs of young adolescents, was not an untested initiative, as Barker reminded his board. It had been inaugurated to good effect in Columbus, Ohio in 1909, in Berkeley, California in 1910, and in Los Angeles in 1911, and had since been established in some 200 cities (Barker, 1917). Barker was deeply curious to learn how these different cities had

customized the plan in their own school systems, and he asked his director of research to conduct a survey of cities that were in the process of implementing the junior high school.

The 53 replies the Oakland research department received satisfied Barker. "Cities generally throughout the United States", testified Barker after reviewing the results, "are doing just about what Oakland is doing with respect to the junior high school problem; namely, experimenting" (Barker, 1917, p. 38). Oakland ranked high, he reported, with other cities that had introduced different variations of the junior high school. In Oakland, the junior high school became a new organizational form through which it was possible to explore other novel approaches to schooling. Barker was aware of national efforts to differentiate the curriculum according to the perceived needs of pupils, and he stated that the departmental teaching of the junior high provided "more opportunity for pupils to choose subjects in accordance with their interests, aptitudes and abilities" (Barker, 1917, p. 16).

Despite his own successes, Barker (1917, p. 38) continued to voice frustration at the character of American educational reform: "[W]e go on experimenting without controlled conditions", he said, "or looking hither and thither for the opinions of people who know no more than we do, or whose conditions are wholly different from ours". "The great need is for a real scientific investigation", he explained, "under expert direction and properly controlled conditions, of the educational and other results of all the various types, under all possible or probable conditions". He hoped that either the federal government or private foundations would aid in funding large-scale, controlled experimentation. Barker thereby offered a different vision for the educational research community. Instead of urging, as so many others did, the rapid proliferation and adoption of fashionable efficiency-oriented innovations, Barker suggested that reform, especially curricular reform, should be more deliberate, research-based, and thoughtful. This was not a message that found a ready and receptive audience among many administrative progressives who argued for immediate change and swift improvement.

Barker's resistance to simple-minded efficiency measures demonstrated both an intellectual tenacity and an adherence to principle that were unusual for his time. As a result, the evidence suggests, Barker also served as an example of moral leadership to those around him. This influence was demonstrated, for example, by the willingness of his assistant superintendent to offer a rare ethical critique of the efficiency movement. "I have no quarrel with the doctrine of efficiency that is everywhere stirring up a new interest in getting things done", said an emboldened Lewis Avery, "but only with its assumption of finality". "In every quarter it has invaded", he said, "it seems to bring all back to a material basis and introduce a wholly materialistic spirit". Avery also worried that an overly efficient system would "prepare pupils for a certain niche in life" while it "unprepared them for others". He wanted instead,

he said, a curriculum that would “promote the development of the individual rather than fit him to anything or for anything”. Avery hoped that efficiency would become secondary to the development of individual “character, purpose, and power” (Avery, 1915, pp. 750-51). Avery’s concerns about the dangers of “unpreparing students” represented a direct challenge to those efficiency-minded educators who advocated separating students into rigid curricular tracks. Given more time in office, Baker and Avery may have developed workable alternatives to Terman’s plan for mental efficiency. What happened next to Superintendent Barker, however, was an example of the fate experienced by some individuals who attempted to slow the rising tide of efficiency.

Despite his exemplary and professionally sound efforts to develop a customized version of the “modern” school system, Barker was deposed in 1917 by a majority vote of the school board, despite the vigorous objections of two board members and several community groups (*Oakland Tribune*, 1917). This move appears to confirm Callahan’s “vulnerability” thesis (Callahan, 1962, pp. 52-4), as presented in my introduction, because Barker seems to have suffered the fate of other superintendents who refused to be cowed by local business pressure, and who resisted to abruptly infuse business management, “efficient” instruction, or pupil accounting into their school systems. However, the available evidence also suggests that personality clashes had as much to do with Barker’s firing as anything else. Some board members appear to have become nettled by Barker or frustrated with his cautious and serious study of educational innovations. Instead, they wanted a superintendent with boldness of design, national aspirations, and a quick and confident manner.

The Oakland board chose to appoint as its new superintendent Fred Hunter, who at the time was superintendent of schools in Lincoln, Nebraska. Hunter’s star was rising within the small world of Progressive era educational administration, and members of the Oakland school board wanted to catch him on the way up. Hunter can hardly be described as a vulnerable superintendent. Even before he arrived in Oakland, he was able to convince the board to reorganize district administration along corporate lines, essentially surrendering much of their power to him as their chief executive. Furthermore, he introduced over 15 fundamentally new practices into the Oakland schools within his first two years. These reforms included: establishing a department of “mental measurement” to conduct IQ and achievement testing; differentiating the curriculum into three tracks based both upon the results of these IQ tests and upon the presumed “needs of students”; extending of the budgeting system into all schools; founding a junior chamber of commerce in the high schools; and directing an energetic public relations campaign designed to promote community goodwill toward the schools (Oakland Public Schools, 1918, p. 27).

Hunter could perhaps be accurately described as being complicit in disseminating and acting upon a business-oriented ideology of education. Not content to stop with mere budgeting practices, he sought to introduce efficiency measures throughout the public school curriculum, as his early introduction of “classes in salesmanship” demonstrated (see Gamson, 2001). He swiftly adopted a set of reforms recommended by academics at leading institutions, such as the managerial innovations of Ellwood Cubberley and the IQ testing and tracking plans of Lewis Terman, both of nearby Stanford University. Hunter even hired one of Terman’s students to serve as director of the research department. Efficiency became one of the hallmark concepts of his school system. Hunter was, in other words, the quintessential administrative progressive, and he demonstrated to others how easy it could be to replicate swiftly a district-wide philosophy of efficiency. Before exploring further developments in the 1920s, however, I now return to the first decade of the century and explore another example of early twentieth-century educational leadership.

Charles Chadsey: Denver, Colorado 1907-1916

“What are the specific forms through which the city school of today differs from the mechanically perfect yet lamentably rigid school system of the past?” Superintendent Charles Chadsey rhetorically asked his Denver audience in 1911 (Denver Public Schools, 1911, p. 15). Chadsey, who was superintendent of the Denver public school system from 1907 to 1912, introduced to Denver’s schools many of the innovations he had collected at national educational conferences, but like Barker in Oakland, he was not especially susceptible to calls for efficiency. Chadsey’s tenure in Denver provides another example of the kind of authentic leadership possible in the Progressive era, this time a model of administration that also demonstrates the ethic of care in its treatment of students. Chadsey thoughtfully developed a program of curriculum and instruction at the same time as he created strategies for helping schoolchildren who were failing academically. Chadsey’s checklist of the reforms that elevated the modern school system above its rigid, obsolete ancestor included: advances in architectural construction, a more intelligently organized curriculum, improvement of textbooks, and improved professional preparation of teachers combined with tougher requirements for joining teaching ranks. Like Barker, Chadsey also tipped his hat to efficiency by initiating district efforts to improve the “business and educational administration” of the schools (Denver Public Schools, 1911, pp. 13-20).

A graduate of Stanford University and Teachers College, Chadsey’s background provided both a broad knowledge base and valuable professional connections for his work at the local level. During his first few years as superintendent, Chadsey added practices that he felt addressed modern problems. For example, he built new schools, he added more high schools, he

reduced size size, and he replaced overcrowded, stuffy classrooms with larger, better-ventilated rooms. Chadsey confessed that administration of such a system was no longer simple. Indeed, he felt that a “typical school system” was rapidly becoming an organization difficult to describe or even to appreciate” (Denver Public Schools, 1911, p. 13). Yet even while Chadsey steadily accumulated innovations, he focused on reforms intended to improve learning rather than on those that redesigned administrative structures.

Although Denver was a rapidly growing frontier city, Chadsey was not emboldened to innovate capriciously – quite the opposite. “A large city school system cannot, in the very nature of the case, afford to be a pioneer in the matter of radical experiments”, he wrote in 1910. Rather, a large school system was compelled to observe successful developments in other systems and “to adopt only those things which offer a reasonable promise” of improving the conditions they displaced (Denver Public Schools, 1911, pp. 12-13). The solutions to local problems, Chadsey believed, could be achieved through leadership and an administrative vision on the relentless pursuit of school improvement. “The modern school system is dynamic to the core”, he stated firmly, “and the superintendent not fully alive to the necessity of carefully and continually revising and adding to his point of view is doomed to failure” (Denver Public Schools, 1911, p. 15).

Regardless of the numerous modern programs with which he was familiar, Chadsey distinguished between the material, administrative developments of the district and the educational needs of the child. He cautioned that none of the administrative or structural advances in the district – as significant as they were for the “more adequate and intelligent handling” of schooling – constituted the “really vital difference between the typical school system of the past and the present”. The essential difference between past and present practice was, he felt, the development “of the power to appreciate the needs and demands of the individual”. The “great problem of every progressive school system”, as Chadsey explained it, using words similar to Barker’s, was to “furnish to each boy or girl the opportunity to secure the particular training most demanded by his ability, limitations, tastes, aptitudes and presumable future activities”. The “real advance over the past”, he said, was in the creation of mechanisms for providing “genuine flexibility in the gradation, assignment and advancement of the individual pupil” (Denver Public Schools, 1911, p. 15).

One of the most important challenges Chadsey confronted in responding to students’ “needs and demands” was that of students who were failing or who were behind for their grade level. Referencing the two works that had elevated these concerns to national prominence – Ayres’s (1909) *Laggards in Our Schools* and Thorndike’s (1908) *Elimination of Pupils from School* – Chadsey explained that the concern about large numbers of students falling behind was a problem “for every school system in the country” (Denver Public Schools, 1909, pp. 11-15). Compulsory education, he felt, had added new groups of

children “not formerly found in the schools”, students who did not “respond to the ordinary school impetus” of the traditional curriculum. From the perspective of progressive educators, if not from any perspective, it was inefficient and ineffective to have large numbers of students in the schools who were not learning, who were not advancing, and who were not getting what they apparently needed from the public schools. Of course, from the perspectives of families and students, what mattered in the end was the quality and consequences of the solutions progressives supplied.

Chadsey tried several strategies for attacking and alleviating the problem of “retardation”, as it was called at the time. In the early phase of his superintendency, he developed an approach that was markedly different from some of his contemporaries who had begun using psychological clinics to determine the “mental weaknesses” of children. Instead, Chadsey felt that academic failure was not necessarily due to any inherent intellectual deficiency on the part of these stragglers but to the fact that the public schools were not meeting the needs of some children as well as they should. “Experiments in other cities”, he explained, “have shown that a large percentage of these pupils can, under such special conditions, make more than normal progress” (Denver Public Schools, 1909, pp. 11-15). In other words, the flaw was located not in the child but in the schools, and, therefore, it was a problem that was solvable through attention to instruction.

In 1910, Denver school district personnel conducted a citywide study of student failure and set up special schools for educating children determined to be academically behind. In these schools the customary curricular requirements were set aside, and Chadsey directed each teacher “to study the individuality of the pupils under his charge and to determine, if possible, the reasons why such children are retarded” (Denver Public Schools, 1909, pp. 13-14). If the student was simply deficient in his knowledge of a specific subject such as arithmetic, Chadsey explained, the student would be placed with other children experiencing similar difficulties. Special attention was given to the student’s work in this setting in order “to strengthen his powers so as to enable him to reenter into the work of the grade composed of children more nearly his age”, this always being Chadsey’s ultimate goal (Denver Public Schools, 1909, p. 15). Many students who had fallen behind because of an inability to attend school regularly, or due to other environmental difficulties, were given special tutoring and instructional assistance until they could return to their grade.

Unlike many other educators of the era, such as Terman, who estimated that there remained large numbers of “undiagnosed” and “retarded” students in every city, Chadsey felt that there was a “small number [in Denver] who have fallen behind on account of mental inefficiency”. These students, he explained, were “given work which will be helpful to them as individuals, and thus their school life is made richer and more effective than would otherwise be possible”

(Denver Public Schools, 1910, p. 15). Chadsey's use of the phrase "mental inefficiency" demonstrates a common usage of the terminology of the time. Efficiency was linked directly to human intellectual activity, and some administrative progressives believed they could somehow increase "the efficiency of schoolchildren" as if they were machines to be oiled rather than children to be taught (see Maxwell, 1914). During his tenure in Denver, Chadsey never appeared overly preoccupied with concerns about bureaucracy or efficiency. Given the opportunity to experiment with other organizational models, he might well have adopted non-hierarchical measures in administration.

In 1912, Chadsey moved 1,200 miles east to take a more prestigious administrative position as superintendent of schools in the rapidly growing, car-manufacturing town of Detroit, Michigan. The next several years in Denver were characterized by contentious board politics and unrelenting fiscal concerns. In 1915, a local taxpayer's organization demanded that a comprehensive survey of the school district be carried out in order to determine the efficiency of the school system; evidence of the demands for accountability documented by Callahan. The published survey report (Bobbitt, 1916) exceeded 500 pages and examined almost every element of the school system. The University of Chicago's Franklin Bobbitt directed the survey, and he enlisted, Lewis Terman, among others, to join him. The investigators delivered detailed findings and a range of recommendations covering a multitude of district activities. In his section on the organization and management of the Denver schools, for example, Bobbitt recommended that Denver school leaders reorganize the district using industrial models. "The people of the district need to understand", he wrote, "that there is not one set of principles of business management applicable to a business corporation and another different set applicable to the school corporation". "Both kinds of corporations", he said, "are subject to exactly the same laws of good management" (Bobbitt, 1916, p. 111). The surveyors calculated that the schools contained over 3,700 "retarded" students, out of some 32,000 (Bobbitt, 1916, Part III, pp. 25-6). Furthermore, Terman, in his meticulous medical inspection of the schools, complained even about janitorial cleaning practices, stating his surprise at finding that "the medieval feather still holds sway in some of the school buildings of a progressive city" (Bobbitt, 1916, Part V, p. 41).

The Bobbitt survey, with its tone of confident prescription and intellectual superiority, offers an example of why local practitioners often found the recommendations of outside "experts" somewhat galling, and helps us understand what William Maxwell, superintendent of schools in New York City, called "a certain arrogance in educational theorists" (Maxwell, 1914, p. 165). What distinguished people like Chadsey and Barker was their sense of independence, their skepticism toward new educational practices, and in

Chadsey's case especially, an ethic of caring for students, combined with a professional sense of stewardship toward the schools.

Much more frequent, however, was the experience of the Oakland school district. Indeed, most cities that developed unique local programs or initiatives to help failing students before 1920, were soon convinced to consign such practices to the nineteenth-century educational dustbin, even when those programs were succeeding. The desire to help schools meet the "tastes and talents" of schoolchildren – as articulated by Barker, Chadsey, and others – soon became an administrative justification for placing working class children in lower academic tracks because of the widespread, erroneous belief that such courses better suited their limited intellectual "needs". On this issue, many educators prematurely considered Terman to have settled the matter in 1919 when he declared that intelligence tests had proven many children "incapable of learning" and that, therefore, teachers and administrators still who believed these children could succeed "may as well abandon, once and for all, the effort to bring children up to grade" (Terman, 1919, p. 73).

The cases of Barker and Chadsey offer examples of the sorts of opportunities lost in the Progressive era, at least the kinds of alternatives that were available before administrative efficiency became the dominant educational ideology of the 1920s. But even after efficiency became the accepted currency of American education, some school leaders refused to capitulate completely to the business ethic of the day. In Denver, Colorado during the 1920s, for example, two leaders demonstrated how districts could be outwardly "efficient", as they also developed remarkable programs internally.

The flip side of the pedagogical coin: Jesse Newlon in Denver, 1920-1927

One of the few heroes identified by Callahan in *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* is Jesse Newlon. Newlon was a member of a select group of scholars, most of them faculty at Teachers College, Columbia University, whom Callahan depicted as holding firm against the excesses of educational efficiency. Newlon, in particular (along with his more radically-oriented colleague, George Counts) provided a rare dissenting voice against the rise of efficiency. However, although Callahan described Newlon as a "true educator" and "one of the most able of American school administrators", he left Newlon's tenure as school superintendent in Denver (1920-1927) relatively unexamined (Callahan, 1962, p. 203). This is unfortunate, for Newlon offers a somewhat more complicated picture of the ways in which administrative "efficiency" and progressive pedagogical reform sometimes intersected. Newlon's efforts in Denver, along with those of his assistant superintendent, A. L. Threlkeld, also provide an illustration of the argument that William L. Boyd presents in his article also published in this issue: that efficiency and education need not be antithetical (Boyd, 2004).

Other scholars have devoted attention to the pedagogically progressive characteristics of Denver schools during Newlon's superintendency (Cuban, 1993), especially in terms of the way the district's work reflected Deweyian pedagogical practices (Zilversmit, 1993), but an account of the administrative dimension of Denver curriculum revision activities is critical to a full understanding of the district's history. Newlon characterized his first years in Denver as a time of "reconstruction and rehabilitation", since he had to make up for time lost during the First World War and, as he saw it, for the poor conditions of the schools at the time of his arrival. Therefore, altering instructional practices was not his first priority. Three years into the job, he reported that, although progress had been made in curriculum and instruction, his main emphasis had been upon "the more material phases of administration" (Denver Public Schools, 1923, p. 7). As a result, in the early 1920s the Denver public school system was not necessarily all that distinguishable from other districts organized according to the principles of scientific management. In fact, by 1923 the School District of Denver looked remarkably similar to the school system Fred Hunter developed in Oakland at about the same time.

Newlon devoted attention almost exclusively to the reform of administrative matters during the first phase of his Denver superintendency. He praised the organizational structure he had inherited (the one established based on the Bobbitt survey of 1916), but he also continued to tweak and update the administrative structure he had acquired. He reorganized the administrative and supervisory staff, resulting, he said, in "increased effectiveness", and he revised the system of budgeting "to conform to the standard system in use in larger school systems throughout the country". Newlon also introduced a system of educational and vocational guidance and inaugurated a "systematic program of school publicity" (Denver Public Schools, 1923, pp. 7-9). A number of these reforms echoed the types of recommendations that Bobbitt's survey team had made several years earlier, leading historian Gary Peltier to argue that the 1916 survey report provided the "logical starting point" for Newlon's overhaul of the system (Peltier, 1965, p. 116).

Whatever the source of Newlon's ideas and innovations, much of the change he fostered in Denver schools conformed to standard administrative progressive notions of reform. In fact, Newlon reorganized and expanded the differentiation of the curriculum, created programs of vocational education and "thrift education", and he implemented another reform that most administrative progressives viewed as essential: a program of intelligence testing designed to improve "methods of classifying students for instruction" according to their "mental capacities". A new department of research coordinated IQ testing, contributing, Newlon explained, "to the effectiveness of the school system" through "statistical studies and other investigations" (Denver Public Schools, 1923, pp. 8-9). Newlon credited the separation of students into curricular track for much of the improved effectiveness of the

school system. The older systems of classifying students, such as age grading, he said, had “proved inadequate in many respects” because all students did not progress through the schools at the same rate (Denver Public Schools, 1923, p. 23).

Newlon’s innovations such as administrative reorganization, intelligence testing, differentiated coursework, and vocational guidance were precisely the kinds of Progressive era reforms that Callahan criticized. Given Newlon’s reputation for democratic reform, how do we explain that educational “progress” in Oakland and Denver looked so similar? The evidence suggests several reasons for the similarity. One overlooked detail of Newlon’s background is the fact that his previous experience had been in Lincoln, Nebraska at the same time that Fred Hunter was Lincoln’s superintendent (Gamson, 2001). Indeed, Newlon had been principal of Lincoln High School while Fred Hunter was superintendent, and when Hunter left Lincoln in 1917 for his new position in Oakland, he recommended Newlon as his successor. The two men remained friends long after their Lincoln relationship had ended (Peltier, 1965), and as Lincoln’s superintendent, Newlon continued most of Hunter’s programs (Lincoln Public Schools, 1919). It was in Lincoln that he began the practice of intelligence testing, and one wonders how Newlon might have structured the curriculum and organized children without Hunter’s influence.

In addition to his experience under Hunter, Newlon’s educational attitudes also were formed by his experiences at Teachers College, where he was mentored and befriended by George Strayer, whom Callahan described in *The Cult of Efficiency* as “contributing substantially to the movement to introduce business methods into education” (Callahan, 1962, p. 186). In other words, in the 1920s Hunter (who had also studied with Strayer at Teachers College) and Newlon seemed to have similar ideals about the ways in which schooling should be organized and carried out.

A third reason for Newlon’s proclivities for efficiency might be explained by his professional and intellectual connections to members of the educational élite. By 1920, he had been invited to join the exclusive Cleveland Conference, joining other members – such as Ellwood Cubberley, George Strayer, Lewis Terman, and Franklin Bobbitt – who met regularly to discuss educational policy. When Newlon needed to find a director to take charge of Denver’s new department of classification and statistics, for example, he relied upon the recommendations of both Strayer and Terman (*Colorado School Journal*, 1921, p. 22). He again took Strayer’s advice when he hired A.L. Threlkeld as his assistant superintendent (Peltier, 1965, p. 131). In fact, Threlkeld was a wise choice; he quickly became instrumental to Newlon’s work in the district.

However, even while Newlon implemented administratively minded reforms, he demonstrated subtle differences that distinguished him from Hunter and Strayer, differences that grew greater over time. These shifts in

Newlon's thinking are best illustrated through close examination of how he utilized his key administrative staff to improve teaching and the curriculum. Scholars have devoted attention to the program of curriculum revision developed by Newlon and Threlkeld, as I have noted, but a discussion of the administrative side of these two men is essential to understanding the kinds of authentic, inclusive leadership they exemplified. For the purposes of this paper, a closer examination of the strategies that Newlon used to implement his vision illustrate how the ethics of professionalism can be realized through specific practices. Newlon and Threlkeld, I believe, should also be viewed as examples of what Starratt (2003) calls "centered leadership", with the core value in this case being placed upon the cultivation of a democratic learning community.

Even before his arrival in Denver, and throughout his seven years as Denver's superintendent, Newlon articulated the idea that the genuine involvement and cooperation of teachers in district activities was critical. "If we are to have a democratic school", he wrote in 1917, "we must have a democratic organization of the faculty, and, in my opinion, the faculty must participate in determining the policy of the school if the maximum of efficiency is to be obtained, whether it be in teaching, in administration, or in curriculum making" (Newlon, 1917, p. 267). A democratic organization placed special responsibilities on school leaders, Newlon believed. Administrators, he said, "ought to be big enough to accede, in some instances, to the judgment of their [teachers] when it is contrary to their own". At no time did Hunter or Strayer suggest granting such power to teachers. These two men viewed teaching as more of a series of prescribed steps, a set of directions to be given from above and followed below. Instead, Newlon wrote "[i]f we are to have democratic schools, taught and administered in a democratic way . . . we cannot have cut and dried programs handed down by administrators to faculties" (Newlon, 1917, pp. 266-7).

Newlon felt that direct engagement with the curriculum was the "best kind of professional study for teachers". When teachers had worked together for two or three years improving the curriculum, he explained, when they had debated curricular issues on committees and in faculty meetings, and when they finally had "evolved and adopted" a curriculum, "that group of teachers will teach better and with more understanding and sympathy than they could ever otherwise teach." According to Newlon, "the best 'courses' were those that were the results of the cooperative efforts of teachers and executive officers" (Newlon, 1917, pp. 266-7). The confidence Newlon expressed early in his career about the collaborative work of teachers soon developed into an enduring conviction upon which he relied in Denver. Once he had cemented the "material matters" of his administration, curriculum revision quickly emerged as his dominant focus.

Historians have noted that many of the Progressive era administrators who praised and implemented "teacher involvement" often maintained strong

administrative control and usually included teachers in curriculum revision only symbolically (Ravitch, 1983). Therefore, the form of direct teacher engagement that Newlon fostered in his Denver curriculum revision program was not only unique for its time, but was also noteworthy for the demonstrably genuine measure of respect it gave to teachers and for the way it utilized administrative staff to foster serious discussion about curriculum and instruction. The specifics of Denver's curriculum revision strategy, it should be noted, did not spring forth fully hatched from Newlon's mind. After his first few years in Denver, Newlon devoted more attention to "purely educational advancement" and inaugurated Denver's curriculum revision program, using the early experiences of the program to guide his approach. As developed in Denver, "curriculum revision" referred to a district-wide, comprehensive approach to redesigning the traditional curriculum in ways that utilized the skills of both teachers and administrators. It took some three years before Newlon had refined his strategy enough to warrant broad implementation of the program and still several years more before the positive results of the program fully emerged.

I briefly discuss some of their strategies, as a guide to understanding how they implemented something as slippery as "democracy". As Threlkeld (1926, p. 37) recounted, Denver administrators had articulated "no definite plan of procedure" during the first year of the program. "Committees were appointed and did what they could after school hours without much assistance", he said, and they "were advised simply to read extensively in the literature of their several fields". The result was that many committees did a great deal of reading but made little practical headway on revising the curriculum, and neither Newlon nor Threlkeld was especially satisfied with the results of the first year of the program. They recognized that weary teachers, working nights, weekends, and holidays, and without clear direction, were not able to make significant steps on improving the curriculum itself (Peltier, 1965).

Newlon became convinced that a "more effective organization would be necessary if a thorough-going program of curriculum revision were to be carried out". So, he and Threlkeld altered their strategy, submitting to the school board a request for financial support for a more structured revision program that included teacher-release time and the use of outside curriculum specialists and supervisors. In making his case before the board, Newlon combined his belief in the value of teacher collaboration with his fluency in the language of efficiency. "Curriculum-making is a first consideration in the successful administration of any school system", he told the board (Newlon and Threlkeld, 1927, p. 11). Curriculum development was directly related to instruction, he explained, and all appropriations, therefore, were, in the last analysis, for the purposes of instruction. Newlon reasoned that it was "extremely wasteful and short sighted for a community to spend large sums of money on its schools and at the same time fail to concentrate in an effective

way on the problem of making appropriate courses of study” (Newlon and Threlkeld, 1927, p. 11) Or, as Threlkeld put it more bluntly: “Modern buildings without modern programs of studies would be stupid” (Threlkeld, 1926, p. 39).

The rhetoric of efficiency served Newlon well in convincing the board of the soundness of his proposal. He shrewdly presented his case in terms of the savings that would result rather than focusing on the expense incurred. “[I]f ten percent of the teacher’s time is spent on nonessentials and misplaced materials in courses of study”, Newlon argued, “. . . it actually represents an annual loss to the Denver taxpayers of \$478,000 on the basis of the present budget” (Newlon and Threlkeld, 1927, p. 11). According to such logic, the district would reap benefits far greater than the \$30,500 Newlon requested if the curriculum were improved and streamlined.

Beyond strict monetary matters, Newlon and Threlkeld raised other concerns about the dangers of “mental waste” that resulted from an inadequate curriculum. Education, they felt, must raise each child up to his or her “maximum capacity”. Such individual improvement could not be accomplished, they said, “by teaching such poorly selected lists of words . . . that pupils do not learn how to spell”, through programs that failed “to develop habits of accuracy, industry, and sound thinking, because materials of study have not been properly adjusted to the needs of the pupil” (Newlon and Threlkeld, 1927, p. 12). Newlon’s justification for the revision of the curriculum, then, employed hard-nosed efficiency rather than softer notions of pedagogy or teacher growth. In the post-war period, when many school administrators were cautious about proposing additional spending on seeming “fads and frills”, Newlon and Threlkeld held firm to their convictions and values – that significant expenditure on the curriculum was vital.

At the same time that Newlon proposed substantial support for curriculum revision, he and Threlkeld also articulated several principles that provided the guiding foundation for the revision program. More so than the arguments about efficiency, these principles formed the core focus of Denver curriculum revision over the years that followed. Newlon and Threlkeld believed, first, that the participation of local teachers – “the professional corps” – should be the basis for the entire program of curriculum revision. No curriculum would be successful, they felt, that had not “evolved to some extent out of the thinking of the teachers who are to apply it” (Threlkeld, 1925, p. 573). This principle of teacher inclusion manifested itself in a number of ways within the system, highlighting the centrality of the district’s respect for its instructors. Newlon used over half the funds allocated by the board to hire substitutes to temporarily replace the classroom teachers assigned to revision committees. “Curriculum revision is fundamental to all else”, wrote Threlkeld, and he wanted teachers to understand that their work was “anything but a side issue” (Threlkeld, 1925, p. 576).

Second, while the subject matter committees were made up primarily of teachers, Newlon and Threlkeld stressed that district administrators had to play an important role in coordinating, directing, and supervising the revision program. They felt that the lack of focus evident in the first year of the revision program, as well as the extensive nature of the newer revision procedures, proved the need for a "very definite organization" to facilitate the curriculum-making process. They made sure, however, that the teachers felt comfortable by appointing teachers as chairs of most of the subject matter committees.

Finally, the two administrators believed that the "most advanced educational thought" should be incorporated into the content of the new Denver curriculum. "Any course of study put into operation in Denver", they wrote, "should represent the last word of investigation in its particular field" (Newlon and Threlkeld, 1927, p. 12). But even when they used external curriculum specialists to help guide teachers in their efforts, Newlon and Threlkeld were careful to limit the amount of authority these outsiders were given. Threlkeld, especially, was cognizant of the dangers of courses developed without the complete cooperation of teachers. He was critical of educational theorists who believed that "a curriculum revision program should be carried on single-handed by specialists and handed over to teachers to teach" (Threlkeld, 1926, p. 38). Such an approach would result in little real benefit, Threlkeld argued. "Teachers no doubt can be presented with course of study and trained to be excellent reproducers of the work of others", he said, "but in this situation we could not look upon our teachers as sources of new thinking, which is necessary to progress". The attitude that teachers could be sources of original thought was itself a decidedly alternative viewpoint for the time, but both Newlon and Threlkeld demonstrated that uncommon ideas could be carried out in an era that stressed commonality.

The tenets articulated by Newlon and Threlkeld provided the conceptual support for a policy that both departed from the standard practice of the day and displayed a uniquely sophisticated understanding of the nature of the educational change process. The application of their three principles also illustrates how Newlon and Threlkeld viewed democracy within the context of teaching and learning. What we gain from examining the story of Denver in the 1920s, is an awareness of the ways in which efficiency can, counter-intuitively perhaps, support creative approaches to democratic leadership. In so doing, they offer evidence of alternative approaches to efficiency-minded management and illustrate the ways in which seemingly contradictory practices can sometimes be blended together (on this point, see Gamson, 2003). As Newlon and Threlkeld demonstrated, "efficient" administrative structures can be used to buttress more pedagogically oriented reforms in ways that satisfy competing constituencies. Denver was not necessarily an anomaly, nor was it the only district in which unique practices flourished. Historians have documented, for

example, how Carleton Washburne was able to combine efficiency-oriented management with district-wide curriculum change in Winnetka, Illinois during the 1930s. Washburne thereby delighted those interested in fundamental curricular change, while reassuring members of the business community at his administrative practices were sound (Zilversmit, 1993). Yet those who sought easy solutions, and attempted copy and rapidly replicate the administratively led curriculum projects developed by Newlon or Washburne, often became frustrated when such programs proved tricky to imitate. Therefore, Newlon and Threlkeld, along with leaders like Washburne, remind us that the best educational programs are usually those that are democratically planned, locally developed, and administratively nurtured by patient, dedicated, authentic leaders.

Conclusion

Ultimately, it does us little good to dismiss efficiency out of hand, because most educators exist in a world in which efficiency and accountability are perpetually important. Taken together the three case studies of these authentic leaders from Progressive era offer a variety of lessons. First, they remind us to examine assumptions about the past with skepticism. Despite the common attitude about the retrograde practices of generations of past administrators, we can also learn something from the ways in which exceptional educational leaders carried out their duties, educated children, and worked with their teachers. Second, they demonstrate how authentic leaders can avoid both vulnerability to business values and complicity with accepted practices of efficiency.

Third, these administrators demonstrated a kind of practitioner-based ethic of critique. Rather than allowing themselves to be overcome by the, at times, overwhelming pressure to implement a “one best system” of efficiency, these leaders resisted dominant ideologies and stood for principles that sometimes imperiled their careers. Fourth, they show us how an ethic of care that focuses clearly on specific goals, such as returning students to grade level rather than justifying their failure, can provide powerful alternatives to dominant practices of the day. And finally, they remind us of the importance of the importance of the ethic of professionalism, because of its focus on the core tasks of teaching all children, thoughtfully reflecting on new practices, and of engaging all teachers in the democratic enterprise of education. These last three points deserve special attention. One of the reasons why many Progressive era educational theorists ignored the needs large numbers of teachers and schoolchildren was because of their inability to view the educational world from the perspectives of others (e.g. Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001). This arrogance of nationally recognized reformers was not, unfortunately, unique for its time. Therefore, overburdened practitioners today, who are frequently confronted with officially mandated, popularly promoted, or virtually untried

educational reforms, would do well to inspect each new “innovative” practice by considering the potential consequences of reforms according to the ethics of care, professionalism, and especially, critique.

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