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Educational Policy and Training Implications of Social Science Research: Lessons from an Inner City Elementary School*

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ABSTRACT

Participant observation research in an elementary school from 1989 to 1992 reinforces our understanding that often inner city children find a conflict between the behaviors and values that help them survive on the “street” and those that are expected in the middle-class educational system in which they are engaged on a day-to-day basis. While expecting middle-class responses, however, many teachers used archaic teaching strategies that have been abandoned in our best suburban schools. The research also makes clear the need for teachers to have high expectations for children while employing teaching methodologies that focus on individual students and their strengths and weaknesses. Policy recommendations are outlined that could alter the success of inner city education, if employed judiciously.

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The research reported here was conducted in an inner city elementary school in a middle-sized Virginia city. Research was conducted from September 1989 to May 1990 and again from September 1991 to May 1992. In addition to participant observation, researchers reviewed school records and conducted informal interviews with students and school personnel. As a part of their role, the researchers tutored in classrooms and acted as mentors for students.

The Neighborhood

The area in which the research was conducted is actually two historic neighborhoods that are contiguous with one another. Both neighborhoods are predominantly African-American and have high rates of poverty. The first neighborhood, Jamesbridge, is made up of deteriorating Victorian row houses intermingled with vacant lots and cleared land awaiting development. South of Jamesbridge is Blacksburg, which contains a mixture of turn-of-the-century frame houses in fair to poor condition and 600 units of scattered-site public housing. Blacksburg-Jamesbridge is separated from the mainstream of the city not only physically by a river, but psychologically as well. A major finding of a 1986 needs assessment was that residents feel abandoned by the city and powerless to halt the neighborhood's decline.

Long-time residents of Blacksburg blame the area's problems on the arrival of public housing and the influx of low-income residents. According to them, what was once a close-knit working-class community has been transformed by poverty, crime, and drugs. Contemporary newspaper accounts portray Blacksburg as an enclave of a violent underclass. Murders have become routine in this neighborhood. The neighborhood murder rate contributed heavily to the trend that helped the city rank fourth among U. S. cities for its homicide rate in 1988. In 1989, the city ranked fifth. In a 15-month period in the early 1990s, 34 homicides occurred in the housing projects in Blacksburg.

Many in the area place their hopes for the future on their youth, who comprise about one-half of the population. But others express grave concern, noting that as early as the fourth grade, children begin skipping school and hanging out on the streets. They cite truancy and its resultant behaviors, as one of the major problems confronting the area.

The School and Its Students

The neighborhood is served by Blacksburg Elementary School, originally built in 1888. Today, with additions, it houses about 900 students from pre-school through the fifth grade. Blacksburg is the only school in the city to employ a full-time security specialist. His job is to ensure the safety of the school environment by locating weapons, breaking up fights, and identifying trespassers, who are usually dropouts.

Standardized test scores for the school are consistently below the national, state, and city averages. In 1989, Blacksburg ranked lowest in the city on the Iowa Basic Skills test. Approximately 95 percent of the student body live in public housing and 97 percent receive free or reduced-price lunches. Sixty percent of the families represented in the school are single parent households, and fewer than 50 percent of the parents have a high school education.

The PTA at Blacksburg is virtually nonexistent, a situation which illustrates the chasm between home and school. According to the vice president of the PTA, parents are intimidated by the school setting and the administration, and most lack the skills to participate in their children's education in a positive way. However, they often show their interest by maintaining a combative stance with the school; confrontation is their major means of communication. Numerous attempts to include parents in the improvement and restructuring of the curriculum have failed.

The school's principal explains, "My students are not children. They are very young adults." In a newspaper interview in 1990 he discussed his students' lives: "My children are exposed to the rawness of life at 2, 3 . . . pre-school age, before they are able to emotionally and physically deal with it." He notes that many of them have seen corpses and many have had family members that committed or were victims of homicides. "I've had some kids held hostage in their community because the SWAT team wouldn't let them out of their houses." Children tell him stories about crawling on the floor of their apartments while shots were being fired.

When speaking to people outside the community about his pupils, the principal often uses a striking analogy to characterize the circumstances of their lives. "Think of my children as oranges. If you were to squeeze them out, the juices, representing their life-experiences, would in no way compare to the juices of middle-class children." Over a third of the students have witnessed or been involved in violent crimes outside school. Likewise, social exchanges within the school are often characterized by violent outbursts. Anger and frustration are

acted out frequently in the form of physical confrontations, many of which result in suspension. Most of the 115 suspensions that occurred during the 1989–90 school year were the result of fighting. Repeated exposure to violence has made the children wise beyond their years. One fourth-grader reported matter-of-factly what to do if you heard gunshots. “You just hit the ground and pretend you’re dead. Then you lay there quiet to see what happens.”

Many of the children bear extraordinary responsibilities, often caring for younger siblings and running a household. Dante, a ten-year-old boy from the projects, cleans the house and goes to the grocery store alone. He cooks dinner for himself and two younger siblings most nights while his mother works. “Last night we had fried chicken. I cooked it. I put the oil in the pan and cooked it.” Dante is frequently absent from school. He has trouble keeping up with his assignments and is often too tired to stay awake in class.

Larisha, an eleven-year-old from the same classroom, also sleeps in school. She says there are drug dealers who come in and out of her apartment building at night, and sometimes she is afraid to sleep. For several weeks she stayed alone at night while her mother was in the hospital. There was no phone in her apartment, so a neighbor came over every morning to check up on her and wake her up for school. After school each day, she caught the bus to the hospital on the city’s Northside. She stayed with her mother until dinner was over, then returned home alone after dark on the bus. Larisha was a bright student, but was a behavior problem in the classroom. She sought constant attention from the teacher and other students, often to the point of being very disruptive.

Many children, for various reasons, are left unsupervised at home. For some this means extra responsibilities; for others, extra freedom. Those accustomed to freedom at home are rarely willing to give it up in the classroom. Shanita, a ten-year-old girl who was new to Blacksburg, was suspended several times during the year for failing to obey the teacher. She told one of the researchers that she could stay out as late as she wanted. When asked what she did on those occasions, she said she went places with her best friend, a nineteen-year-old who had her own car, a new jogging suit for every day, as well as her own Uzi.

In spite of their extraordinary life-circumstances, the students at Blacksburg spend much of their time simply being kids. They laugh, dance, and play like other elementary school children. They are curious, creative, and eager to learn. The school serves as a safe haven and a center for social interaction for the children. However, the effects of inner city life are often manifested in the children’s academic life. Many problems in the classroom have their origins elsewhere. However, many of the students adjust to school expectations. Almost half of the students succeed, while the others are either marginal or failing.

The fourth grade classrooms are not unlike many elementary classrooms elsewhere. Physically, the classrooms are in reasonably good shape. Although they are old, they are well maintained and are equipped with all the materials needed to teach at the fourth-grade level. Words of encouragement or the students' latest creations often cover the classroom walls, much as you would expect in a middle-class classroom.

However many obstacles impede learning. On the surface, student behavior is a problem, and many of the students lack the academic and social skills that mainstream fourth graders usually have. Disruptions and misbehavior by students manage to consume time normally allotted for teaching. Some teachers manage to subvert this behavior by using innovative techniques which allow students to vent their energies through the use of contests and team building.

Many teachers appear to be well trained and innovative, normally using written, visual, and verbal presentations in their lectures. However, many students arrive 15 to 20 minutes late, which distracts students who are already restless. Teachers also often need to remind students to pay attention or raise their hands before speaking.

Classes usually disassemble around ten in the morning when a Chapter 1 reading and math specialist takes several students for remedial training. The remaining students often consolidate into a reading group on either a literature or social studies assignment. These students read in order around the table, usually no more than three or four sentences, some with great difficulty, and frequently needing assistance from the teacher. The final part of the reading period usually involves sending students back to their seats to complete an assignment. The students who are able to work independently are the most productive in these tasks. Lunch is from 11:45 A.M. until 12:15 P.M. and is usually occasioned by some disruptive behavior. After lunch, the day becomes less routine, rotating between a number of activities. But, there is no outside play time for students, a regular activity in most elementary schools.

Observations of different classrooms reveal the extent to which the teaching method affects the number and quality of student-teacher interactions. The teachers who have the best results rely heavily upon the use of games, some of which are designed as team contests, and others in the form of a challenge to the entire class to "see how many can find the answer to . . ." Noise is kept to a minimum by allowing students to *cheer* quietly, with raised fists and shouts of *yes*. The games teach academic and social skills such as cooperation and sportsmanship and seem to be an effective tool for stimulating and encouraging participation. This observation was validated by the children's response to an interview

question, "What do you like most about school?" The games also afforded the students an opportunity to get out of their seats, or to move around vigorously as they *cheered*.

Students frequently read aloud at the front of the room, or go to the board, maps, or overhead projector to *be the teacher*, providing a chance to move throughout the room and be *in charge*. Students are eager to be chosen and see this activity as another type of game. The reward for participation is a round of applause, and correct answers are additionally rewarded by praise from the teacher. Student-teacher interactions are frequent, supportive, and positive.

Activities are creative and move quickly, a result of the teacher's belief that this helps prevent discipline problems from occurring. The classroom format includes frequent discussions and is characterized by a well-ordered, but flexible system that allows for spontaneity. A great deal of time centers on positive student/teacher interaction, and much of the day is spent *on task*. Students are expected to achieve and to behave.

In these classes, students are not punished for talking unless it clearly interferes with work. Leaving one's seat is okay as long as it has a purpose, such as borrowing a book. Standing at one's desk, something that is very frequent for boys, is also okay.

Those who misbehave after several warnings are taken out into the hall and counseled, and often left there for a cooling off period. If that fails to remedy the situation, a tactic called *prime time* is used, which sends the student to another room to sit and work for a specified period of time. Fighting is never tolerated and means an immediate trip to the office—and suspension. Only as a last resort are students sent to the office for reasons other than fighting.

Many of these teachers are also very concerned about the external influences of the neighborhood and do what they can to negate them. These teachers engage students in discussions about drugs and murders in the area, giving them an opportunity to talk out their fears and frustrations. Aware of how quickly tempers could flare, some practice what can best be described as *preventive discipline*. They anticipate unacceptable behavior and halt it before it can escalate into a major problem.

Seating arrangements reveal a preventive measure that alternates boys with girls. Boys who are most likely to get into trouble are seated as far away from each other as is physically possible or in the front of the room where the teacher stands most of the time. Tempers are diffused by rapidly pulling angry students into the activity at hand. Children who act out are often diverted by being called upon to go to the board, or to collect books or papers. Those teachers who have effective

measures for dealing with discipline problems are able to spend more time teaching, and the students spend more time on-task. Those teachers who are fair and make clear their expectations and rules are perceived that way by the children.

Other teachers are not as successful. Through observation and conversations with other teachers it is clear that for some, the issue of primary importance is to maintain control at all times. Some teachers do this by avoiding activities that involve discussions or children leaving their seats. When children ask for further explanation of an assignment, answers are abrupt and insensitive to the fact that they have not adequately defined the task at hand. Frequent responses are, "If you had paid attention the first time, I wouldn't have to repeat myself." The number of times that children asked for help gradually diminished over time, and many who seemed eager and attentive at the beginning of the year simply chose to stop trying.

A lack of organization and planning is often a problem, resulting in confusion as to what has been covered, and what is next. As a result topics often move slowly, and students begin to talk or walk around the room—a situation that some teachers will not tolerate, but one that they never see as a result of their own actions. In some rooms bulletin boards are rarely used, and there is little feeling of fun, excitement, or accomplishment. Teaching methods often result in few learning-oriented student-teacher interactions.

Some teachers demand strict adherence to rules which preclude any type of student interaction and movement throughout the room. These rules are based on the teacher's perception of the students as behavior problems, a situation that is blamed on last year's teachers and the administration. These teachers expect misbehavior and never miss an opportunity to tell the students so. A typical comment from some teachers when spotting misbehavior is, "I don't expect anything else from you but this. You all can't do anything right."

A disturbing pattern emerged early in the first year of research when a minor infraction was punished far in excess of its seriousness. This pattern continued throughout the year and resulted in a chain of events that ended in suspension for many students. One boy was singled out repeatedly for minor offenses. When he protested, he aroused the teacher's anger further and she began to perceive him as disruptive. One day after discovering that the student had left his notebook at home, the teacher called his mother at work, telling her that her son was disinterested and unwilling to cooperate with her. Within minutes, the mother appeared at the classroom door with a belt in her hand. She pulled her son out into the hall and whipped him repeatedly. The noise brought everyone to their doors to witness this child's pain. Later in the year he was suspended.

Some teachers arrange seating patterns so that the "worst" students are in front where they can be seen. Unfortunately, this puts a large number of boys into close contact, a situation that invites trouble and often results in suspensions. Students who misbehave are sent to the corner or out to the hall. In some circumstances, more than half of a class was sent to the office at one time or another. Students are sometimes required to write a *punishment sentence* 500 or 1,000 times in class. The most frequently used tactic, however, is to take points off the student's grade, or to give him or her a zero for the day. Often when two or three misbehave, the entire class is penalized this way.

The system for maintaining order in some classes is unfair and insensitive. Rules are not consistently enforced, and specific behaviors that are tolerated with some are punishable for others. The students' perceptions that they are not being treated fairly often results in anger and withdrawal from work to "get back" at the teacher. As the year progressed, behavior deteriorated, reinforcing the perception that these were "bad" classes. The following illustrates one teacher's attitude: "It's a well-known fact around here that you all are the worst class in the school! I didn't do that! YOU did it to yourselves!" Negative student-teacher interactions in this room are frequent, and derogatory remarks accompany punishment.

In the first year of the study two classrooms were compared. The classrooms had equal distributions of low, medium, and high achievers. However, by the end of the year the children whose teacher had high expectations for them had marked differences in test scores compared to the second class. In addition, the class that experienced lower expectations had a ten times higher suspension rate than the other class.

Observations

Education continues to be a paradox for many poor, especially minority, children (Glasgow 1980). Although education is presented as a means of upward mobility, the academic efforts of many poor youth, especially African-American children, are met with failure and destroyed aspirations. They often find incongruities between the cultural system of the school and their own life experiences (Irvine 1990; Comer 1988).

Irvine (1990), for example, has demonstrated that the competing role demands of inner city environments and school social systems often lead to cultural conflicts. The ability of a teacher, parent, or a disadvantaged child to adjust to these social and cultural differences is often a determinant to academic

success. Comer argues that the values and beliefs required to succeed in schools, largely mainstream middle-class values, are often incongruent with African-American cultural values. Bowles and Gintis (1976) emphasize that schools in poorer neighborhoods tend to emphasize behavioral control and rule-making rather than the open systems favored by middle-class schools. William Julius Wilson (1987) argues that social isolation and the concentration of poverty also have a tacit influence on life chances, norms, and behavior patterns of inner city residents. In addition, Rosenfeld (1971), Brophy (1970), Rist (1970), and Ogbu (1974) have demonstrated the unremitting effect that teachers can have in shaping their students' low achievement. The self-fulfilling prophecy of expecting and consequently finding a low level of achievement has been well documented by others, including McDaniel (1984) and Crohn (1983). In addition, researchers have consistently found that many disciplinary procedures used in schools are counterproductive, do not change behaviors, and increase the drop-out rate. Fine (1988) argues that dropouts are often coerced into leaving school through an organized commitment to ridding the school of difficult students.

Children of the inner city are often forced to compete in an educational system based on mainstream values, while their day-to-day connection to these values is sometimes marginal. The children observed in some of the classrooms at Blacksburg were expected to perform tasks autonomously and quietly. Most of the students who received low evaluations on tests needed constant instruction, interaction, and reinforcement in order to perform their classwork, even to perform tasks they could easily accomplish. Tasks requiring delayed gratification were less effective with many of these children. They were much more productive when their work was acknowledged with positive reinforcement while it was still in progress. Often students who previously could not perform would work if coached and guided, or rewarded through interaction with the teacher or an assistant. To assume that self-reliance and delayed gratification will work is not appropriate when working with students whose environment cues them that immediate gratification is the only thing they can depend on.

Often after tests, students would swap papers and correct them as the teacher gave out correct answers. After that, each student's grades were called and students above a chosen criterion were asked to stand by their desk in recognition of their accomplishment. Although this procedure provided immediate gratification for a few, it was also publicly humiliating to many. It promoted competition rather than cooperation and embarrassed the poorer students rather than motivating them. The desire to compete for grades and a need for high achievement are assumed traits of students. However, when this is done in an atmosphere that

punishes the vast majority it can be devastating. The assumption of self reliance, delayed gratification, and competition are mainstream values. However, interaction and cooperation seem to be more effective in motivating low achieving students. For example, during one of the science activities, the children sat at a round table and shared in the task of gathering information from encyclopedias. This group task seemed to motivate some of the students who found it difficult to work independently, while continuing to offer relevant information.

Most of the discipline problems observed were the result of students' inability to observe classroom rules. Simple tasks such as raising one's hand before speaking created disruptions in the lecture. The social skills required of students, for some teachers to effectively manage a class, were lacking. Despite the fact that the students were reprimanded for deviation, each day class rules were repeatedly broken.

Classroom conduct and learning are often more the result of teacher expectations and behavior than the poor behavior and abilities of children. One student from a classroom with less progressive teaching techniques, related:

I wish I could be in a nicer class. My class is the worst one in the fourth grade hall. Our teacher has to scream to get my class quiet. I can't understand why my class is the worst. The class keeps good people from learning.

In this classroom, as the year progressed, the time spent on punishment increased, followed by a decrease in the time spent *on-task*. Children were effectively barred from the learning process by spending time in the corner, the hall, writing *punishment sentences*, or in the principal's office.

Upon questioning students whose work deteriorated over the year, one student responded, "I act up because she don't treat me right and I don't like her." Another responded, "I don't do the bad things the teacher says I do." However, he continually had points taken off for "bad behavior," which was not supported by field notes. Students believed that academic grades reflected behavior and believed that there was no reason to work hard if the teacher was going to take points off anyway.

In a survey of one class, only one student responded that she liked the teacher, and this was in spite of the teacher's "meanness." Twelve of nineteen students also indicated that they didn't like school. The most frequent reason given was because they "always got into trouble." When asked if they would like to change anything, they expressed a desire to stop the fighting, make the teacher be fair, and stop punishing the class.

In another class, only one student admitted to not liking the teacher and twice the number of students indicated that they liked school. They thought the teacher was fair, that the right students were punished, and that some students ought to come more often.

Conclusions

The school failure of poor children has long been a concern of social scientists and policy makers. However, the implications of school failure have perhaps become even more serious in recent years because of well-known technological changes and structural changes in the nation's economy (Comer 1988; Wilson 1987). This failure of the schools to adequately prepare our children cannot be isolated from the general wellbeing of the larger society; it not only punishes, for a lifetime, the children who are affected, but it also affects the level of economic productivity and prosperity that the nation as a whole can achieve. Thus, in terms of social policy, any intervention that can change the circumstances of the poor and provide more successful educational experiences for children not only benefits them but also benefits the more privileged sectors of the society.

Children growing up in neighborhoods like Jamesbridge and Blacksburg suffer because they are both African-American and poor. Their poverty is more accentuated and concentrated because they are almost always the victims of high levels of imposed racial segregation as well as concentrated poverty. No other American group experiences these two debilitating problems in quite the same way.

This culture of segregation, as Massey and Denton (1993) refer to it in their new book *American Apartheid*, has resulted in the development of coping alternatives, to ameliorate the effects of concentrated poverty and diminished life chances. This situation of virtual isolation and imposed segregation has had the twin effect of emphasizing the differences between whites and blacks and also forcing many poor African-Americans to adopt cultural and behavioral patterns that help them get by, but at the same time are ones that are anathema to mainstream society, thus increasing the separation and isolation.

As long chronicled by social scientists, many young African-Americans have been unable to meaningfully fulfill their aspirations. As a result, several generations of African-Americans have grown up developing an alternative status system which is in opposition to that of mainstream culture. This pattern was seen

as early as the 1960s when Kenneth Clark (1965) described the situation in *Dark Ghetto*. This pattern has been further demonstrated by Ogbu (1974, 1983) in his studies of African-American neighborhoods. Ogbu and Signithia Fordham (1986) have specifically documented the effect of this oppositional black culture on educational achievement among black children. Their studies show that bright, motivated, and intellectually curious students will often go to great lengths to not "act white," succeed in school, or achieve any academic distinction. Although this study did not specifically recognize this manifestation, it was in all likelihood present.

The children in Blacksburg and Jamesbridge maintain cultural and behavioral repertoires that are both alike and unlike their mainstream counterparts. Their culture is one that is mainstream in socio-economic aspiration, African-American in socio-cultural heritage, and is uniquely adapted to the ghetto space that is distinctly Blacksburg-Jamesbridge. Like other poor and African-American children, their culture and behaviors are a mosaic that allows them some footholds in difficult and often treacherous terrain.

If we are to meet the challenges of the urban environment and the needs of our inner-cities, we must, as a nation, bring ourselves to an understanding that the problems of the poorest among us are the problems of us all. There will not be a solution to the problem of America's schools until we understand that we all have a stake in them and until there is a realization that any alternative rests on a generally improved status of children in our society.

As the authors re-examined neighborhood, school, and educational policy studies from the 1960s, 1970s, and the 1980s, we were amazed as to how short a distance the nation has come in the last thirty years. Much of what is published today is a reiteration of the past: the same neighborhood problems, only magnified, as well as the same solutions to teacher training strategies.

For the most part, the lessons of the last thirty years have not been heeded and basic research has not been turned into policy. Although clearly not exhaustive, the following recommendations could begin to solve the short-term problems of schools in our poorest neighborhoods. For example, teacher training should:

- Provide immersion for future teachers in the diversity of American society. We do not suggest a simple course in multiculturalism or practice teaching in the inner-city, but rather an integrated service-learning/reflective process that develops a true interplay between theory and reality in all dimensions of American society.

- Emphasize that future teachers must understand and recognize the special needs of individual children and develop strategies to personalize instruction to meet those needs.
- Demand an understanding of the importance of providing an atmosphere that recognizes the possibility of success in all children, while comprehending the difficulties that many children bring with them to school.
- While recognizing the special concerns, problems, and needs of children in these neighborhoods, emphasize the teaching strategies that are most successful in mainstream schools: creative programming, group learning, hands-on experiences, and a minimum of rules and regulations that impede interaction.

The research also supports policy level options that suggest the:

- Provision of environments in which community-based schools can be successful and allow decision-making at the lowest possible level, while maintaining the assurance that students, teachers, and staff receive fair and equitable treatment.
- Development of systems that allow teachers to teach and reward those who do it well, especially those who conceptualize the role of teaching as focused on motivating rather than on selecting and sorting students.
- Development of programs that foster positive interaction between parents and schools, a task that most staff are not trained to develop or implement. A perfect role for an applied social scientist.
- Provision of opportunities for other professionals to be hired to provide assistance with essential but non-teaching duties, i. e., replacement of guidance counselors with social workers. In order to meet the future needs of citizens, schools will, in all likelihood, become multi-purpose centers providing a focus for a broad range of community activities and services not dissimilar to the role that schools played in the nation's past.
- Necessity of hiring strategies that target individuals who have an understanding of the cultural backgrounds and neighborhood social patterns of inner-city students. Student/teacher congruence or *fit* may be the most important factor in the recruitment and success of new teachers.
- Importance of nurturing an environment where teacher's unions and organizations, as well as school system bureaucracies, can support a system where ineffective teaching and inappropriate responses to neighborhood specific problems are viewed negatively, and patterns of ineffectiveness and insensitivity result in developmental training, reassignment, or dismissal.

- Development of a network of relationships that assure that schools are integrally linked to the world of work. The school to work transition will be successful only if minorities can be convinced that the social and economic gap between them and mainstream Americans can realistically be closed. That gap can best be closed by trust. Unfortunately, this trust-gap appears to be growing wider.

Many of these recommendations are short-term measures however. As Lee Rainwater observed in 1968:

... if culture is an adaptation to life situations, if it is transmitted as the accumulated knowledge of the group about how to adapt, and if the learning of the culture is systematically reinforced by the experiences that individuals have as they grow up and go about their daily lives making their own individual adaptation to their own individual social and ecological situation, then one can predict that any effort to change lower-class culture directly by outside educational intervention is doomed to failure. Lower-class people will have no incentive to change their culture (indeed they would suffer if they tried), unless there is some significant change in their situation. . . . [C]hange can only come about through a change in the social and ecological situation to which lower-class people must adapt.

Because we have not heeded Rainwater's, and others' advice about the state of the poor, and the effect of poverty on our life chances, the promise of this society has become dimmer over the years. Although there are significant specific strategies that can be changed in classrooms across the nation, none will be very productive unless there are changes in policies at all levels of the society that will realistically provide opportunities for all, and not just the few. If Rainwater is right, we must go beyond these simple approaches and seek fundamental and comprehensive changes in the development and implementation of educational, economic, and job training policies at the federal, state, and local levels.

This should not suggest, however, that small innovations not be implemented to assure the best short-term educational outcomes we can attain. If we can improve the lot of some in the process, it will be worth it, but long term success must be the result of more fundamental innovations in how we measure the success of our society.

In conclusion, Christopher Jencks (1992) recently reminded us, "America has never been very good at learning from its mistakes." The problem we face is helping the American people and our political leaders understand that a strong

public education for all children is a national security issue and that a good education for *my* child alone will not get the society where it needs to be. There is a social contract and that social contract requires that all citizens assume both their rights and their responsibilities. Traditionally, this nation has been primarily a nation of "rights" and that must dramatically change if our society is to succeed.

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