

Education for Liberation: A critical analysis of the Robert F. Kennedy
Community Schools and their ability to transform education



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Urban & Environmental Policy

04/15/2020

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Acknowledgments

I want to start by thanking my incredible support system for helping me get through this project. This project wouldn't be a fraction of what it is without you all. Ma, thank you for support not only in this project but during my entire time at Oxy. Any time I've doubted my ability to finish you had enough faith for both of us and I'm forever grateful to have you in my corner. To all my homies, thank you for pouring into me constantly and for strengthening me when I thought I couldn't continue.

I would also like to thank Professor Matsuoka and Professor Terry for their guidance and feedback throughout this process. Not only did you both help me refine my vision for this project but you pushed me to think critically about what I wanted to convey and what was the best method to do such.

Education is a topic that touches all aspects of life. It's one of the few things every person experiences in some shape or form. I hope this project contributes to the conversation around education and the potential it has to change lives. In particular, I hope this project causes us all to think critically about what we learn and how and to begin to see education as the means to transform the world we live in.

Abstract

This project explores the education system in the U.S. In particular, it analyzes why the current education system is failing students, especially marginalized students, throughout the nation and offers solutions to this problem. The continued failure of the current education system is a direct consequence of a shift in the intention of education. Historically education has served as a space for self-reflection and self-discovery. This was meant to be a continual process that changes the learner forever. Today, however, education is understood as a linear and finite process and is facilitated through a standard curriculum and high-stakes tests. It was this shift that stripped the U.S. education system of its ability to support its students. This project is focused on uplifting how this shift was made and providing a framework for returning the education system to its once liberatory understanding of education. I began by using the work of Paulo Friere, Glore Ladson-Billings, and Karen Mapp to provide a theoretical framework for this liberatory understanding of education. In addition to providing a theoretical framework, I also utilized qualitative methodologies to assess Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Community Schools in Los Angeles's ability to implement this form of education. The RFK community schools are returning the liberatory potential to education, and as a result are better supporting their students, in a variety of ways. This includes intentionally creating the school's building, recognizing each school as part of the larger community, and prioritizing relationship building both in and outside of the school community. The RFK Community Schools show that liberatory education can exist in the modern world. The implementation of this form of education may require the creation of a hub where resources and mentors can be found, changes in staffing, or how school leadership is structured. Whatever the requirements, it's necessary and possible. If liberatory education can exist in LA there's no reason it couldn't exist in other contexts and it's our job to figure out how.

Introduction

“Once you learn to read you will forever be free” (Douglass, 2003)

In his autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass reflects on how reading, and education more broadly, was forbidden during his enslavement in the early 1800s. He recalls his white slave master saying that “learning would spoil the best nigger in the world... if you teach [a] nigger... how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave” (Douglass, 2003). Despite this being a relatively short statement, it conveys the historical potential of education. Historically, education has been positioned as the gateway to transforming one’s life. The slave master asserts that learning makes any enslaved person unkeepable thus spoiling them forever. It is then logical to assume that the process of learning somehow unlocks something within these people that quite literally makes it impossible to continue to contain them. While this alone is a powerful understanding of learning, the true power behind this statement is revealed when considering the context in which this was being said. Fredrick Douglas lived during an era where Black people were born into enslavement and would remain in such until they died. This was destined to continue for generations as there were no conditions that would grant freedom, yet Douglass’ slave master declared that education alone could disrupt this cycle. In this sense, education literally liberates people and their future descendants. It was that very possibility for liberation which the slave master feared despite the obvious power he held. He recognized education was the key to dismantling the power structure and thus could turn his world upside down.

Even after chattel slavery ended, a deep belief in this liberatory potential of education continues to prevail in marginalized communities. If all else fails, education is the foolproof path

to a better life and ultimately liberation. Even as I myself was growing up, 130 years after the beginning of slavery in this country, my elders promised me if I studied, worked hard, made good grades, anything could happen. Reality, however, tells a drastically different tale. The education system is failing marginalized students. In the 2016-2017 academic year, the national high school graduation rate was 85% (Public High School Graduation Rates, 2019). Though this may seem like a relatively high rate, it's an average number meaning each individual school's graduation rate may be below or above that number. A deeper analysis of who is above or below this average can help paint a clearer picture of the current education system. In that same year, only 78% of Black students graduated from high school (Public High School Graduation Rates, 2019). Not only is that rate significantly lower than the national rate but is also lower than the 89% of their White counterparts who graduated (Public High School Graduation Rates, 2019). There is a clear disparity between Black student's graduation rates and those of their White peers. These disparities exist in students' outcomes as well. In 2016, for example, the median annual earnings for full-time year-round White workers who had a high school diploma was \$35,000 (Indicator 30: Earnings and Employment, 2019). This is \$7,200 more than the annual earnings for Black workers with the same qualifications. It's evident, even when Black students are focusing and investing in this education system, it is still failing them. Gone are the days where high school diplomas came with the promise of a brighter future. In fact, as this data shows, too often marginalized students are graduating only to be stuck in the same positions their family has been in for generations.

This failure is rooted in the shift in the intention of U.S. education. Historically education, and by extension schools themselves, was meant to be a space where students learned

to question the world and discovered themselves. In this way, education was truly transformative as students were constantly reflecting about themselves and their communities which facilitated continual reshaping. Today, however, students are not granted that same opportunity as a standardized curriculum forces students to reflect on experiences that often don't reflect their own thus preventing a majority of students from entering the cycle of self-reflection and reshaping. This shift goes beyond missing the mark as in many ways, it is causing irreparable harm to the students who experience it. Instead of propelling them forward schooling is now causing these students, and future generations, to remain stuck if not to regress.

Fortunately, this failure has not gone unnoticed and people are searching for a solution. For some, this has meant looking at policies and organizing individuals. For others, this has meant questioning the very way schools are structured and erasing the line between community and school. The discovery of the right solution will not be a quick or easy process. Instead, it will require deep and critical reflection. Throughout the course of this reflection, questions will arise. Is it even possible to return the liberatory potential to education? If so, how? Is it realistic to assume every school can make this shift? The list of questions will only continue to grow throughout this process.

While this project cannot answer every question that will undoubtedly arise, it will serve as a place to critically engage with educational theories and practices and in doing so illustrate a framework and direction for schools today. In this paper, I will discuss the differences between liberatory and oppressive education and unpack the consequences of each educational framework. Not only will this discussion provide examples of these theories in practice, but it will also highlight areas that historically inhibit the successful implementation of these theories.

Overall, the goal of this paper is to analyze how community schools, in particular, are committed to liberatory education today and critically reflect on how more schools can become committed to the same project. The research questions for this project were as follows:

1. How does the curriculum of community schools reflect a commitment to liberatory education?
2. How does community school engagement with the broader community undergird their commitment to liberatory education?
3. What are the obstacles and challenges community school administrators face when implementing this type of education?

Literature Review

The current state of education

It's imperative that the current state of the U.S. education system is understood as the result of specific policies, not simply an accident that suddenly occurred. This is important for two main reasons. Firstly, analyzing the impact of these policies erases the mystery behind how the education system got like this. It is only in revealing these that the thought of reversing it becomes more doable. It's much easier to imagine dismantling or creating specific policies than to imagine starting from scratch. In that way, erasing the mystery is an important step in understanding how possible change is. Secondly, in analyzing these policies it becomes clear what did and didn't work. Those lessons, of successes and failures, must guide the new policy created if there is any hope of creating real changes to the current education system. If not, whatever is created will either continue the problem or exacerbate it.

The first policy we need to analyze was a result of the *1896 Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case. In this case, the Supreme court ruled "that racially segregated public facilities were legal, so long as the facilities for blacks and whites were equal" (History, 2009). While this ruling was detrimental to many aspects of life, it uniquely affected how schooling was experienced by Black and brown youth. By legalizing the separation of students of color from their white peers, the Supreme court essentially gave racist policy and decision-makers the green-light to systematically neglect schools serving students of color. While this verdict allowed the separation of schools, it didn't specify who was in charge of checking that these schools were in fact equal once the students had been separated. Due to this lack of regulation, schools were inherently unequal. Schools serving White students were able to rely on the unjust wealth

accumulated by their student's families, a resource that schools serving Black and brown students didn't have access to for a variety of reasons.

There are countless examples of Black and brown students being expected to attend physically unfit schools while in neighboring districts, White student's schools are being constantly renovated and improved. Outside of the physicality of these schools, those serving Black and brown students were often lacking the material students needed while in some cases their counterparts had more than they needed. For many students of color, schools came to simply reflect already existing systems of oppression. Though this ruling was later repealed in 1954 by the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* it still marks a change in how education was facilitated. Even after integration schools still continued to replicate existing systems of oppression causing students of colors' experience with education to get farther and farther from liberatory.

Interestingly, the next policy we must unpack was originally intended to reverse the long-term impact of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Passed in 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) affected all K-12 public schools and intended to "provide equal educational opportunities for disadvantaged students" (Lee, 2019). The prioritization of these students made sense since historically they were the same group being systematically neglected and ultimately it was the long term neglect of these schools which led to them not being able to transform the lives of their students. Those who graduated from these schools, which was an alarmingly low number to begin with, were still dealing with the same issues previous generations had dealt with. Congress hoped this act would remedy this situation by placing a stronger responsibility on schools to adequately teach their students. Through the NCLB Act, Congress promoted the creation of

nationwide math and reading tests, which were to be administered “every year in grades 3-8 and once in grades 10-12” as a means to both standardize what was being taught and understand how well students retained this information (Lee, 2019). In some ways, these tests were meant to do the regulating work that the Supreme Court forgot during the *Plessy v. Ferguson* verdict. While on the surface this looks like a good solution, the problem lies in the consequences associated with student scores on these tests.

Because NCLB directly correlated school funding with the scores student’s received on these standardized tests, those with lower scores received less funding. This act neglected to consider the fact that schools, particularly those serving marginalized students, often did not have the proper resources to properly teach their students, because of their historical under-funding. NCLB created a vicious cycle in which the so-called “solution” for student’s low test scores became the very reason they were failing. Essentially the very act meant to support these already struggling students was now targeting them. While this alone was problematic, if a school was consistently not meeting standards, NCLB would “allow the state to change the school’s leadership... or even close the school” (Lee, 2019). Never before had any test, let alone a standardized one had such a high impact on the future of a school. In hopes of saving their schools, administrators and teachers were forced to change how schools functioned. Gone are the days when education was about exploration. Instead, teachers began teaching their students for a test for fear of losing control over their schools.

Fortunately, the NCLB act was repealed in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). To date, this act is “the main education law for all public schools” (Lee, 2019). While this act is still centered around holding schools accountable for student achievement, it differs in

how it “gives states more say in how schools account for student achievement” (Lee, 2019). Admittedly, it’s still hard to tell the lasting impact of this new act as “most schools [didn’t]... start seeing the impact of ESSA [until] the 2017-2018 school year” (Lee, 2019). Despite this, this act, like it’s predecessor, is missing a key component. Though it shifts who has the power to define student achievement, it continues to ground at least some level of student achievement in testing and by doing this, it still encourages schools to be test driven. Though this policy is relatively new, it’s logical to assume because there is a connection to testing, that it too may not solve the real issue at hand. The question remains, however, if these policies are unable to solve the problem, what will?

The continued failure of the current education system is rooted in a flawed understanding of learning is. Currently, learning is framed as a linear process that should be completed in a finite time frame. Often the ending of this time frame is marked by some sort of standardized test or paper. Fixing the current education system will require the interrogation of what it means to learn and of what the purpose of schools should be within this new project. What if instead of a linear process learning was understood as a fluid process that never truly ended? What if it’s not just the paper that’s written or the test taken at the end of the semester but rather all the conversations before then which show a student is learning. It is only through asking questions like those that we can begin to fix the current education system.

Liberatory Education

Paolo Freire’s concept of “problem-posing education”, Gloria Ladson-Billings concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Karen Mapp’s framework for Dual Capacity-Building in

community engagement begin to answer these questions. Together these concepts reconceptualize what learning and schooling is thus building a framework for how to return education to its once liberatory roots. The following section unpacks each of these theories and in doing this not only reveals the true intention of these theories but, most importantly, the potential they have to fix the U.S. education system. This section concludes by discussing a historical example of this theory in practice and the challenges faced in implementing this framework with the goal of proving liberatory education can exist outside of the theoretical.

Problem-posing education

Paolo Freire noticed the education system in Brazil was failing the students in his community and in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, intentionally highlighted the connection between this failure and the various systems of oppression that existed during his time. It was in this book that he first introduced the concept of problem-posing education. According to Freire, problem-posing education understands “education as the practice of freedom” (Freire & Ramos 2009, pg. 170). For Freire, this understanding is extremely important, and each facet of the theory is invested in achieving this goal. It is this liberatory foundation that makes Freire’s work useful for imagining how to bring the liberatory potential back to the U.S. education system.

Problem-posing education begins by shifting the understanding of how knowledge is acquired. It positions knowledge as something which “emerges only through [the] invention and re-invention... human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire & Ramos 2009, pg.164). This understanding stands in direct contrast to how knowledge is commonly positioned. To most, knowledge is a stagnant entity that can be possessed and transferred from one individual to another and most often this transfer happens in the classroom

where teachers are expected to make students knowledgeable. Problem-posing education recognizes that understanding of knowledge is inherently problematic as it assumes students have no knowledge without teachers. This understanding of knowledge is undergirded by the belief that students' brains are simply empty containers that are waiting to be filled by teachers. Not only does this take agency away from students, ultimately it is untrue. While students may not come into the classroom with the specific content knowledge they do come in with knowledge and it is unjust to dismiss this fact. Problem-posing education recognizes this and intentionally upholds the fact that students do have knowledge, be it in the content area or not.

In recognizing that knowledge, problem-posing education complicates the student-teacher relationship. "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (Freire & Ramos 2009, pg. 169). The categories of teacher and student are made more fluid. This, in turn, challenges the power dynamics in a classroom. Instead of good teachers being those who impart the most knowledge and good students being those who passively receive the most knowledge both groups are given a chance to impart and receive knowledge. Within problem-posing education, instead of lecturing, "the teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own" (Freire & Ramos 2009, pg. 170). There is no such thing as a concrete understanding of anything. Instead, learning is meant to be a continual process that is always changing based on whose in conversation.

"In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world

not as a static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire & Ramos 2009, pg. 171). It is here where the goal of education as freedom is most clearly met. The current education system sees students as adaptable and intends to condition students to understand what currently exists as the only option. Through this conditioning, students are stripped of their critical consciousness thus making them easier to mold and oppress. Problem-posing education disrupts this process by giving agency back to students. Instead of changing the way students think, this form of education respects every individual’s way of thinking and requires students to apply that thinking to real-life situations. By doing this, “problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality... [and] strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (Freire & Ramos 2009, pg. 170). Ultimately, “Problem-posing education... posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation” (Freire & Ramos 2009, pg. 173). Much like the education, Frederick Douglass’ slave master feared, this form of education forces those involved to question and challenge existing systems of oppression. Students, particularly marginalized students, need to be given the tools to create a better reality for themselves and future generations. Problem-posing education understands this and creates the conditions for these tools to be crafted and for that very reason, it should be included in this project.

Culturally relevant pedagogy

In some ways, Gloria Ladson-Billings’ concept of culturally relevant pedagogy can be used to ground Freire’s theory. Ladson-Billings’ research was centered around Black students which was a choice not fully supported by other education researchers. Much of their push back was due to these students historically doing poorly on evaluations and the general public's

assumption that they were simply uneducable (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Despite this pushback, however, Ladson-Billings recognized that Black student's failure was not on the students themselves but simply a reflection of inadequacies in the education system. Ultimately she realized a theory that critically addresses that history of failure has the most potential to help all students. Ladson-Billings grounds culturally relevant pedagogy in the stories and experiences of eight teachers who were successfully teaching Black students to highlight the fact that success is possible (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Throughout her work Ladson-Billings not only highlights pedagogical similarities between these successful teachers but also unpacks the theoretical underpinnings of these choices thus providing an outline for how to address the systematic failure of these students.

Ladson-Billings defines culturally relevant pedagogy as “a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pg. 469). She then divides this theory into key three tenants: Academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It's important to note that Ladson-Billings didn't discredit academic success or even debate the fact that Black students weren't meeting society's standard of academic success in her theory. Rather she posits Black student's lack of academic success as a reflection of students' lack of investment in reaching these standards, not an inability to. She is directly opposing the common narrative that failing students aren't capable of succeeding. These students aren't inherently less capable; they are simply less engaged. In positioning failing to reach academic success like this, Ladson-Billing places responsibility back on schools and

upholds that instead of forcing students to align these standards, “the trick of culturally relevant teaching is to get students to ‘choose’ academic excellence” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pg. 160).

Students need to see and feel value in academic success to want to reflect it.

Ladson-billing suggests teachers begin to get students to see the value in academic success by finding “ways to value [student’s] skills and abilities and channel them in academically important ways” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pg. 160). This requires teachers to make a shift from combating students to collaborating with them. Teachers must recognize that students are fully capable and reflect these capabilities in non-academic ways all the time. The task of the teacher is to find ways to engage students in dialogue about how best to represent that capability academically. In fact, Ladson-Billings' research showed “teachers who used language interaction patterns that approximated the students’ home cultural patterns were more successful in improving student academic performance” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pg. 466). By entering into conversations with these students, not only are teachers able to achieve their goals but ultimately these students are able to reach higher levels of academic success.

The second tenant, cultural competence, ensures students do not lose their sense of self in the pursuit of academic success. Often, Black student’s culture is framed as something inherently incompatible with schooling and as a consequence students often feel like their culture and traditions have no place in schools. In fact, “successful students’ ...indicated that they were social isolates” because they felt forced to choose between academic success and their connection to their community (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pg. 476). Ladson-Billings addresses this through this second tenant by asserting there is nothing about any students’ culture which is inherently incompatible with academic success. Actually, academic success is more likely when teachers

“utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pg. 161). This can be done in various ways; including cultural music, home language, parent involvement, etc. within the classroom. Regardless of the manifestation of this tenant, the goal is for students to feel like “what they [have] and where they came from [is] of value” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pg. 161). In doing this, the teacher humanizes students and emphasizes that they do not need to become a different person to be academically successful. It shows the students that their teachers believe they have all the tools they needed already and they simply needed to employ them, which in turn increases their likelihood to invest in their academic success. This also ensures that cultural knowledge is not being lost or minimized within schools. By showing students what they, and by extension, their community know is valuable, culturally relevant pedagogy is questioning the often unspoken assumption that these communities are valueless. Here the liberatory potential of this concept can most clearly be seen as Ladson-Billing is directly challenging assumptions of who is or isn’t valuable within the classroom and the world more broadly.

The last tenant, critical consciousness, speaks to the overarching goal of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings recognized there is no value in reaching academic success if students aren’t thinking critically. In fact, she upholds “students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” if they are to be considered academically successful (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pg. 160). Much like Freire, Ladson-Billings believed in this radical potential of education. “A culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pg. 483). Thus even if a student reaches conventional understandings of academic success, if they

are not questioning the status quo and pushing society to grow and better itself they aren't successful to Ladson-Billings. Through this last tenant, Ladson-Billings pushes us to think critically about which students should be considered successful. Under the current education system, a successful student would be what Freire would describe as a passive reciprocal. Should success not mean more? Shouldn't education ignite passion instead of dulling students? Ladson-Billings says yes and it is in her ability to answer yes that the liberatory potential of this theory can be seen.

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework

Where Freire and Ladson-Billings' theories focus on the educator's role in returning the liberatory potential back to education, Karen Mapp's framework of Dual Capacity-Building intentionally uplifts parents and community's role in this return. In fact, Mapp begins her work by explicitly stating that "parent and community ties'...have a systemic and sustained effect on learning outcomes for children and on whole school improvements" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, pg. 5). This assertion stands in direct contrast to the conventional understanding of parent and community involvement in education as auxiliary. In many ways, by situating parents and community as integral to "sustainable and systematic" improvements Mapp's work reconceptualized who's included in a school community and thus completely changes the conversation around who can bring the liberatory potential back to education. Undergirding her work is the belief that any change to the current education system that doesn't critically discuss the role of parents and communities are inherently inadequate and thus unable to lead to the creation of truly transformative changes.

Despite parent and community engagement being encouraged through federal acts like “ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act)... [which] requires that Title I schools develop parental involvement policies and “school– family compacts” that outline how the two stakeholder groups will work together to boost student achievement” parent engagement remains a low priority to many schools (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, pg. 5). This has shifted as the growing body of research exposes more schools to the immense benefits of involving parents and communities on both their students and their institution as a whole. This research, however, is primarily focused on proving the benefits of parents and community engagement not on how to begin the process of engaging these stakeholders. While this has been instrumental in raising school interest in parent and community engagement, there is an underlying assumption within this research “that...educators and families...already possess the requisite skills, knowledge, confidence, and belief systems...[necessary] to successfully implement and sustain these important home–school relationships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, pg. 5). The reality, however, is that neither group truly knows how to interact with each other. In fact, it’s that “ limited capacity...[which is] a major factor in the relatively poor execution of family engagement initiatives and programs over the years” (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, pg. 7). Mapps’ work is aimed at filling that gap and building the capacities of schools, parents, and communities and as a consequence making partnerships between all three much more realizable.

Often capacity building within conversations on this topic is framed as something only parents or community need to engage in. Undergirding this framing is an assumption that there is something lacking within parents and communities and ultimately it is because of that inadequacy that these partnerships fail. Mapp highlights that this understanding is wrong and the

reality is, schools need this capacity building just as much as parents and communities. Though the areas where this is necessary will and should vary based on each partner, this doesn't mean that the need doesn't exist across all three. From the very offset, this mindset is challenging existing power relations as Mapp no longer allows parents and communities to be blamed. This understanding of capacity building is fundamental in framing what the goal of these partnerships should be. If schools, parents, and community are not all learning and growing through this work than the partnership isn't working as "effective engagement rests on relational trust between families and school staff, and building such trust depends on mutually valuing each party's contribution to student learning" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, pg. 38).

After acknowledging that the need for capacity building is present in all areas, Mapp is intentionally outlining what capacity building means for each partner. For educators and school administrators capacity building can come in the form of professional development. While most schools already have some form of professional development, Mapp highlights the need for these workshops to facilitate critical reflections about why parents and communities are an integral part of a healthy school community (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Though not explicitly outlined in her work, these trainings may also be a place where educators and administrators are exposed to concepts like problem-posing education or culturally relevant pedagogy as both concepts are well aligned to Mapp's understanding of the importance of parent and community engagement.

Parent and community capacity building should be centered around skill-building. This may manifest in a variety of forms like sessions about how the school system is structured or how to best academically support their students but what's most important is that these sessions help demystify schooling and prepare parents and community to advocate for their students

(Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). It's important to note however that Mapp doesn't limit this skill-building to only topics related to schools. In fact, she intentionally leaves this section vague as other areas like housing, health, finances, etc. can also affect their ability to interact with school and thus they should be supported in developing skills in these areas. Another benefit of Mapp being vague is the ability it grants each school to partner with parents and community and create sessions that truly address the skills they want or need to develop.

Debatably the most impactful part of Mapp's work is the eight requirements for the successful implementation of parent engagement programs she outlines. While much of her suggestions are open-ended, with the understanding that truly successful programs must be designed by the parents and community and school, these requirements provided structured markers schools can use for evaluating the programs they are creating. These requirements can be categorized as either about the initiatives themselves or about how these initiatives should fit into the school system as a whole.

Mapp says the initiatives themselves must be (1) "aligned with school and district achievement goals and connect families to the teaching and learning goals for the students", (2) build "respectful and trusting relationships between home and school", (3) build "intellectual, social, and human capital of stakeholders engaged in the program", (4) Learning must be done in a group and "focused on building learning communities and networks", and most importantly (5) "Participants are given opportunities to test out and apply new skills" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, pgs. 4-5). Though all of these requirements are important, the last two are what separates Mapp's framework from other existing work. To fully understand the importance of number 4, we have to first reflect on when parents and community are most often being invited to schools. Most

often, parents are invited to schools to meet their student's teachers or to volunteer. Neither of these opportunities focus on building a sense of a community. At best, these meetings can develop relationships between individual parents and teachers likely these relationships are weak. For example, while many parents may be in the building at once during parent-teacher conferences, each parent is coming to represent their own student and there aren't many chances for interactions between parents. During volunteering, even fewer parents are able to participate as often volunteering conflicts with work schedules and needs. Mapp argues these circumstances in which parents are normally coming to schools are not enough because there isn't a sense of community or bonding being formed. This is why schools have had these opportunities for years and yet their relationships with parents and communities aren't improving.

The fifth requirement is important because it recognizes that parents and communities should grow after these capacity building sessions and be able to apply these new skills. This is an important requirement for ensuring these sessions feel useful. For example, imagine if a parent is coming to these workshops but every session is focused on understanding the structure of schools. After the first time, these sessions are no longer engaging and quickly the parent can feel undervalued or like the program is stagnant. While it may be unrealistic to think schools will never repeat seasons, schools can address this requirement by allowing parents who are informed or who have already participated to take leadership roles in these workshops. In that way, parents will feel valued and be able to demonstrate their knowledge thus actively challenging the assumption that only schools have the ability to lead.

Ultimately, "the framework reveals that, in order for family-school partnerships to succeed, the adults responsible for children's education must learn and grow, just as they support

learning and growth among students” (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, pg. 26). These initiatives are meant to be long-term, not band-aid solutions. “Capacity-building efforts [must be] embedded into structures and processes” and receive necessary resources to be sustained (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, pg. 10). Not only is this work doable, especially when following Mapp’s framework, but it's necessary. “Family and community participation is a crucial resource not only for individual student achievement but also for catalyzing and sustaining school improvement and for building school cultures that support all students” (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, pg. 35). It is in that new space that the liberatory potential of education can most clearly be seen.

A historical example of these theories in practice

Though outside of the traditional education system, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s (SNCC) 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools can stand as an example of what these theories may look like in practice. The idea for these schools was created by Charlie Cobb and Noel Day during SNCC’s planning for the Freedom Summer of 1964. At its peak “there were 41 functioning Freedom Schools in twenty communities across the state [of Mississippi] with an enrollment of 2,135 students—twice the figure projected in planning for the summer. There are approximately 175 teaching full-time in the Freedom Schools, with the recruitment of 50 to 100 more in process” (Students of Freedom Schools, 2017, pg. 13). A fundamental goal of these schools was “to train people to be active agents in bringing about social change” (The Radical Teachers, 1991, pg.9). To fully appreciate how revolutionary this goal is it's important to understand the context in which these schools were created. These schools were created in Mississippi in the heart of the Jim Crow South during a time when many understood learning to

mean, “learning to stay in your place...[students, particularly Black students]...learned the learning necessary for immediate survival: that silence is safest, so volunteer nothing; that the teacher is the state, and tell them only what they want to hear; that the law and learning are white man’s law and learning (Teachers of Freedom Schools, 2017, pg. 6). These Freedom Schools directly challenged that understanding as not only did they practice a radically different form of education, but they also intentionally educated Black people in a society dependent on their continued miseducation and marginalization. Everything about these schools was meant to be revolutionary.

These schools are often framed as being at “the intersection of education and political action” (Perlstein, 1990, pg. 301). Kwame Ture, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael, and one of the key organizers in SNCC once said “ all real education is political... You can have no serious organizing without serious education”(Civil Rights Movement History Mississippi Freedom Summer Events). This quote, and SNCCs commitment to these schools more broadly, reflects the organization's commitment to upholding what Freire and Ladson-Billings defined as the true purpose of education to engage a student’s “critical consciousness”. Freedom Schools were using “reading, writing, arithmetic, history, and civics” to do exactly that (Civil Rights Teaching, 2017). After participating in these schools, students were meant to be transformed and to push for the transformation of their communities.

The curriculum developed for these Freedom Schools is one area where SNCCs investment in returning the liberatory potential to education can most clearly be seen. Considering the deeply important and difficult work these schools were engaging in, it’s surprising this document is actually under 30 pages. Even more surprising is the fact that there is

not one definite answer on any of these pages. Instead, this curriculum was full of open-ended questions that these teachers were expected to pose to their students. Though standard curriculums also include questions, they provide answers for teachers which ultimately allows them to standardize education. While teachers may accept any variation of these answers from students, the curriculum at least gives them a frame for what is right and wrong. By not including any answers in their curriculum SNCC is not only preventing standardization but they are also actively erasing the idea of a right or wrong answer and instead necessitates dialogue and reflection. This curriculum highlights SNCC's belief they couldn't guess what students would say or dictate which direction these conversations would go. Much like the theorists mentioned previously, they knew students came to these classrooms with their own knowledge-base and experiences and as a result, every conversation would be different. Ultimately this curriculum forces teachers to fully engage in conversations with students and discover the answer collectively. If students were expected to become change agents the first thing they needed to have was agency over their own education.

It was a bold choice to use this type of curriculum as this was essentially the only content-based tool these teachers had during the six-weeks these schools were running. Most volunteers had little to no experience teaching and one can imagine a curriculum, like the one they were using, wouldn't make anyone feel prepared to teach. The good thing is SNCC had no intention of having these teachers indoctrinate or lecture at their students. In fact, they often directly condemned that. Instead, teachers were expected to facilitate conversations and as a result everybody, including the teachers, would learn. These teachers were not from the community and often the students knew more about topics like racism, classism, etc. than their

so-called teachers and thus were best able to create solutions to these problems. It's not accidental that one of the few tools given to all teachers necessitates dialogue and acknowledges that no two classrooms would be the same.

In addition to the curriculum, SNCC's commitment to liberatory education can also be seen through the five principles every Freedom School was built on:

The school should be an agent of social change, (2) students should learn and be exposed to their own history, (3) the (academic) curriculum must be linked to the life experiences of students, (4) the program must continually ask open-ended questions, (5) and while pushing for social change, these programs should continue to stress the necessity of developing academic skills (Green 2014).

These principals were crucial because they were the only unifying factor between all 40 Freedom Schools. While requiring each program to adhere to these values, SNCC also understood the importance of individuality and pushed each school to adapt to the community they were serving. There was no expectation that the Freedom School in one area of Mississippi would match a school in a different area. Instead of trying to replicate the same school over, the SNCC focused on training their teachers to be culturally competent and providing a curriculum that ensured that important questions were being asked to the students at every school. Here we can most clearly see connections between SNCC's understanding of how Freedom Schools should be run and the work of Ladson-Billings.

Though students were ultimately expected to learn and do well in these schools there was also an expectation that teachers would use student's cultures as the grounding for that success. One of the principles was that the curriculum must be linked to the student's life experiences. There was no expectation that being successful in these schools would require students to change or distance themselves from their culture. This understanding of success was imperative because many of the teachers volunteering in these Freedom Schools were college-aged white northerners and their cultures and standards for success would undoubtedly be different from their Black southern students. SNCC recognized this and instead of requiring these students to change themselves to reach these new standards, SNCC required teachers to respect the dignity and knowledge of their students and to create standards based on their culture. This was an important step in making sure these Freedom Schools didn't simply mirror the oppressive education which existed in the average Mississippi school. SNCC wanted these schools to be different and committed to a liberatory form of education and used curriculum and principles as the means to do this.

Though 1964 Freedom Schools were powerful and radical, they weren't sustainable and though many tried, SNCC was never able to recreate Freedom Schools at the magnitude of what happened in 1964 again. There was a lack of volunteers and fundings. 1964 was the height of the Civil Rights Movement and everyone wanted to be involved. Though dangerous, movement work was popular amongst young liberal whites who believed they were making a difference. After that summer, race-based discrimination wasn't as hot of a topic, despite being prevalent, and thus it was harder to gather volunteers. This problem was only exacerbated by the lack of funding.

Even before the 1964 Freedom Summer, SNCC didn't have enough money. "By early May only \$10,000 has been raised and there [was] not even \$5 to fix the clogged toilet at COFO Headquarters in Jackson. Comedian and Movement stalwart Dick Gregory [did] a fund-raising tour that nets \$97,000, but that [was] nowhere near enough, and on three occasions before summer SNCC [was] unable to pay its staff their munificent salary of \$10 per week (equal to \$75 a week in 2013)" (Civil Rights Movement History Mississippi Freedom Summer Events). This created both short and long term problems. Freedom Schools were often dependent on communities being able and willing to host them. While initially, this helped get community investment in schools it also took away SNCC's ability to be selective in where these Freedom Schools were hosted.

In addition, the lack of funding also made it difficult to garner volunteers as their labor would be unpaid. While the work is important, being unpaid is not something everyone can afford to have for one summer, let alone multiple summers. Not only were these volunteers unpaid but it actually cost volunteers to join as "there are no funds to pay for transportation or bail bonds...[and] summer volunteers [had] to pay their own way and bring \$500 in cash (equal to \$3700 in 2013) for bail and other expenses"(Civil Rights Movement History Mississippi Freedom Summer Events). This wasn't something most students could afford thus forcing them to target those they believed could; rich white northern liberals.

Internally it was "SNCC's own vision of self-effacing leadership [which] inhibited the institutionalization of the schools" (Perlstein, 1990pg. 321). The vast majority of volunteers for the 1964 Freedom school were not directly involved with SNCC but instead were friends or allies and were often white. Though SNCC was transparent about this being a strategic move,

this fact remained a point of contention. Ultimately this led to “SNCC’s [future Freedom] schools generally rejected the use of white volunteers and often relied on the SNCC staff itself” (Perlstein, 1990 pg. 323). Though on the surface this seemed like a perfect solution it ended up being the demise of the Freedom Schools as “activists were increasingly unlikely to seek the expertise of outsiders, black or white, for support and planning” (Perlstein, 1990, pg. 323). In many ways, making this shift killed the schools ideologically before it physically died since they are rooted in collaboration and reflection.

After that summer “the state legislature passes a law prohibiting schools not licensed by the county superintendent of education and forbidding a license to any school that "counsels and encourages disobedience to the laws of the state" (Origins of Freedom Schools, 2017, pg. 14). Much like Fredrick Douglass’s slave master, the state knew these schools were transforming and empowering their students and couldn’t allow them to continue. “In the face of the intractability of American injustice, the pedagogical project of simultaneously promoting self-discovery and articulating a vision of social justice could not be sustained” (Perlstein, 1990 pg. 324). Though these external factors made their work increasingly difficult, it was the internal issues that ensured these schools would never run again.

Despite these limitations, however, these schools ultimately were transformative, not only to the students who participated but also to the teachers who volunteered. This example proves not only that the theories can work in reality but that it can be extremely successful. The question still remains however whether this form of education can work contemporarily. The remainder of this paper will be focused on answering this question. Though there are no doubt individuals who are committed to the project of liberatory education contemporarily, this project

focuses on how they are able to do this work and what obstacles, if any, they face while implementing this form of education.

Methodology

I used Qualitative methods to conduct this research. Through interviewing principals I hoped to better understand specific ways in which community schools show their commitment to returning liberatory potential to education. My interview questions were centered around the following topics: (1) what does liberatory education means to them (2) what are obstacles they've faced in implementing this form of education and why (3) what are the areas that have been successful when implementing this form of education(4) finally, what is the future they see for liberatory education. In addition to understanding the specific manifestations of liberatory education in their schools, I was also interested in understanding the broader relationship between funding and policies and the education they were implementing. Exploring this relationship was imperative because my analysis of the 1964 Freedom Schools highlighted that sustainability was deeply tied to this relationship and I was interested in understanding if this pattern persisted today.

This study was focused primarily on the Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Community Schools in downtown Los Angeles. I chose this location for two reasons. Firstly, this particular community school came highly recommended by past LAUSD Board President Steve Zimmer. As Board President, Professor Zimmer has seen and interacted with numerous schools in the district so I found his input very valuable. Secondly, all the schools in this learning community are pilot programs. I believed this was an important perspective as it would provide a framework

for how to start implementing this form of education instead of just focusing on what it looks like after liberatory education has already been implemented. I believe highlighting the how is imperative if there is any hope of spreading this form of education throughout the nation.

After selecting RFK as my research site, I reached out to each principal from the 6 schools within the learning community. Ultimately I ended up interviewing 4 out of the 6 principals. I decided to focus my research on principals because I believed they best be equipped to help me understand how a school, at large, can become committed to this form of education. I also believed they would best be able to highlight the role policy and funding play in this process as they work most directly with those sources. Though I cannot have a complete picture of the school by only interviewing the principals, I still believe the information they provided would be helpful in creating a framework for other schools to use.

Limitations

Despite my best efforts, there were limitations to my research. Firstly, my study was limited to the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). While I recognize that there are other spaces where education happens and that this framework can be applied in multiple spaces, I choose LAUSD because it allows my recommendations to address the largest number of people as not only is this is the second-largest school district in this nation but a majority of Los Angeles youth attend a school in this district. By centering my research on LAUSD, I was also able to ensure my recommendations were geared towards the most accessible form of education. In addition to being accessible, I also strategically choose LAUSD because it would have higher

regulations than private or charter schools. I knew if my recommendations were able to be implemented into LAUSD they would then be able to fit into more flexible school structures.

Secondly, I only had a year to complete this research. Like most research, there were many directions and subtopics I was interested in exploring but due to time constraints, I needed to narrow my focus. In the end, I was only able to interview 4 principals. With additional time, I would have interviewed more administrators and ideally included the perspectives of educators to this project, as well as, this would have provided a wider breadth of data. Despite being unable to do this however I was still able to gather relevant findings from these interviews and ultimately create a framework for ways other schools can bring the liberatory potential back to education.

Finally, this project had little to no funding. While I would have loved to interview people throughout the nation who are committed to this form of education, I did not have the appropriate funding to do such. Because of that, I was only able to visit schools located in Los Angeles as this was most accessible to me. In addition to limiting where I could go, the lack of funding also meant my interviewees would not receive any monetary compensation. While I informed all participants that this was the case before participating, it would have been nice to provide compensation for this labor as all of the participants are busy people. Despite these limitations, however, this research still provides a foundation for important conversations about the future of liberatory education in the U.S. education system.

Background

The following section will do three main things: explain why Los Angeles (LA) is the perfect context for this project, explain what a Community School is and how this model aligns

with the theoretical framework, and finally provide a brief history of the Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Community Schools. This section is intended to provide the context necessary to fully understand the findings of this project.

California is at the forefront of change and is considered a place for innovation. In fact, the policies and laws implemented in California often serve as justification for changes in other states. This trend is particularly useful for this project because this research aims to create recommendations that could be implemented throughout the U.S. education system. By studying a site which has historically influenced other places, this project is both answering the problem in California and opening the space to discuss the problem in other areas.

Secondly, Los Angeles specifically has been a site for radical education activism and reform. For example in 1986 students at Garfield High school walked out in protest of their “run-down campuses, lack of college prep courses, and teachers who were poorly trained, indifferent or racist” (Sahagun, 2018). This walkout spurred a movement and soon students from all over Los Angeles were walking out of their schools. At its peak, 22,000 students had participated in this movement (Sahagun, 2018). The Los Angeles Times called these walkouts “the day a Mexican American revolutions began” (Sahagun, 2018). These walkouts were important not only because they were disruptive but because students were taking agency over their schools in a way that had never been seen before. Not only did these first students have a clear list of concerns and points, but they were able to get other students from various schools to participate which forced everyone to take these concerns seriously. In many ways, these walkouts are an organizer’s dream and ultimately they show just how much power students have. Much like the Freedom School of 1964, these walkouts also highlighted how flawed and harmful

the education system was and forced people in power to be accountable for what they were doing. These walkouts were so impactful that they continue to be studied and talked about today both in LA and beyond.

This strong commitment to educational activism exists throughout the city today. Most recently, it can be seen in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) teacher's strike. "More than thirty thousand L.A. teachers went on strike [for six days] to protest abysmal conditions in their schools" (Goodyear & Galchen, 2019). This strike addressed multiple issues. Firstly, it was responding to the conversation around school funding; specifically the potential repeal of Proposition 13. Among other things, Proposition 13 decreased the available funding for the state's public schools by a quarter which drastically affects the funding LAUSD receives. These cuts have continued to trickle down exacerbating pre-existing inequities. On the 2020 ballot, however, there is a new bill, the California Schools and Local Communities Act, which would potentially reverse these detrimental consequences of Proposition 13. Ultimately, the successful passing of this bill "[would] generate eleven billion dollars for schools and other community services" (Goodyear & Galchen, 2019). The teacher's union considered this passing of this act intrinsically linked to their negotiation of contracts as LAUSD "claimed to be constrained by a lack of funds from making lasting changes to address staffing and other needs" (Goodyear & Galchen, 2019). This strike was a clear indication that the union didn't believe LAUSD's claims and that they were willing to push back for more.

Moving towards a strike was monumental for a variety of reasons. Firstly, LAUSD is the second-largest school district in the nation with 696, 096 students and 1,322 schools (LAUSD 2018). The teacher's union directly and publically challenges a district that large was daring and

shows how deep teacher's passion and belief is in this issue. This is also considering how many other districts look towards LAUSD for guidance on how to run their own districts. The union knew it would be a long and hard fight but ultimately it was one which they saw as necessary for their students, both current and those in the future. Not only did this strike call into question whether LAUSD should be looked at as a model but this strike also showed the collective power of the teacher's union.

In so ways, however, it was the outcome of this strike which ensured this strike would be monumental. The teachers won and got much of what they wanted and ultimately reshaped the district. Because of their fight, LAUSD will invest "a total of \$403 million over the next three school years" into their schools by 2020 (Yan, 2019). This will be done by decreasing class sizes, adding more nurses, counselors, and librarians as well as raising teacher wages. In addition to lamenting the power of teachers, this strike also shows LAUSD's capacity to change. So often calls for change are met with concern that LAUSD is too old or large to change. Though these changes will require investments and sacrifices, they are possible. No longer can concerns about education be swept under the rug and no longer can districts use their size as justification for not addressing these concerns. Moreover, if LAUSD, the second-largest district in this nation, then so can other districts.

Some educators and educational theorists position community schools as a model that fully addresses the failures of the current education system. "A community school -- sometimes referred to as a full-service school -- is a school that strives to address the needs of the "whole child" (e.g. intellectual, psychological, physical and emotional development) by situating itself within a network of partnerships to offer a complete range of wraparound support services"

(Noguera & Lyons, 2016). This model began to gain popularity in LA in 2017 after districts in Oakland and New York declared themselves community school districts and as educators and educational activists began to understand its ability to ensure “schools [are] safe havens for students and families” and that “every student can benefit from an education” (Raden, 2017). Much like the 1964 Freedom Schools, proponents of community schools emphasize that no two schools should be the same. Every school community has different students and families and thus may require different resources or programs. There are however four pillars most community schools include: (1) integrated student support, (2) expanded learning time and opportunities, (3) family and community engagement, and (4) collaborative leadership and practices (Oakes, Maier, Daniel, 2017). These pillars stand as one of the only unifying characteristics of all community schools and are how community schools are able to ensure their ability to educate all students. All four tenants of this model clearly align with the literature on how to return the liberatory potential to education.

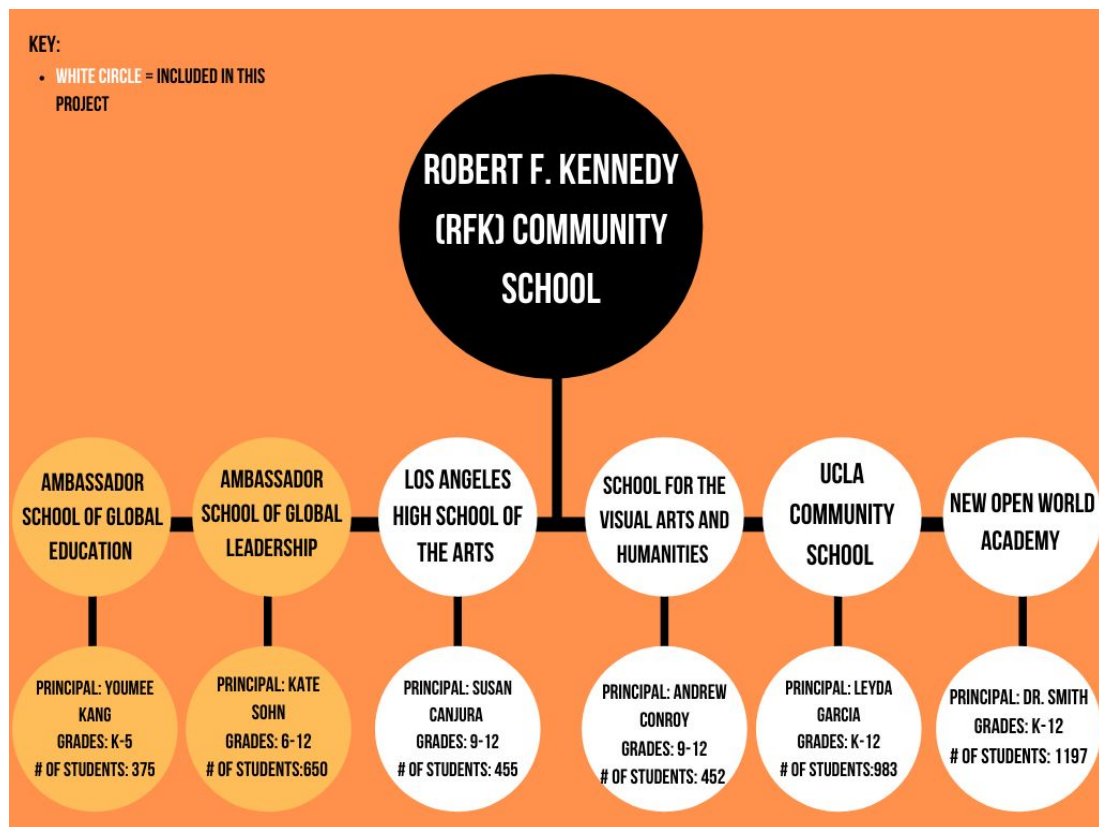
The first and second tenants reflect Ladson-Billings and Friere’s theories about how to teach students. The first tenant, integrated student support, is aimed at understanding students as whole beings. Proponents of community schools recognize what happens outside of the classroom affect what happens inside the classroom and thus set up supports to help students in both spaces. This understanding is aligned with Ladson-Billings reasonings for the usage of culturally relevant pedagogy. Students are whole beings and all of them must be engaged and supported if they are to be successful. Though Ladson-Billings focuses on the content in the classroom it’s logical to assume she would also support the inclusion of other supports outside of the classroom. In some ways, this tenant pushes Ladson-Billings theory farther and ensures that

all aspects of students are accepted. Though less explicit the second tenant, expanded learning time and opportunities, aligns with Freire's work. Much of problem-posing education is grounded in a need for education to be applied to real-life situations. By expanding learning time and opportunities community schools are allowing learning to happen outside of the classroom but like Friere wanted. The third and fourth tenants reflect a commitment to both broadening whose a part of the school community and ensuring all members of the community have decision making power. This commitment upholds much of Mapps' considers necessary for school improvement. Community schools intentionally create relationships with parents and communities and thus are able to create solutions that will truly help students. It is because of that partnership that community schools have the potential to create lasting change. Today, "At least 5,000 schools in the United States identify as community schools" which is evidence that this is "becoming a popular way to meet the needs of students that extend beyond the classroom" (Castrechini, London, 2012, pg. 5).

The Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Community Schools is home to some of the first community schools in the district. Before becoming a learning community, this land was formerly home to the Ambassador Hotel which was "a favorite of 20th century Hollywood, Presidents, and other dignitaries" (History of Ambassador Hotel). Remnants of this history can still be seen throughout the building as the theatre was left intact and other rooms were converted after the demolition in 2006 (History of Ambassador Hotel). The conversion of this space took around \$578 million and now this building can hold up to 4,200 students and must be "filled by students within a nine-block radius" of the building (Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools, 2020). Though originally conceptualized as a traditional K-12 school in "2008 LAUSD Local

District 4 determined the facility would host wall-to-wall pilot schools” (Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools, 2020). These schools are Ambassador School of Global Education (K-5), Ambassador School of Global Leadership (6-12), Los Angeles High School of the Arts (9-12), New Open World Academy (K-12), School for the Visual Arts and Humanities (9-12), and UCLA Community School (K-12). To honor the history and intention of the old hotel, the district ensured all these schools were committed to social justice.

This project includes the Los Angeles High School of the Arts (9-12), New Open World Academy (K-12), School for the Visual Arts and Humanities (9-12), and UCLA Community School (K-12).



Through examining these schools this project aims to both better understand how community schools reflect a commitment to liberatory education and suggest recommendations for how other schools throughout the nation can implement similar forms of education.

Findings and Analysis

The remainder of this paper analyzes the interviews of four principals from Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) in downtown Los Angeles (LA). The principals included in this project are Principal Garcia from the UCLA Community School, Principal Conroy from the School for Visual Arts and Humanities, Dr. Smith from New World Academy and Principal Canjura for the Los Angeles School of the Arts. Each principal had a nuanced understanding of both what that commitment looks like both at their sites and within education more broadly. In particular, everyone cited grassroots efforts and programs as the best embodiment of their school's commitment to transforming education.

This project is ultimately aimed at better understanding community schools and this model's potential for returning the liberatory potential to education. To accomplish this these four interviews were centered on (1) how curriculum of community schools reflect a commitment to liberatory education, (2) how engagement with the broader community undergirds community school's commitment to liberatory education, and (3) the challenges/obstacles do community schools face when implementing this type of education. The following themes arose when answering these questions:

1. The importance of physical space
2. Dismantling professionalism

3. Reconceptualizing the relationship between schools and the broader community
4. Critical theory and Community as central and challenging
5. Relationships are a high priority for principals

Collectively, these themes highlight the key differences between the work happening in these schools and what exists in the U.S. education system more broadly. The remainder of this section will explain and examine each theme.

1. The importance of physical space

In the heart of downtown Los Angeles, RFK stands out not only because it is surrounded by green space, something increasingly rare in downtown, but also because the building's windows and curved edges give it an almost futuristic feel. In some ways, this building feels like an oasis within the chaos of downtown. This futuristic feel is contrasted by bright murals and paintings which incorporate different cultural icons and artifacts that reflect the students attending RFK. Interestingly, these cultural pieces aren't hidden at the back of the building or in a corner but rather are purposefully displayed in obvious and highly trafficked areas. They are an intentional part of the architecture and in many ways, just as much a part of what makes RFK beautiful as the huge windows and greenspace.

The interior of the building is even more beautiful than the exterior. Walking down the halls, one can't help but notice how new and well-kept everything appears. Of this \$578 million it's clear a substantial investment has been made in the physicality of this building with the intention of cultivating a space that inspires learning. Student work, covering a wide variety of styles and content, can be seen throughout the building from the classrooms to the halls to even

the library. In one hall alone, I saw drawings from elementary school students next to projects from middle school students. Much like the murals and paintings outside, these works juxtapose the new-age feel of the building as these touches of personality stand as a reminder that students are learning and growing within this building. I introduced this finding with such a detailed description of the building, not with the intention of romanticizing the school, but rather hoping to highlight how a commitment to liberatory education requires transformation on all fronts, including the physical building itself.

It may be helpful to understand how most urban schools are built, and the subsequent role that campus design plays in a student's experience of education, to fully grasp why RFK's design is so transformative. Urban schools are so often surrounded by gates, fences, and other large imposed barriers that those items are "intimately interwoven within the fabric of the school" (Sojoyner 2016, pg. 10). Damien M. Sojoyner talks about this in his book *The First Strike*. In particular, he theorizes about how these forms of security, "ranging from large, black, steel, arrow-tipped gates to metal detectors, [are]...the literal and metaphorical device for the multiple forms of enclosure that Black youth face both inside and out of school" (Sojoyner 2016, pg. 10). It is these various forms of enclosures, Sojoyner theorizes, which help facilitate the pushing out of students in most urban schools. These various security measures come with the implication that there is danger, either from the community (hence the need for fencing) or from students themselves (metal detectors). Regardless of the source, there is an underlying lack of trust in these situations which automatically places the students and their communities in a defensive position. Before even entering a classroom, students are being dehumanized and the liberatory potential of education vanishes.

Upon entering RFK it's clear many of these enclosures don't exist. Though there is fencing, they resemble the thin kind normally placed around parks not the thick bar like fences that surround neighboring schools. There are also no metal detectors anywhere in the building. Despite this building hosting 6 different schools, there is no sense that the students need to be confined or controlled. It was shocking to see students moving so freely inside the building. While I was in the UCLA Community School front office I was surprised by how many students came in either wanting to say hi to staff or sent by a teacher to get something. It's important to note that many of these students were young, 6 or 7, showing that this trust is something given to all students, not just the older ones. Though these changes may seem small or insignificant they make a big difference in school environments. The absence of these security measures implies the school trusts that its students, and the surrounding community, have good intentions and won't bring harm to the school. As one would assume this shift can also lead to students feeling more comfortable in schools. This choice is even more impactful considering they replaced these traditional security measures with art. These murals, paintings, and student work not only show students they and their cultures have a space within the school which ultimately transforms the school environment. While the physicality of the building isn't solely responsible for this new environment, it is logical to assume that it has some effect. It is in this new school environment, built on trust and acceptance, that the possibility of liberatory education can even exist.

2. Dismantling professionalism

During their interviews, both Principal Garcia and Principal Conroy talked about professionalism and the need to transform how it's commonly understood. In addition to being generally interesting, their perspectives also highlighted the ways in which the current education

system actively dehumanizes educators and administrators. In this way, this theme exemplifies how the current education system isn't working for anyone, even those commonly understood to be in positions of power. Both participants positioned professionalism as something which necessitates the altering of self to in some way better fit a job or work environment. These alterations can happen on multiple levels from how someone speaks to what one wears to even the name they use in these spaces. Though capitalism forces everyone to in some way interact with professionalism it's important to note that the amount of change required to meet that differs from person to person. This is due in large part to the image of professionalism matching a particular person. Because this concept was created within a world undergirded by white supremacy it is logical to assume that within this context the most effective and productive person would be whoever's at the top of the hierarchy; the white man. This is not to say that professionalism wants workers to become white but rather professionalism encourages workers to emulate the productive qualities of whiteness. Anyone not emulating these ideals, either physically or through their personality, is forced to change to fit the goal of the work environment; to create highly effective work environments that produce or reproduce wealth. This is particularly true for marginalized people just by existing are considered unprofessional.

In the context of schools, this can often look like administrators, particularly administrators of color, distancing themselves from students. This can be done through language or dress as well as through the relationships these administrators develop. Often the most professional administrators are by-the-book as emotions take time and thus are deemed ineffective. Interestingly, instead of subscribing like many of their peers, both interviewees understood professionalism as a project that doesn't deserve investment. They had little interest

in being considered professional because the project of professionalism was against their beliefs. Instead, they are invested in a different understanding of professionalism, which is outlined below, and it is within this understanding that the liberatory potential of education can most clearly be seen.

When asked about her understanding of professionalism Principal Garcia said: “you have to integrate [yourself] because you are you in all the spaces you are in” (Garcia, 2020). In saying this Principal Garcia was highlighting a fundamental flaw in the project of professionalism. There is no way that she, or anybody, could fully transform themselves to fit the ideal of professionalism. This is particularly true for people who physically don’t and will never fit the image. There is also something profoundly radical about what she said as well. She’s refusing to commit to a project meant to silence and harm her despite the rhetoric around it. This is crucial considering the amount of pressure principals have to constantly endure. She noted working in this way was not a choice but rather a necessity. She reflected on how demanding and tiring striving for an impossible goal is. Specifically, she stressed remaining an administrator long-term requires she be herself as it was only through the complete integration of her whole being that she is able to do this work. She also highlighted this choice is especially important considering how often schools encourage students to be authentically themselves and brave. In particular, she talked about the school’s goal of empowering and encouraging authenticity amongst students and questioned where they would ever realize this goal if educators and administrators are doing the opposite. Ultimately, resisting the common understanding of professionalism not only makes Principal Garcia’s work doable but it also creates spaces for students to feel validated exactly as they are without fear of never being successful because of it.

Principal Conroy emphasized how his rejection of the project of professionalism resulted in him being able to connect with students easier which ultimately makes him more successful in his role. He used the whole school assemblies as an example of how he does this. During these assemblies, the pressure for professionalism may be more pronounced as numerous students are watching the principal. Instead of following the expectations of professionalism however, he uses this time to show the students that there are other ways to exist in the space. For Principal Conroy art has always been an important part of his life and because of this, he incorporates it into what he presents to students. When asked the effect of this choice he only had positive things to say. Not only does this allow him a chance to feel a different type of joy doing his work, but students also noticed he was running assemblies differently than they had ever experienced them. Excitedly he described these moments as a time when “students look forward to seeing what [he] will bring” telling him it was one of their favorite parts of the assembly. By constantly adding art to these assemblies, and intentionally creating projects bigger than the last, he is proving to the students that he cared about them and was willing to put the work into making these assemblies interesting. Additionally, it humanized him to the students and helped them understand him as a multifaceted being. This is important not only for helping them relate to him but also in helping them envision themselves one day being in similar positions. If the principal of a school loves art it opens a whole new world to what type of person could become the principal. Not only can it be a person who loves school or debate but it can also be a person who loves art. Simply by being himself, Principal Conroy is engaging in multiple radical projects, some intentional and some consequential.

3. *Reconceptualizing the relationship between schools and the broader community*

Each principal shared a deep commitment to the community. From curriculum to the language spoken in schools, to the way the schools themselves are decorated, it's clear each school in RFK is intentionally erasing the divide between school and community.

Principal Conroy noted schools must understand the community they are situated in, as well as the various communities their students come from, if they hope to ever be successful. In his eyes, “a school not committed to this project is a school not committed to student success” (Conroy, 2020). While he did highlight the need for everyone in schools to be committed to this project he emphasized this was especially important for him because of his own identity as a white man. His lived experience is very different from most of his students and their communities. From the beginning of his interview, Principal Conroy was clear that any success he's had in the school is a direct result of him taking the necessary steps to understand the students and their communities.

In particular, he talked about using language as a means to do this. Many families in his school community, have limited English proficiency and as a result, they often need their children to translate when English is being used. Language barriers can create a variety of problems and ultimately may be the difference between talking with and talking at families. Fortunately, Principal Conroy has the ability to speak Spanish and intentionally uses Spanish when addressing parents and community members despite not being a fluent speaker. While there still may be miscommunication or words he doesn't know it's still impactful because it “levels the playing field” (Conroy, 2020). Principal Conroy noted there are often power dynamics between parents or community members and principals and often language serves as

another way these dynamics are expressed. By speaking in a language he is less familiar with, he is guaranteed to make mistakes or choose the wrong word and in doing that is calling to question those power dynamics. Beyond just the humor of him stumbling through the language, this is also an opportunity for parent and community agency which doesn't often exist in schools. In this situation, parents and community members are the experts and he needs their help to fully communicate. Once he makes a mistake, Principal Conroy noted that parents often correct him and take up the role of the teacher as they help him better understand what word to use instead. Though this can seem like a small example, consider that within one presentation this can happen numerous times. As a result, this presentation becomes a dialogue as parents show the knowledge they have while being presented with new information. Though this example is centered around language, Principal Conroy is creating a culture where parents can correct an authority figure. Over time, these corrections can go beyond language into thoughts about a variety of topics pertaining to schools. In many ways, this exemplifies Mapp's idea of Dual-Capacity building as both partners are working collaboratively towards growth. The liberatory potential of education can be seen as these power relationships are being dismantled and parent and community agency rises in its wake.

Principal Garcia took a slightly different approach to understanding this relationship. While she too talked about the importance of language and understood the power dynamics between community and schools she also focused on the role schools can have in changing the narratives around the communities they are within. She began this conversation by reflecting on how she learned people saw her community in college. She highlighted that "Some of those labels (about urban youth) are about me except I don't see me like that. those aren't the words I

would use to describe my family” (Garcia, 2020). In this way, there was a clear disconnect between what was being said about her community and how she felt as a member of the community. Here, she noted, is where schools have the ability to change the narrative. In particular, she talked about using action projects as the means to do this. The UCLA Community School created these projects in response to what is being said about their students and their communities during the 2016 elections. Principal Garcia noted that she and her staff believed hearing harmful and racist narratives on national news could have a negative effect on how their students saw themselves. These action projects were created with the intention of allowing students to grapple with what they were hearing and create counter-narratives. In this way, the school actually shifted the curriculum to both better reflect the community and to better equip the students to advocate for themselves. The school is so committed to the genuine and successful implementation of these action projects that they can focus on the same topics for years because students continued to highlight the need to discuss it. This type of education is liberatory as it also allows students to think critically about the world they live in and how it perceives them. These projects are both culturally relevant and problem posing and facilitate constant reflection and reshaping. Though these projects may never be recognized on state tests or other common markers for success, they make the difference between students being educated and indoctrinated. Like Ladson-Billings and Freire, Principal Garcia and her school community understand the importance of education pushing students to think critically. To all them, if students are unable to do this then they were never truly educated.

Principal (Dr.) Smith provided yet another example of how schools can have reciprocal relationships with the broader community. At Dr. Smith’s school, they noticed that many of their

students, and by extension community members outside of the school, were in need of basic necessities. Instead of ignoring this need, the school created a program called Cover with Love. Over a six-week period, the school collected donations from everyone able to contribute. At the end of this period, they set up a flea market style event where every family can “shop” for what they need. It’s important to note that this shopping is done privately. Dr. Smith noted privacy is important for families and community members to be comfortable participating in the event. By allowing families to shop privately, no one knows who did or didn’t attend the event thus erasing some of the shame often attached to receiving or needing donations. Though a highly effective and appreciated program, Dr. Smith highlighted that it’s not something required or encouraged by the district. Instead, this school community had come up with this idea on their own and run it independently. Though outside of the common understanding of a school’s responsibility to the community, Dr. Smith’s understanding of reciprocity and the importance of meeting the needs of those in his community mandates he continues this work. For Dr. Smith had he not implemented this program he wouldn’t be fully supporting his students and thus won’t be doing his job as principal. Much like the other interviewees, Dr. Smith’s understanding directly connects the success of a school to the relationship it has with the community.

4. Critical theory and Community as Central and Challenging

Critical theory, such as that of Paolo Freire and Gloria Ladson-Billings, plays a crucial role in each of the principal's schools. In particular, all interviewees focused on the need for these theories when implementing truly transformative education since the continual reflection required by these theories often serves as the means for growth and transformation. In all of

their schools these theories, and critical research associated with it, facilitates continual development and reshaping and much like for students, it is in that process of continual change that the liberatory potential of education and schooling can most clearly be seen.

The principals focused on the role of these theories in two realms in particular; curriculum development and teacher training. Principal Garcia highlighted how in the UCLA Community School the work of theorists like Paulo Freire and Gloria Ladson-Billings directly informed the expectations she had for the curriculum. Once she understood the project these theorists were committed to and wanted her school to join the movement as she truly believed it would benefit her students. She highlighted however how despite her understanding of the importance of these theories it was still a struggle to see how to incorporate it into her school. In particular, she talked about the tension between testing, and the resulting consequences of scores, and her desire to implement this new form of education. In collaboration with teachers in the schools, she developed an alternative curriculum that would both teach students what they needed to learn for these tests while also incorporating elements from the critical theories. They did this primarily by undergirding the new curriculum with self-reflection and agency which, to both Principal Garcia and the teachers, it is here where the liberatory potential of the curriculum lives. This curriculum comes in two forms: the Multilingual Interdisciplinary Social Action Project (MISA) and Reading Identity and Self-reflection (RISA). Both of these programs allow students to evaluate how they feel their learning is progressing and what goals they would like to set. For example, in RISA students are asked what reading skills they would like to develop and why. Interestingly, this is done for reading in both Spanish and English and the UCLA Community School is a bi-lingual school. Principal Garcia talked about the implementation of

this curriculum helping students become invested in being literate in both languages as they set and achieved their individual goals. Ultimately this changed the dynamic in classrooms, and learning more broadly, as students are now put in charge of their own learning and teachers are simply facilitators of that learning. Though ultimately the UCLA Community School created a new curriculum, other schools can start this process by just incorporating self-reflection and agency into the curriculum they already have. This can look like asking students to create goals for the class or asking them what they think is most important to learn. Though this isn't a perfect solution, it is a step in the right direction and can make the ultimate goal of creating a new curriculum more tangible.

Principal Canjura highlighted this possibility in her interview as she spoke at length about her school being a certified Linked-learning institution which intentionally creates a “connection between education and career pathway” (Canjura 2020). In many ways, this form of education mirrors what Paolo Freire theorizes about by ensuring a student's education is relevant to what they want to do outside of school. Much like the UCLA school, Principal Canjura's school also allows students to choose their pathway. In the 9th grade, they choose between 2 different pathways (acting/videography or technical theatre/design) which they will stay in for the next 4 years. This is a relatively big decision to make, but Principal Canjura emphasized that it is important because it both increases their investment in pathway track and their agency over the high school experience. Each year for the next 4 years each student will take one elective, which builds off the one previous, focused on their pathways content area. Principal Canjura also talked about the importance of students being able to present what they've learned at the end of their time at her school. Again this is an important step in reminding them that their work has a

purpose and that they have grown over their time at the school. Throughout their 4 years, they have various opportunities to present their work, through workshops and plays for the community, but their biggest presentation happens their senior year. They have an event called a Senior Defense where students have to show work from multiple areas (writing, art, math, science, etc.) in front of a panel of teachers. Principal Canjura talked about this event being one of “solidarity” as everyone within the school community supports the student during their presentations. There is also something deeply powerful about this event because it allows every student to show exactly how they have grown during their four years at the school. It is this individuality and agency which is liberatory as no two students will have the same path, unlike what happens in many other high schools.

Principal Conroy highlighted a less conventional way to incorporate theory into school. He began by talking about the tendency to look outside schools themselves for a solution. Though he acknowledged the value in this, he also talked critically about the need to recognize and uplift the expertise which exists inside the school and the surrounding community. He talked about this specifically in the context of teacher development. As a principal, he is intentional about consistently visiting classes and understanding what’s happening. To him, this is an important step in understanding the data he gathers from tests, teachers, parents, and students themselves. While visiting these classrooms he is also intentional about giving advice or pointing out areas for improvement as he too believed that everyone should always reflect and grow. Interestingly however instead of assuming that he knows how to do everything best, he uses this as an opportunity to partner teachers together. For example, when he notices teachers have a hard time with class management he first brings the problem to their attention. But if he notices it

again, he will then partner them with a teacher he believes have excellent classroom management skills. He was adamant about saying that it's their expertise in the school he looks at not their length of time teaching. This often creates a situation where younger/less experienced teachers may be teaching more experienced teachers. In this way, he is challenging power relations and acknowledging the knowledge exists in multiple spaces all the time. Though a small step this can have a lasting effect on the work environment within schools. After experiencing this themselves it is much easier for teachers to then implement the same thing into their own classrooms.

While interviewees highlighted specific areas where these theories can see they also emphasized that these theories have such a profound impact on their understanding of education that they transform the way everyone navigates the school. A true commitment to these critical theories necessitates an embodiment of the values which they uphold. The interviewees highlighted that though curriculum and teacher training is important if power relations aren't being interrogated interpersonally the full potential of education is still being missed. Through this logic, these principals are questioning the common assumption that a change in the curriculum would automatically return the liberatory potential to education. Instead, liberatory education requires a transformation that extends beyond the classroom.

5. Relationships are a high priority for principals

All interviewees discussed at length the importance of relationships within their school communities and whether these relationships were between themselves and students or teachers or parents or community partners, it was clear none of them believed the work they do would be possible without these relationships. To take the words of Dr. Smith " school is a microcosm of

life” and without sustainable and healthy relationships there is no hope for growth as for him, and by extension, all the interviewees, schools themselves are simply a reflection of relationships (Smith, 2020).

Principal Conroy highlighted the importance of administrators building relationships with students despite not seeing them every day or having long periods of time with them. When asked why this was important he laughed and then asked back why not. Though joking, his answer did highlight the foolishness in the question itself. How could a principal lead a school without building relationships with the students? To Principal Conroy, these relationships are just as much a part of his job as managing the school budget. When asked how he did this he described a binder he has with every student’s name and face, along with basic information and how he used this to help him remember all the students he would greet at the beginning of the day. Though a relatively mundane strategy, as he highlighted most schools have similar binders or databases, he talked about how he notices students appreciated him knowing their names and being able to remember little things like whether they have siblings or are involved in sports or even their birthday. To him, this was just one way to show students that he saw them and cared about them. Despite the amazing programs being built in his school, he credited interpersonal relationships to truly making the difference of whether students felt accepted or not in school. While he talked at length about all these benefits of knowing the students he also was transparent these relationships take time. In fact, when he first began there were freshmen at his school who would look at him weird or even ignore him when he greeted them at the beginning of the day. In those moments he noted that humility was key but it also reminded him that most students weren’t used to being seen by teachers let alone by administrators. They weren’t acting this way

because they didn't like him knowing who they were but rather because they weren't used to it which made them uncomfortable. He then made it his mission for students to feel seen in his school and to expect this every time they came to school. He ended the story by saying those same freshmen who looked at him weird now go out of their way to talk to him during their senior year. Though a small example, it does highlight the power of consistency while developing relationships, particularly with students. If he had taken their rejection personally he would have never continued greeting students and never gotten to know them as intimately as he does now. The school community would have been completely transformed. This same dedication to student relationships was also evident in the UCLA Community School. Whether it was about a student's new puppy or how they had broken their wrist it was clear that every person was invested in creating relationships with the students and the difference it made was almost palpable.

All interviewees also highlighted parent relationships as fundamental to the success of their schools. There was a belief in all of these schools that it is only through working together that real change can happen. "It is only in talking to parents that you understand the trajectory of the school because it's really about what they want" (Garcia 2020). Parents need to have a sense of ownership in schools because the reality is they do own them. School funding is often passed on students and as the influx in charters shows public schools need parents to choose them to stay open. Gone are the days when public schools are the only option and while there are various opinions on the effects of this shift it does give parents more agency. It's important however that these relationships are built "with parents not for parents" if they are going to be successful (Principal Garcia). Both Principal Garcia and Conroy spoke at length about an event they host

called Coffee with the Principal. For both of them, these events are key opportunities to cultivate strong parent relationships and develop leadership skills. Principal Conroy noted using these events as a space to review budgets with parents and ensure that they were in support of where and how money was being spent. “It’s important you don’t just show them the budget and ask for approval but instead ask critical questions” (Conroy 2020). Principal Conroy also talked about incorporating parent evaluations into the school. They ask questions like who do you feel about X class or X decision and again open the space for parents to be critical. It is often having conversations like this which allow parents to feel ownership over a school. Like Mapp suggests in her work however these conversations are only productive if parents are equipped to have the conversations. Dr. Smith talked about his school’s efforts to create a physical space for parents. Though this project isn’t complete he was clear about what it means to invest in a space for parents. Much like the murals around RFK, creating a physical space for parents shows that they aren’t auxiliary but that they are a permanent part of the school. Parents are currently working with staff to draft the vision of this center “because it’s important [they] get it right”. Prioritizing collaboration from the beginning, though time-intensive, is yet more evidence in their school’s commitment to having equitable relationships with parents. The goal of this center is to “equip parents to be able to do the work they want to do”. Dr. Smith reflected on how parents had great ideas for the school but didn’t fully understand how or if they were implementable. By creating this center, Dr. Smith hopes to create a space where parents can learn the answers to these questions as well as create more ideas. In many ways, this is the first step in his larger dream of having a school as a place where one can access everything they need; a true “microcosm of life” (Smith, 2020).

In his interview, Dr. Smith highlighted the importance of creating strong relationships with teachers. From the very beginning, he was clear that for him “community schools are teacher-led and teacher-driven”. This understanding of the school is completely opposite of the more common understanding of principals being in charge of a school. Because Dr. Smith sees schools in this way, strong teacher relationships are fundamental to his job as it is only through talking to teachers and understanding the issues that he knows what to focus on or change. He talked about doing this both through leadership and through having strong interpersonal relationships. During the interview, Dr. Smith was very intentional in highlighting the importance of understanding just how much goes into being a teacher and how that affects their ability to plug in in different ways. In the classroom teachers are doing much more than facilitating learning as often they are conflict managers, social workers, mentors and much more all at the same time. The difference in community schools, he emphasized, is that in addition to this they are also making structural decisions. “This means longer hours and longer days” (Smith, 2020). Not to mention the lives and families teachers have outside of the classroom. For Dr. Smith, it was important to recognize this and work with teachers to make this job both sustainable and effective. Unfortunately, Dr. Smith’s understanding of teacher labor isn’t common and often teachers are expected to perform all these tasks with little to no recognition. Though Dr. Smith highlighted this is a process, he believes that his willingness to recognize and value the work teachers do helps create a better work environment for everyone. “People feel valued” and in those spaces and moments, people are more willing to collaborate and grow together (Smith 2020). Here again, we can see the liberatory potential of education affecting

someone outside of students. Though naming people's work may seem like a simple gesture it's something that many schools lack and ultimately can transform a working environment.

Community partnerships are another place where relationship building is a big priority. All interviewees talked about community partners in some way changing their school. For the UCLA Community School, their partnership not only gives them more staff but it allows them to have access to the most recent research. Principal Garcia talked at length about their school uses "partnerships to fully understand what does and doesn't work" (Principal Garcia). They've created a system that allows them to lean on UCLA professors to understand how to collect data on areas they suspect could use change. This has been instrumental in various programs and curriculum as the school tries new techniques and ensures they don't pour years and resources into programs that aren't addressing the needs they have. Principal Garcia calls this "practice-based evidence" as they are now able to have something to look to and highlight as the moment that made a difference. For the New World Academy, their relationship with non-profits like the Fulfillment Fund has allowed them to provide students with resources about college. This organization talks to students about topics like financial aid and ultimately makes the idea of college more accessible to students. Though similar messages are coming from other places within the school, Dr. Smith highlighted this resource really helping students believe they can and should go to college. Though just one example, this relationship highlights the role that non-profits and similar organizations could play in schools more broadly. As previously mentioned, teachers and professional staff are often stretched thin in schools and having additional staff assisting students would make a huge difference both for them and students themselves. Here is where all the interviewees aligned at they highlighted the work their partners

were doing wouldn't happen without them. Students would just be without the resources which is a sad reality in many schools. Interestingly, Principal Canjura added nuance to these relationships as she also emphasized the need for community partners to be aligned to the project the school is committed to. All of the partnerships mentioned above were successful because they lacked what Principal Canjura called "harmful assumptions". These partners were not only committed to working with youth but they tailored with work to fit the needs of the students at each school. This is an important detail to ensuring that beyond the additional resources these partnerships are making positive impacts on the school community.

Policy Recommendations

Findings from RFK Community Schools highlight the changes necessary for supporting a large scale implementation of liberatory education in LAUSD and the current education system more broadly. These recommendations are directed at educational policymakers on both the local and national level. Understanding how to return the liberatory potential to education was the main goal of this research and the following recommendations offer ways policy can facilitate this return.

Recommendation #1: Create an online hub for those interested in this form of education

Every interviewee talked about their ability to implement this form of education being dependent on their knowledge of the resources and strategies available to their schools. Fortunately, the principals included in this project were able to learn of these resources and strategies themselves, but there was no institutional help in this process. This is primarily

because LAUSD assumes those who are interested in this form of education know exactly how to implement it within their schools. Not only is this assumption flawed, as even those who had been doing the work for a while talked about struggling to understand how to do it best, but it also actively dissuades administrators or educators without prior knowledge of these resources and strategies from implementing this form of education. Without providing a framework or a way to implement this form of education the process can feel overwhelming and impossible. This is exacerbated by the fact that the already limited information on both how to implement this form of education is often inaccessible because it's scattered and intentionally obscured. This hub is intended to address this problem as instead of relying on personal knowledge and connections of administrators and educators, it would function both as an archive and a connecting space for those interested in this form of education. By centralizing where this information is contained and creating a community around this space, this hub ultimately makes the goal of implementing liberatory education more accessible.

A large part of this hub should be centered around archiving as it uplifts the reality that people have noticed that the current education system is failing and have created alternative spaces throughout history. Unfortunately, this fact is often unknown due to both institutional erasure and lack of documentation of the projects done. As a result, it often feels like this iteration is the first time this work is being done which can either cause people to feel like the task is too large to accomplish or alternatively they can end up recreating things that have already been created and failed in the past. Having an archive would address both of these issues.

This archive should have several components. The first component should be centered around the theory which ungirds this form of education. Much like the literature review of this

project, this section wouldn't need to be particularly long but it is a crucial step in helping everyone understand what the problem is and how it came to be. This demystifies the problem and allows all schools to engage in this new project and to fully understand what values and morals they are upholding. The second component should be about historical examples of this work. This is important both in showing the cyclical nature of this work. It will also provide a base understanding of what this has looked like in the past and particularly for those just engaging with these theories or forms of education it can be helpful to ground it in a concrete example. In doing this the archive is actively disrupting the tendency for this work to be erased. The third component should include information about funding sources and potential grants that schools could apply for when engaging in this work. Much of what Community Schools, and liberatory education more broadly, are bringing to their students isn't included in the average school budget. This often puts schools in a position where administrators and educators are spending their own resources attempting to fill the gap. Fortunately, however, there are funding sources and though it doesn't address the root problem of budgets being too small it can make this process of implementing this form of education much easier and ultimately more sustainable. In addition to listing these sources, it could also be useful to have timelines and application tips to help schools be as prepared as possible to request this funding. Again this an important part of making the process accessible to everyone regardless of experience or personal knowledge.

In addition to collecting history, this hub should also be a space where administrators and educators committed to liberatory education can connect with each other. This can happen through a variety of avenues. Administrators and educators could post information about teaching strategies and pedagogical tips that align with this form of education to a forum within

the hub. Though many may have identified old tips and strategies are no longer working there are still questions about what to replace them with. In addition to the what, there are also may be questions of how to do it effectively. Having a space dedicated to answering these questions would be useful for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it can be helpful for those implementing this form of education, whether for the first time or not, to see how other people are doing. Every school community is different and thus these tips and strategies would need to be adapted to fit each school but at the very least these tips and strategies can provide a framework. Ultimately this type of resource could be the deciding factor between administrators and educators seeing liberatory education is something they themselves could implement. Secondly, this recognizes that there are people doing the work and respects their expertise. Instead of relying simply on theory, this forum is focused on practice and hearing the tips and strategies that work in real life. A large goal of liberatory education is recognizing all the spaces where knowledge exists and it's only right the hub embodies this. The creation of this forum is an easy, yet effective, way of doing this.

During her interview Principal Canjura spoke about seeing other high schools and engaging with other administrators as a formative reason why she was able to perfect her craft. Ideally, the hub could embody some of this by creating pathways for mentorship between experienced and novice educators and administrators. Through this mentorship, knowledge can potentially spread between generations of the profession and as a result, increase everyone's ability to implement this form of education within their own schools. This could be modeled off of a system similar to what Principal Conroy does for teachers in his school. To do this the hub would need to create a list/database of administrators or educators who are experts on particular

areas then match them with someone who's struggling in the same area. It's important to note that this list shouldn't be determined off of test scores but could be something that people self-select into or are nominated for by their school community. Not only does this system allow for meaningful connections but it also shows that everyone has something they are good at and everyone could use help in certain areas. It effectively erases the stigma of asking for help while also providing the resource of who to ask.

Ultimately this creation of hub, and the community created within it, is an important step in increasing the likelihood of this form of education being implemented throughout the nation. It erases the need for administrators or educators to personally know how to implement it or to be physically near those who do. By having this hub online anyone with internet access can learn about and engage in this work.

Recommendation #2: Create policy aimed specifically at supporting horizontal leadership within schools

Undergirding most of the findings in this project is the understanding that there are multiple stakeholders within schools and each of these stakeholders should have the power to make structural changes. This often manifests in horizontal leadership existing within these schools. The use of horizontal leadership directly challenges the understanding of schools as entities that only administrators and policymakers have the right to change. It recognizes the value in everyone who interacts with schools and makes space for them to adapt it to meet their needs. Unfortunately, however, most policies don't account for this form of leadership. Often timelines and requirements imposed by these policies actively prevent the implementation of

horizontal leadership while simultaneously advising parent input in decision making. As a result, schools that would normally be interested in this type of leadership are forced to keep traditional systems of leadership in hopes of meeting these timelines and requirements.

To address this disconnect a new policy should be written which explicitly supports horizontal leadership. Mapp's research, along with others, has proven sustainable school transformation requires the inclusion of more stakeholders. It's time that districts accepted this and explicitly encouraged a form of leadership that necessitates the inclusion of these stakeholders. To truly encourage the implementation of horizontal leadership, this policy must allot funding for training sessions administrators and educators can take on how to do this. Without these training sessions, similar situations to what happened ESEA will occur and administrators and educators will be encouraged to change without knowing how to do it thus making them more likely not to make the changes. Though all interviewees discussed the importance of training when it came to parents or community members being able to fully engage in this work when asked about training they themselves received there was no mention of training on this topic. Again, there is this assumption that vaguely supporting alternative forms of leadership is enough and if a school really wanted to implement this leadership model they would already know-how. Offering these training sessions would ensure that administrators and educators learn best practices in how to sustainably implement this form of leadership and thus are truly able to transform their schools. Additionally, as these strategies become public knowledge the pool of schools using this form of leadership may also widen.

In addition to training, LAUSD should also create rewards for schools using this style of leadership. Though these rewards can come in a variety of forms to be effective they must both

show the District's understanding of the impact of using this form of leadership as well as explicitly support the implementation of it. This would stand in direct contrast to what currently exists as too often schools using this form of leadership are forced to choose between district support or transforming education. The creation of this policy would shift this narrative as district support would now align with the goal of implementing this form of leadership and ultimately transforming education.

Recommendation #3: Increase funding for the hiring of a full-time community liaison

Literature on Community Schools emphasizes the importance of having a full-time staff member dedicated to being a community liaison (Coalition for Community School, 2020). This person “ is responsible for building relationships with school staff and community partners, for engaging the families and community residents, and coordinating an efficient delivery of supports to students both inside and outside of the classroom, all day, every day” (Coalition for Community School, 2020). Creating a full-time position for these jobs is important for two reasons. Firstly, building relationships and engaging with community members is a time-intensive job and by dedicating a full-time position to this work, schools are able to ensure this work is given the time and investment it deserves. Secondly, the creation of this position can prevent everyone in the school community from being stretched too thin as it's unrealistic to expect someone to do the work of being a community liaison as well as be a school administrator or educator.

Despite this fact, however, not every community school has the resources to hire a full-time community liaison. Not only is this putting additional stress on the administrators and

educators within these communities but it also makes it increasingly difficult for these schools to find innovative ways to engage with the community or build relationships. This is not to say that they are unable to build relationships or engage community members but it drastically affects what kind of programs they are able to have. Though short-term this may seem an OK system, long-term this can deeply affect the types of relationships created.

The Community School Grant which currently exists in LAUSD is a good example of how to encourage and facilitate the hiring of this staff member. As it is this grant “gives schools a \$150,000 grant to create programs and bring resources aligned with the community school movement as well as a full-time coordinator who would support the future of the school and community relations” (Dr. Smith, 2020). This program shows the districted investment in this movement both rhetorically and monetarily. While this is an amazing opportunity in LAUSD it’s important that these types of grants and supportive programs expand into other districts if Community Schools, and by extension liberatory education, have any hopes of spreading throughout the nation. Without monetary support and increases in staffing, it’s difficult to envision community engagement being sustainable or replicable. Without resources, this work often relies on individuals being so dedicated to the project of transforming schools that they go above and beyond and are willing to make huge personal sacrifices in exchange for change. Not only is this unsustainable but it's unjust. This work should be supported by the District not only because it results in better student outcomes, but because it will transform administrators and educators’ experiences.

Conclusion

The reality is the current education system is failing and it is mostly marginalized students and their communities who have to live with the consequences of this fact. This research aimed at both defining liberatory education and examining community school's ability to uplift this form of education. The task now is to examine how this form of education can be implemented in other schools throughout the nation. By explicitly outlining 5 ways schools in RFK returned the liberatory potential back to education this project provides a framework for other schools to use when transforming their own schools. Ultimately, the implementation of this framework will require investments on both the local and national levels. Transformation of the current education system is imperative not only to change student experience but to transform the future of this nation.

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