# Finding the Cracks

## Progressive, Democratic Education in an Era of Standardization*

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> What if every school used our founding principles as a nation as their design principles for learning? How would our schools need to change? What would be unleashed? What would we learn as a result?
> —Quoted from "A Year at Mission Hill" film clip

When educators and students grapple with the contradictions that undermine the democratic promise of public education in America, they expand possibilities for present and future learning. People in schools are a vital resource for this country as it comes to understand itself in the face of its many challenges, from income inequality to systemic racism to opaque political decision making.

But rather than take the lead of the people engaged in learning and teaching, our country has chosen to follow standards and assessment systems

*This article weaves together the work of teachers' and principals' roundtable participants, as edited by Joan Bradbury, Shanti Elliott, and Joby Gardner. The roundtable groups decided by consensus to remain unnamed in this article. We, the editors, deeply appreciated the honesty and trust of the roundtable participants and wish to respect the need for confidentiality, although we regret not being able to credit their important contributions to this article. Any names of participants included here are pseudonyms, until the end of the article, where we feature teachers' open letters.

*Schools: Studies in Education*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Fall 2014).
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that come from outside schools. "High standards for all students" is a mantra that policy makers perennially offer up to the problem of education inequity. However, systems set in place to hold schools accountable, without regard for individual differences and local conditions, have in fact had negative consequences on the education of children and the role of children and teachers in shaping their own education.

Proponents of standards-based education claim democratic aims, but increasing numbers of teachers, parents, and principals are questioning how democratic it is for our young people to be controlled by curricula, tests, and mandates imposed from outside of local school communities, especially when those developing the standards and assessments are not educators. These parents, teachers, and principals also question how well standard programs and systems of assessment can work with powerful inquiry-based education that supports students and teachers being and becoming reflective and imaginative thinkers, creative problem solvers, and active citizens. Chicago educators, and educators all over the country, are working for public schools where students are known and trusted, where teachers are able to work together to create vibrant curricula, and where students are given the time and space to experience joy, fascination, and challenge in learning. Above all, educators are striving to find and create conditions where learning is rooted in trust between students, teachers, and parents; where schools help to grow the strong, diverse relationships needed for democratic life; and where the focus is on exploring "the stuff of the world" together.

Mission Hill School is an urban Boston public school founded on principles of progressive, democratic education. In a time when democratic space is narrowing in Chicago and in other US cities, Mission Hill provides a powerful text to explore the possibilities of progressive, democratic urban public education. Mission Hill is the subject of a series of short videos, "A Year at Mission Hill" (2011–12), which is readily available online, and of an hour-long documentary, "Good Morning Mission Hill, the Freedom to Teach, the Freedom to Learn." The documentary, produced by Amy Valens and Tom Valens, will be on many public television stations in the fall of 2014.

In April 2014, 200 people came together from across Chicago's schools and neighborhoods to learn about Mission Hill and to learn directly from and with Mission Hill staff members Ann Ruggiero and Ayla Gavins. Events included a public screening of the rough cut of the film and a public forum with Ann and Ayla, along with a series of roundtable meetings, one series for principals and one for teachers. These public events and the roundtable series were supported by Francis W. Parker School and the DePaul Uni-

versity School of Education, in partnership with the Teachers' Inquiry Project. We, the editors of this article and three of the cofounders of the Teachers' Inquiry Project, together with Diane Horwitz of DePaul University and Bill Kennedy of the Urban Teacher Education Program at the University of Chicago, planned and led these events, with the aim of exploring how progressive, democratic education was being practiced at Mission Hill—and how educators could work together to nurture and sustain similar work here in Chicago. In working with teachers and principals in the roundtables, we hoped to consider this *non*standard example in relation to participants' current context and practice in their home schools. Having this real example gave us the possibility of exploring together our own experiences and our own visions at the same time. Here in Chicago schools, where do we find the cracks in the reality that exists, find room for the excitement of learning?

We were interested in not only discussing the video but also using processes similar to those that Mission Hill faculty are engaged in that promote democratic collaborative inquiry. We hope this article, based on our seminar notes (see Seminar Notes 2014), can serve as an extension of the roundtables, as an an invitation for teachers and principals to consider some of the questions we grappled with and to seek out processes and people who help you "find the cracks."

In what follows, we share reflections, writing, and questions from the roundtables. Teachers and principals came largely from regular Chicago Public School (CPS) elementary and high schools, with a few participants from outside Chicago and a few teachers from independent or parochial schools. From the educators' conversations and reflections over the course of the roundtables and other events, we all gained a clearer understanding of progressive practices, perspectives, and commitments that support quality education for all people. These practices are based in and sustain strong relationships, expressed in trust and collaboration within the school, with a public dimension beyond the school as well. We argue that trust and collaboration, grown through sharing, reflection, and professional dialogue, have the power to counter the dehumanizing formulas, scripts, and tests that now dominate education in our city.

We clustered the participants' reflections in sections that we named after key phrases in their writing: "Audacious Ideas and Behaviors," "Tell a Different Story about Relationships and Community," "Respectful Disequilibrium Promotes Growth," and "The Shape of Things to Come." Longer participants' pieces reflect tensions that we engaged in together; we leave them hanging to respect the challenges that they raise about how we work

together for democratic education, challenges that extend far beyond the boundaries of our small professional learning community. We also include shorter passages that teachers and principals offer up as they reflect together. They project a growing understanding of what is at the heart of progressive, democratic education in reference to their own and one another's experiences.

In their written reflections, teachers and principals expressed interest in relationships that make trust and collaboration possible and their hunger for freedom from externally imposed accountability. One assistant principal in the group wrote about similarities between Mission Hill and her own school and the ways that bureaucracy and external accountability threatened student choice and inquiry:

> The mission and implementation I have viewed thus far [in the Mission Hill videos] do not seem far off from what our intentions were when opening our school five years ago. We continue to emphasize the importance of student choice, place value on everyone's contributions to a child's education, support inquiry through all of our learning, support grade level inquiry . . . yet every year I feel more and more pulled away from these foundations. I look forward to hearing others' experiences and viewpoints on the sustainability of such a mission in the increasingly accountable and bureaucratic realm of public education.

Teachers and principals are asking for professional development that is neither content knowledge nor pedagogic or management methods (and certainly not scripts). They know that having space to think and discuss is what strengthens education practice. This translates directly into powerful democratic student-teacher relationships, as this teacher emphasizes:

> I would like to be part of a group that takes seriously children's rights and the teacher as a professional. I would like to participate through dialogue and writing about how to respond to how children view their world. I would like to think about and share strategies on how to take action to support children's epistemologies of their world and what they are telling us about their needs.

Respecting the knowledge and capacities of people in schools is not just about classroom management—it is the heart of learning, and it involves commitments that have philosophical and political implications far beyond the walls of the school.

## Audacious Ideas and Behaviors

> The whole point of an education is to help you learn how to exercise judgment, and you can't do that if the expert adults in your school are not allowed to exercise theirs.
>
> —Deborah Meier, founder of Mission Hill School, in "A Year at Mission Hill"

Although all the roundtable participants described conditions of pressures or diversions that separated them from the kind of education that they wanted to be part of, their descriptions also included signs of significant cracks in these walls. It seemed to us that no matter what school context teachers and principals were describing, they thrived when they could find the cracks in the system of mandates, expectations, and fear.

One principal highlighted the public stance of resistance and creativity that she saw in the Mission Hill movie, in contrast to what she sees in her own Chicago school, which is bound by the constraints of testing and mandates:

> What I noticed and what stood out for me are bold statements. In order for bold actions or great work to happen, they need to come from bold, great, and audacious ideas and behaviors. The similarity to my school is that we value the democratic models and philosophies that the Mission Hill espouses. The difference is that we are not autonomous and have restrictions that keep us from dreaming big and thinking big.

All the Chicago educators identified heavy "restrictions" on their creativity, ideas, and best practice, restrictions that handicapped student learning. In Chicago schools, autonomy is hard to come by. In such conditions, with chronic reliance on standardized assessments and curriculum and evaluations, it is important to find the cracks in the monolith. Progressive education practices may widen these cracks and thrive within them. The more people look at the monolith, ask questions, and compare notes, the less oppressive it becomes and the more visible are glimmers of freedom.

As we delved further into the educators' stories, we saw the wide variety of shapes the cracks can come in. For instance, a young teacher, frustrated by the mismatch of her Freireian education philosophy with that of her politically conservative school, sought to find cracks by encouraging students' leadership for social justice. But she also sought out colleagues, and these she found outside the school in professional and political communities like

Teachers for Social Justice (and this teachers' roundtable). The dilemma Tessa wrestled with is one that resonates with the experience of many educators who seek to give students tools for dealing with the complexities of race, identity, and power in America; so we decided to bring the multiple ears and voices of the teachers' roundtable to listen to her story and respond. We constructed a Descriptive Inquiry process (a shortened Review of Practice) around Tessa's story, which follows. The Review of Practice focuses on one teacher's "work," viewed as a work of art, like other Descriptive Inquiry processes, which look at children's work and other educational moments as pieces of art—not for judgment or analysis but for "what that contributes to our humanity and the world" (Strieb 2011). The Review of Practice offers a frame for a group to draw on one another's insight in the ongoing unfolding of the art of teaching. Here is Tessa's story:

> This year I teach at a middle-/upper-class, conservative, predominately white elementary (K–8) school. As a critical literacy educator, teaching at the school has been particularly challenging.
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> There are classrooms where students sit in individual desks, facing forward, silently listening to a lecture. Students work individually from standardized workbooks in silence while the teacher works at her desk during class time. Students have been "indoctrinated" (a term the administration uses) in a "traditional" (teacher-centered) environment. Due to this, I have had to invest more time than usual to scaffold students in using their voice, exploring topics that personally interest them and inserting alternative voices in addition to the textbook. Several students have been successful in moving from rote memory schooling to critical thinking, which is reflected in their comments below:
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> "Before teachers would just read out of the book and make us memorize, but you would actually make us think, and we would be able to learn by ourselves." "You have challenged me to think critically and question my next move." "You would teach us things outside of the textbook, and you had us question what was brought before us." "You involved me and listened."
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> There has been a lot of great student work and achievement; however, I have been met with resistance from some students who resist progressive education. "You're a teacher. You're not supposed to change the textbooks. You're supposed to teach with the books here." Additionally, there have been several "Euro-centric, white privileged," and borderline racist comments verbalized by some of my students

> in class. I sought advice from coworkers and administration but did not receive much if any support. To find assistance, I began to attend anti-racist conferences and I joined Teachers for Social Justice.
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> Recently, when incorporating a few Howard Zinn historical texts (one being Kochiyama, an account of a person whose family was directly affected by Japanese internment camps), I was called "anti-government and anti-American" by some students and parents. I had a conversation with my administration that advised me to go back to only using the textbook: "They are not mature enough to handle this—let teachers in high school and college handle it. They have been indoctrinated for the past seven years with traditional teaching, and you coming in—they just aren't ready." Even after reaching out to external sources to find support in navigating critical thinking scaffolding, I am actually told to refrain or stop this development all together or I could be fired.
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> What I see happening at Mission Hill is the vision I am trying to bring to life at my current school. I don't feel like I am doing anything revolutionary or radical. I am simply trying to teach. What I mean by "teaching" is students collaborating in group work, listening to alternative voices, having class discussions, and writing reflections about their thinking after a reading. However, the majority of my students have been so "indoctrinated" in powerless situations that they are not able to think or speak for themselves. Students have been told what to do and what not to do for the past seven years, so that tasks asking for their opinion or thoughts were viewed as not only foreign but threatening.
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> This indoctrination was clearly overt; it is visible in the structure of the school and physical layout in classrooms. However, it was never spoken or verbalized until a meeting with the administration, where I was told, "I'm not saying to be a dictator . . . and I'm not saying to treat them like robots . . . but we value conformity."
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> The questions I have currently been struggling with are these: How does one promote critical thinking in an environment where conformity is absolute, and how do you negotiate the ideals you value and uphold (inquiry, social justice, democracy, diversity, equality) without a supportive administration or faculty?

Tessa's reflection highlights the importance of being in an environment where one can practice acting from one's own vision and values. She is teaching in the way she believes in, taking audacious action, but in addition to

real excitement and engagement among some of the students, she is also being told by her principal, some parents, and some students that she is being "un-American" and if she continues, she risks losing her job. Tessa gives voice to the pain of being denied the opportunity to teach from her values and beliefs by forces, interests, and fears external to her and to her students.

The teachers' roundtable made space for the listening educators to offer responses to Tessa's story. These questions and suggestions unfolded multiple layers of perspective on and extensions of Tessa's questions. The participants wondered together how to address resistance to exploring whiteness and ethnic identity in America. Many of the suggestions focused on the questions of whose story is being told and whose is not, and, when necessary, how to bypass, subvert, or transmute the political charge of this question through personal connections. For instance, teachers mentioned Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story" (Adichie 2009). They inquired, how do you get multiple specific stories in the classroom so it is not just one or two (polarized) stories? What about involving parents, and other adults in the family, using family histories and interviews? Ask students, what are the stories told about you and your family, what other stories should be told?

Inherent in the social justice approach to teaching history that Tessa embraced is a commitment to understanding mistakes our country has made and continues to make, to learn from them and improve. Far from being "unpatriotic," such a social justice approach to history is hopeful: we can learn, we can do better. But in many areas of this country, to teach this way is audacious.

Another teacher explains the importance of making mistakes and working constructively with them, putting this process at the center of his pedagogic practice. This, he emphasizes, is where freedom in learning is most powerful.

> From watching the Mission Hill videos it seems that learning happens there in the spaces where students are able to try new things and not fear failure. This ability to make mistakes boldly seems integral to the learning that happens both by students and staff. A struggle that I have as a visual arts and science teacher is creating a space where students are able to try new things without fear of failure. In art I find that students as young as first grade are convinced they can't draw so are hesitant to try. I also teach elementary science in as hands-on a way as I can. I come up against similar issues where students don't

> always feel confident enough to engage with an activity where there isn't a clear or defined "right" answer.
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> Places where I have tried and found some success building the culture have been in modeling failure for my students. . . . As I've thought about building a safe place for students' mistakes it seems that it stems from community. By that I mean a place where people are interested and invested in others around them. How does this community grow in the context of being a public school educator and where resources (mostly time and attention when the classes are so large) are so scarce?

This teacher recognizes that learning is rooted in boldness. Experimentation, making mistakes, rethinking, revising—these are the very processes that are often pushed aside with a focus on standardized testing and high-stakes evaluation.

Another teacher also focuses on the importance of taking risks and making mistakes, emphasizing the difficult conversations that are a part of this and the necessary listening, trust, and safety to have these conversations. When these difficult conversations take place, new possibilities open up—for relationships, community, and moving forward together.

> Difficult conversations are what stand out for me in all the segments of "A Year at Mission Hill." It is remarkable that the participants, adults and children, make transparent and available these difficult conversations to the public. Of course, in a democracy such transparency would . . . be more the norm than the exception.
>
> What makes a great school? From viewing these segments it is the dedication to risk-taking, listening to each other in many ways, problem solving in many ways, and putting into action the many possible solutions. It seems that a great school is dedicated to a cycle of reflective practice among all participants. This cycle is a practice that revisits solutions through open conversation. Adults met in many different forums to discuss policy, administration, student achievement, pedagogy, and issues with classrooms design/management. There were tensions in these conversations. However, the tensions seem to act as motivators, not as deterrents. Questions I'm left with: How did this sense of safety to be vulnerable among the adults develop? How is safety sustained in a creative teaching environment where people's egos about pedagogy and practice can be hurt and create unhealthy competition?

What makes a great school? "Many voices and stories." "A dedication to risk taking." "Many ways of solving problems and enacting solutions." "A cycle of reflective practice." "Difficult conversations that encourage more thought and action rather than shutting things down." "That create a safe and democratic space and culture." Here there is no child or teacher left alone, in isolation, without the support of a community. This is a very different notion of support and accountability than the one embodied in the No Child Left Behind law or current testing in Chicago and other public systems.

One of the principals describes this experimental learning process in terms that blur the boundaries between pedagogic practice and political awareness: "public tinkering." Emphasizing that experimentation helps people break through the illusion that the world as it is remains fixed and unchangeable, she provides an image of ongoing creation of democratic space: the "watering hole," where people come to fish, struggle, wait and watch, and learn from one another.

> First of all, I have always been a proponent of project-based experiential opportunities. A good opportunity can stir the imagination of even the most disenchanted student. They provide the space to apply previously learned content as well as develop new theories. As a former computer-programming teacher, I encouraged tinkering, for example, finding new ways in a test environment to be innovative and a problem solver. I learned to appreciate this kind of practice from fishing with my dad.
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> The actual hooking and casting came easily to a natural athlete. However the descaling, gutting, and beheading of catfish gave me a new appreciation for frozen fish sticks. Those moments in nature with my dad taught me the business of wildlife gaming, impacts of industrialization, and the economics of supply and demand. It also taught me that injustice favors those who are incapable or unaware, but that it cannot survive in a democratic state. At the watering hole, I've seen men with the best fishing rod and bait go home empty handed; I've seen men with buckets and branches leave like kings. More importantly, I watched as these seemingly unequal cultures share their theories for success.
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> A progressive, democratic education levels the playing field not by creating an injustice for some but by creating possibilities that are limited only by our imagination. Teachers go into education because

> of the possibilities of what they may accomplish. Students show up to school for the same reason, whether grounded in mischief or in goodwill. It is my job as a school leader to create the circumstances that inspire both teachers and students to explore the possibilities of success. The key is to encourage public tinkering and shared learning.

One of the essential values the roundtable teachers and principals are committed to, take risks for, speak out and act for, is equity in education. Public tinkering, audacious ideas and behaviors, taking seriously the rights of children: these, and not increased standardization, lead to equity in education. This bold work takes place in and through relationships.

### Tell a Different Story about Relationships and Community

> The task of public education is to help parents raise youngsters who will maintain and nurture the best habits of a democratic society.
> —Quoted from the "Mission Hill Mission Statement"

Throughout the video chapters in "A Year at Mission Hill," teachers in the school speak to and demonstrate in their practice the centrality of democratic values in the school and the human relationships that make this possible. As one Chicago principal describes her viewing of the film:

> I noticed children and adults learning in a relaxed, happy, natural way. I noticed that the school was homey, warm, and full of student work. It was a colorful, busy, noisy, and safe place. I noticed that people looked one another in the eye. I noticed kids engaged in activities, in thought, in play. I noticed teachers sharing plans and reflections. I noticed parents visiting the school. I noticed that students were proud of their efforts. Students learned to sort through problems with each other. Adults gently guided students to think about the behaviors that help them. Adults hugged children. People laughed and sang.

In their responses to the videos, Chicago principals and teachers contrast what they see at Boston's Mission Hill with their own experiences in Chicago schools. They speak of conditions in their schools that suppress democratic life and growth, especially the bureaucratic pressures coming from a system that is supposed to be supporting learning but instead limits it. In the words of one assistant principal, "In the public schools, we

live under an umbrella of compliance, and everything corresponds to a number."

A system-wide fixation on numbers displaces and disregards human connections. The numbers—tests, attendance, enrollment—don't take account of the importance of parent-school relationships. Teachers and principals in the roundtables watching the Mission Hill clips took note of parents' engagement in their children's school. This was a marked contrast to the experience of many teachers and parents in Chicago schools. One assistant principal writes, "As a public school parent, I experienced many obstacles as well that gave the message the schools wanted parents out of children's education, which is completely counter to my training and beliefs as a citizen, parent, educator, school leader."

When schools aren't supported in fostering strong family-school relationships, a vital source of democratic education is cut off. Respect for parents directly corresponds to the respect for young people that must be at the heart of education for democracy. One teacher writes:

> After viewing the first two episodes of the Mission Hill series, I was struck by the amount of community voice that seems to go into the school's community. Specifically, I am interested and excited by the portion of their mission statement that states that their goal is to "help parents raise youngsters." By positioning the parent as the expert, and the teacher/school community as the catalyst or helper, I'm wondering what kind of shift this has for all participating actors. In schools I've seen, it always felt like there was a very obvious, powerful teacher/school knows best. However, Mission Hill's mission seems intentionally created as a team support system for each individual child. Additionally, one teacher said, "We each have something to learn from others." Again, I'm thinking about positioning parents and community members as experts of their students and using their knowledge of the student as a way to become more successful in meeting his/her needs in the classroom. This seems to be the opposite of the narrative we hear—"You must make sure your child is reading each night, etc."

In their reflections, principals and teachers showed particular interest in how Mission Hill fosters democratic relationships. They noted the emphasis on trust and love in the school's mission statement: "We must deal with each other in ways that lead us to feel stronger and more loved, not weaker and less lovable." They described their struggles to create joyful learning

environments that honor the learning styles of all their students, in the face of heavy bureaucratic pressures. They emphasize that educators must support their students and one another with a strong focus on social emotional learning. But this focus is forced out by pressures of standardized tests and school funding cuts, on top of trying to cope with the impact of stresses in students' lives, from homelessness to violence in neighborhoods to child-on-child bullying.

Teachers and principals anguished over inadequate supports for the social emotional learning needs of their students. One teacher's story illuminates this anguish. By focusing closely on her own vulnerable social emotional state as a teacher, Maria highlights the dangers to students' development that policies have when they push out human relational work in favor of packaged programs and priorities set by the push for better test scores.

A beginning teacher who came out of a strong teacher education program emphasizing whole-child learning, Maria is upset about the conflict between actualizing the kind of education she has learned and hopes for in her classroom and the mandates imposed on the school and by the school. The school uses a PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions Systems) model to address student behavior, which runs counter to more deep-reaching, inquiry-based approaches she encountered in teacher education. Her reflection expresses a similar disconnection between what she believes is important and what she is expected to implement. Last year, for instance, reading workshop crowded out everything else. Behind her school's emphasis on "reading workshop" lies a concern about children performing well on upcoming assessments.

Maria starts her reflection by drawing attention to two statements in the video made by Ayla Gavins, the principal at Mission School:

> "What we are setting out to do is not rare. But that the environment supports what we set out to do, that's what seems to be rare these days, anyway."
>
> "When I hear the phrase 'great school,' I wonder what does that mean. At this school, great does not mean perfection. Great does not mean without flaws. In fact, the flaws are the beauty of all of this. It's the flaws that we learn from. And we absolutely take the time to learn from our mistakes. We don't try to cover them up. We don't try to erase them. We really try to unpack them. So a lot of what you see here is not quiet and still. It's very active and engaging. It's human.

It's celebrating the humanness in all of us and trying to build on human potential and not stifle it."

Maria goes on to reflect:

> Before the beginning of my first year of teaching, I had every intention of teaching socio-emotional curriculum alongside the academic content I was responsible for implementing. I paged through books to glean ideas for community builders and had semi-scripted mini-lessons to teach students empathy, awareness of their own feelings, and approaches to address conflicts with their peers. It was my belief that the socio-emotional component of education was just as, if not more important than, teaching students to read, write, or solve math problems. After all, if my students did not feel safe and socially supported, how could I expect them to participate and succeed in school?
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> When I shared my initial lesson plans with my grade-level partner, I remember feeling completely deflated when she discouraged me from taking time to teach these things. She stressed how our school's particular focus was to improve our reading workshop, and that anything else would be distracting and irrelevant to this work (even unpacking other academic curriculums like science or math). Her plan to build community was to co-create a list of classroom rules and expectations with her students and conduct a handful of icebreaker activities during the first week to help students learn each other's names. After that first week, she said, there would not be space to explicitly teach socio-emotional skills or strategies because we were expected to strictly adhere to the academic schedule our principals had designed.
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> This feedback angered me and contributed to what would be a very shaky relationship between my grade-level partner and me for the first month or so of school. Eventually we found common ground and a way to work together, but those initial weeks of teaching stung from the isolation and, ultimately, failure I experienced in trying to build a community based in trust, respect, and kindness with my students. The activities I had planned were interrupted so often by students' disrespect and off-task behavior that I grew frustrated and gave up on trying to hold morning meetings or collaboratively brainstorm approaches to handling stress or conflicts within the classroom. Instead, I began pouring my energy into my reading workshop, hop-

ing that stronger instruction in a content block would provide the structure students needed to follow directions and participate in classwork.

For many months, I attended after-school workshops that helped me script my workshop mini-lesson; conduct conferences, strategy groups, and guided reading groups; and refine the art of close reading. Little by little, I noticed how students' behavior improved in small ways because my reading instruction was getting stronger. Most students began to follow the classroom routines and procedures that I had set in place. Yet, despite this slight progress, I knew I wasn't really helping my students. Student-to-student conduct was often rude, uncaring, and manipulative. Bullying was on an upswing in our classroom despite attempted interventions. A core group of 4–6 boys disrupted instruction so often that I began responding with vindictive punishments that stigmatized and isolated them.

My lack of success was turning me into a monster of a teacher. And it's funny that I wrote the last sentence in the past tense, because I still feel like a monster. I am a monster teacher. In only a matter of months in my first year of teaching, I have become the type of teacher I promised to never be. I constantly yell and threaten. I send kids out of the room when I can't handle what I consider to be "misbehavior." I give detention after detention after detention. I am powerless to address bullying in my classroom because I do not consistently demonstrate respect to the students who demonstrate bullying behaviors, which therefore makes it difficult for them to respect and trust my authority. I know that my presence is hurting children, and this reality is hurting me deeply.

The reason I selected the two quotations from Ayla Gavins, principal at the Mission School, is because they connect to what I am presently experiencing in my own teaching practice. I feel that in a large way, my efforts to build community were not authentically supported within my school environment. [Instead, the school emphasizes a compartmentalized academic focus in programs like reading workshop and the PBIS behavior system.] Although I certainly recognize that my own deficit thinking and negative attitude contributed to my present state of failure, I am also aware that I was limited by certain structural and political constraints within my school and greater school district. I know that if I want to continue in my teaching career that significant reflection and change is required of my practice. In accord with Principal Gavins, I want to unpack my mistakes, not conceal them. I need

to reframe my flaws as human and release the monstrous label I have set upon my own back. I know I cannot do this work on my own, which is why I have chosen to apply to this teachers' roundtable. If I do not make intentional efforts to build my potential, I will stifle it.

In our second meeting Maria was one of two teachers who shared her reflection with the roundtable in a shortened form of a Review of Practice. She had shared the beginnings of her story in the first session, and it seemed to embody some critical questions and tensions most teachers and principals encounter in some form as they work. Her colleagues, from different schools, grade levels, and contexts all over the city, responded with observations and suggestions that affirmed her work and challenged her to bring both her powers of inquiry and her concern for community into the problem she had outlined.

The suggestions that emerged from the group fell into several clusters, outlined below, in the teachers' own words.

1. *Teach students to critique the model*: Manipulate the PBIS system by transforming the individualized tickets into classroom community builders. Emphasize student agency: the more freedom we give our students, the more they listen to each other, creating an opportunity for shared voice. Make PBIS a curricular focus. For instance, a focus of social analysis: Who's getting tickets, who's not? Who's being propped up, who's not? The math of tickets. Skinnerian stimulus and response: What if you put the tickets in the students' hands, to distribute, analyze, discuss?
2. *Use this as an opportunity to study and build community in your classroom*: Read-alouds offer great openings for classroom community building. Inform administration and families of the study you want to do—studies of communities, for instance, of neighborhoods or insects. What role do the communities play in sustaining life? Start a tradition of studying one person and the context in which they learn. Nobody is just themselves on their own. Set up another way of paying attention to each others' behavior: each day have children say one nice thing they or a classmate did—telling a different story about community and relationships.
3. *Use this issue as an opportunity to build teacher community*: There is a strategic opportunity presented by the fact that other faculty are questioning the PBIS emphasis. Co-create the vision you want, using a frame of differentiation to help modulate how the system is

applied. Interested faculty could form a study group, make recommendations to the administration. For example, such a group could read the Alfie Kohn book *Punished by Rewards* and make recommendations coming out of that experience. Appeal to the administration's self-interest: ask the administration if they're missing an opportunity for identifying something that would clearly benefit the whole school: rethink the money spent to implement PBIS.

4. *Foster your own development, self-awareness, and leadership*: Study classroom community yourself: "What happens when . . . ?" Take the temperature in the room. Noticing especially your own! Put in writing some of your thoughts—school isn't about getting through it! Data collection on your argument: name a program that's more in line with what you are looking for: proffer an alternative idea/model (e.g., Responsive Classroom).

Participants named many activities and approaches that may not replace but can at least balance out the PBIS: "When it's one of many things going on, it loses its centrality even if it's just for you as a teacher." When Maria shared her struggles in this space, it enabled the roundtable group to learn, together, appreciating the beauty of "the flaws." Through their emphasis on collaboration with colleagues and on the opportunity for responsive curriculum, teachers in the roundtable helped to imagine from *outside* the classroom a vision of what could be happening *inside* the classroom. This is, we discovered, one of many liberatory ways that educators can "tell a different story about relationships and community."

Systems and sets of expectations, from Common Core to PBIS, present themselves as monoliths, but when we study them, we find the possibilities in them: they open up. By looking closely together at such systems, inquiring, bringing many perspectives to bear—as teachers, or as students, we can turn them on their head, with a deeper understanding of the human relationships they are set up to manage and measure.

### Respectful Disequilibrium Promotes Growth

> I'm part of this community too. A learner and thinker just like you are.
> —Mission Hill teacher to his class (quoted from "A Year at Mission Hill")

The myriad of different power relationships in and around a school replicate power relationships in the larger world, and it is incumbent on democratic

education to study these relationships. This means facing inequity, not pretending it is not there. While wealth inequity is a central challenge for this country that touches education as well as every other area of life, there are other layers of inequity in schools that await inquiry and change. Mission Hill offered examples of both this inquiry and this change, when teachers discussed the importance of listening to young people, when parents addressed when they feel included and not included in their children's education, and when the principal acknowledged that her outspoken resistance to one of the tests the state was imposing might cost her her job.

While the process of educators reflecting and learning is important, what feels supremely urgent to roundtable participants is the conflict between a faith in process and the systems of standards, tests, and evaluations that dominate our schools. Another phrase from the movie that resonated with participants was an educator's comment that "To assess really means *to sit with*." It was a surprise to most of us that the Latin origins of this word began with a human relationship, sitting beside. We talked about the possibilities for authentic learning when the teacher-student relationship is grounded in processes of observation and appreciation rather than performance and evaluation. We saw and heard about several kinds of authentic assessments at Mission Hill, including graduation built around portfolio projects, that provided a clear contrast to the kinds of assessments that dominate the Chicago public schools. In Chicago schools, as at Mission Hill, the teachers' and principals' own articulations of their standards are far more meaningful than externally imposed standards. For example, principals complain that the new REACH evaluations make it impossible for them to spend as much time as they previously did observing and interacting with teachers in their classrooms, a key piece of practice they felt the loss of keenly. The educators' standards are entwined with the actual lives of the young people and colleagues they work with, and these are powerfully expressed by the participants in both their roundtable discussions and in their writing.

One teacher focuses on the freedom that comes with overturning the narrative about power and control in schools. He addresses the relationship between inquiry and public action in democratic education in reflection on his own experience:

> I was especially impressed with the comments from the students who are recent Mission Hill alumni. The students mention: respect; caring environment; making connections; empathy; asking questions; work-

> ing together as a community. Deborah Meier, Mission Hill founder, mentions the "Crisis in Democracy." She mentioned that you can't have democracy in schools if society does not trust teachers to make decisions on how to best educate our students; as she stated, "We need respect for ordinary people." The fifth grade teacher summed it up by stating, "It's not about the results, it's about the process." The video showed that his students were able to "listen to each other's opinions, debate skillfully, and have respect for each other's opinions, the process of exploration and commitment to be a part of something greater than oneself." All of these characteristics are exemplified in my current teaching practice. However, I can't say it is at the same level of Mission Hill due to the constraints from the outside on creating the environment of mutual respect that exists at Mission Hill. To see the Mission Hill staff, including the principal, put their careers on the line by standing up to the Massachusetts' standardized testing is one of the most courageous acts I have seen teachers make on behalf of their students. I wonder what the future holds for CPS teachers emulating these acts of courage here. The kindergarten teacher stated, "I do not want them to know reading, math, writing, etc. because some government agency said they have to. I want them to have the tools so that they can learn on their own anything they want to!" To me, Mission Hill is the closest thing I have every seen to being able to call itself "student-centered." Principal Gavins exemplified this too when she stated, "Great schools do not mean perfection. It is the flaws that make a school great." If we do not emphasize this to students, can we really call it true learning?

This teacher is referencing the video—in what he notices, connects, questions, and speculates about, enacting the habits of mind he reflects on. He weaves together many of the ideas others have been grappling with as well: the relationship between teachers and children and the underlying notions about education—safety to take risks being central—for a democratic society. And he is inspired by the courage of the principal and teachers in Mission Hill standing up to some of the testing, and he is drawing the connection to teachers in Chicago publicly resisting testing during the same time period that our roundtables were meeting.

Moving leadership from meeting standards, expectations, and assessments external to the school toward solid, progressive change requires breaking through unquestioned hierarchies in schools. Growing a thoughtful partner-

ship between principals and teachers and parents requires self-examination and deliberate challenges to a dysfunctional system of power relationships. For example, one principal describes the evolution of the Dual Language program in her district:

> Conversations that have been happening between teachers, between administrators and teachers, between support staff and teachers, between parents and staff, have been incredible. Everyone has to go all in. We have to have as many of the right things to support the model as needed. One example is in hiring teachers who truly understand how to teach Spanish, not just speak it. We started to make real progress with Dual Language when we privileged Spanish as much as English. This did not happen until we listened, really listened to our native Spanish-speaking teachers.

Listening is bold. Different teachers come up with different ideas—these voices are needed in schools. English language learners, many recent immigrants along with their families, are often marginalized within schools. They are another group that suffer from misunderstanding and diminished respect, yet another dimension of inequity within the schools.

Within the field of relationships and systems of power, one theme several teachers explored was the importance of autonomy and community—in Mission Hill and in their Chicago schools—and how the two are related in democratic education. Autonomy and community often seem to be in tension with one another, but several teachers and principals began to explore the possibilities that each is actually necessary for the other and collective autonomy is what best supports student and teacher learning and growth. One teacher writes:

> The video shows images of children doing chores such as shoveling manure and running a cultivating machine. The commentator then states: "Some of us need to experience to learn best. Some of us need our eyes to see, some of us need time alone, and some of us need to talk to others to spark our ideas, draw conclusions, or see the world differently." At the end of the clip, the commentator asked the question, "What sorts of relationships characterize a school in which everyone, child and adults, is on an 'active learning journey?' If both child and adult are on an "active learning journey," does this mean that they are both on the same journey learning the same thing, or

> are there things that the children are learning that are separate from what the adults are learning and vice versa?
>
> There was another point in this clip where the commentator was talking about how teachers at Mission Hill want to teach "habits of mind"—creativity, critical thinking, empathy—in addition to academic skills. Isn't this a goal of all education?
>
> I sensed something of a dichotomy between what one teacher said and what the commentator said in this clip. The commentator discussed what sounded like a school mission statement, that Mission Hill wanted to teach important life skills. On the other hand, one of the teachers mentioned that "autonomy" was why she liked teaching at Mission Hill and that other schools did not have it. If each teacher has "autonomy" and the goal of the school is to develop "habits of mind," then how can the faculty follow the mission and still be autonomous?

This reflection makes clear that one of the layers of relationship in progressive education has to do with questions, grappling with apparent contradictions. The reflection and the discussion that emerged from it express the powerful combination of frustration and joy that comes with inquiry into an important tension—like the relationship between autonomy and community—that cannot be easily resolved.

Many teachers and principals approached the apparent tension between autonomy and community from a place of limited autonomy. While they saw their autonomy as limited by the restrictions inherent in required standard assessments and curriculum, these restrictions were limiting to community as well. One math teacher for instance had experience with Lesson Study, supported for a time in CPS, which provided so much more autonomy and community at the same time (see Carol Caref's open letter below). While teachers' autonomy, expressed in and supported by collaboration, generated deeper learning, test prep approaches cut off learning for both teachers and students.

A teacher at an independent progressive school explored another dimension of the relationship between autonomy and community in her context. She comes to this relationship between autonomy and community from a quite different place than most CPS teachers: her independent school offers her significant autonomy. And yet her sense of the strong relationship between teacher and student autonomy and a vibrant teaching and learning community is much the same:

> As I noted in my opening reflections on the film clips, I am currently very intrigued with the relationship between autonomy and community. In my school, teachers are given a tremendous amount of freedom in both how and what we teach. . . .
>
> I greatly appreciate this freedom and definitely see its benefits. Most important is the opportunity it affords teachers to meet the needs and interests of their particular students as well as their own passions. What concerns me, however, are the effects I see on community, especially the faculty community. Since teachers are all doing different things in different ways, they tend to isolate themselves. . . . At some grades there are no team meetings or even discussions about what is going on in each others' rooms.
>
> I believe there is a way to still respect autonomy but also foster community among teachers. There are some grade levels at my school that manage to do this, and it seems to me that one key is communication. If teachers shared more of what was going on in their classrooms and in their heads, they could learn a great deal from each other. Respectful disequilibrium promotes growth. There can be communication without complete commonality, and the benefits seem huge. The question is how to help teachers see the benefits of such communication and feel safe enough to share openly.
>
> Questions: How do Mission Hill teachers balance their autonomy with the greater community? Is there an optimal or healthy balance between individuality and commonality? How do you build respect for individuals while also valuing the importance of a cohesive community?

Autonomous teachers, those trusted to make critical decisions about how and what they teach, nurture and are nurtured by a strong teacher community. Democratic education depends on an ever-deepening appreciation of differences among teachers and differences among students, not so that everyone goes off and works on their own but so that people stretch into a resilient, vibrant, and active autonomous collective.

To be democratic, the interdependence this teacher describes must not be confined to individual schools: it must extend across school contexts. Democratic education is profoundly handicapped by the disparity between overstandardized urban public school education and the individualized independent school education that is available to only a few. In the open letters presented below, Allan's letter will address this problem directly.

## The Shape of Things to Come

> We must deal with each other in ways that lead us to feel stronger and more loved, not weaker and less loveable.
>
> —From the "Mission Hill Mission Statement"

For our final meeting we asked teachers and principals to write open letters. We were guided by the corpus of open letters through which educators have been registering their opposition to policies that harm students and speaking out for something they believe will make a difference for their students, for themselves and fellow teachers, for their community and for the continuity of our democracy. We provided examples for participants to look at, such as "Teachers' Letters to Obama," which included voices like Anthony Cody's: "Teachers need to be active partners in school reform at every level, from the classroom up to the cabinet meeting. Right now our views are being shut out and ignored, and we are not represented. This is driving morale down at a time when our schools need to rally together for our students" (Cody 2009). To educate effectively, teachers' voices must reach beyond their classrooms. This requires that teachers hone their public voices just as they develop their classroom craft and that educators support one another in this important public work.

We've included four of these roundtable open letters, all from teachers. It is an opportunity for these educators to speak for themselves about issues that they are deeply concerned about and probably have been for years, issues they were thinking more about during the roundtables. It might have come from the opportunity to look closely at Mission Hill or the chance to reflect with others about possibilities, obstacles, and the cracks that opened spaces for a more humane and democratic education. In the first letter, Allan Fluharty speaks passionately about the inequities that haunt our schools on so many levels. This letter challenges progressive education to live up to its promise of nurturing intelligent, free, and joyful learning for all children. As Allan and other educators in these roundtables emphasize, democratic education requires revitalized commitment to public education, based in practices of equity in school funding and in access to quality education. There is a provocative and profound connection between this letter and the cluster of questions in the "A Year at Mission Hill" video: "What if every school used our founding principles as a nation as their design principles for learning? How would our schools need to change? What would be unleashed? What would we learn as a result?"

Dear Parents:

I have been a teacher for 10 years. I work at an inner-city, underserved public high school on the west side of Chicago. My students are 60% Hispanic, 35% African American, and around 5% Polish. Many of them are poor. Only 24% are college ready based on standardized testing. As is the case for most schools in Chicago, the vast majority of the faculty is white and from the middle class.

A central tenant of progressive education is to prepare students to participate in a democratic society. Progressive education values diversity of thought and culture, as well as a commitment to equity and justice. I do not see equality and justice in public education in Illinois on several levels.

Families raising children in Chicago are faced with tough educational choices, decisions that have life-changing impact on their kids. One is to stay in the city or move to a suburban district with well-funded schools. There is a vast difference between city, suburban, and rural schools in Illinois, difference in funding and educational outcomes. Most families who can afford it move.

The fact is that the system funding public education in Illinois based on property taxes has created a dysfunctional public school system that favors the student who is lucky enough to live in well-to-do communities. Public education in Illinois is not progressive; it does not provide an equal education for our citizens.

In the city, there are also great differences between schools. Some families send their children to a private or a parochial school; however, most parents don't have the means to pay both for taxes and tuition. Many families live in areas of Chicago with fine CPS schools, but other families don't. Parents with students at CPS hope their children will have the grades and the luck to get into a magnet or a good charter school.

Incredibly, the separation and categorization of students also occurs inside schools where students are placed, or "tracked," into regular, honors, AP, and IB classes. IB classes are particularly divisive, creating a "school within a school" that splits the student body and the faculty into two cliques. An unfortunate after-effect is that "reluctant learners" are concentrated into the same classes, forcing their teachers to focus on social/emotional issues—such as tardiness, absent students, poor behaviors, and so on—at the expense of academic learning. It is typical that novice teachers are assigned to these

challenging classes—teachers with the least experience handle the most challenging students.

Public schools in Illinois are divided by affluence, grades, behavior, and social-economic status. Perhaps the best gift a parent can give to their children is to live within the boundaries of well-off school districts. CPS separates children into neighborhood, select enrollment, magnet, and charter schools, and families pray that their children win the "educational lottery" and get placed into the best schools. This separation continues with a vengeance within most schools through tracking.

Enough is enough! Separating students based on class is not being done in other industrialized nations, whose educational systems are much more successful. Public education in the United States needs to get back on track and model Mission Hill School. It is time to put the "public" back into public education. Parents are voters. Parents need to vote for politicians and policies that support the ideals of progressive education, in particular the ideal of educational equity.

Allan Fluharty

In the second letter, Carol Caref speaks to the power of collective autonomy she experienced as part of a Lesson Study and how the close looking led to better teaching, deep engagement for teachers and students, allowing them to enact the stated purposes of the new teacher evaluation system CPS has adopted. The reality of the new REACH system instead creates an atmosphere of pressure and fear:

Dear Barbara Byrd-Bennett [CEO of Chicago Public Schools],

I am concerned about the (perhaps) unintended consequences of the new teacher evaluation system. When I taught high school mathematics at Chicago Vocational Career Academy, our Mathematics Department decided to form a Lesson Study team. We studied one lesson plan for a week. For example, one lesson we investigated and shared teaching strategies on was trinomial factoring. When you dig deeply into a math topic and its pedagogy, you can spend a week doing it! We did this in the summer, voluntarily and without pay. Later, one of us taught the lesson to our students in front of observers. The observers took notes during the lesson, and afterwards we had a rich discussion. All participants learned a great deal about teaching and learning, in general and particular, through this process.

The implementation of the current REACH evaluation system undermines collaboration and deep thinking about our teaching. Teachers feel so much pressure from the observations of principals or assistant principals. The purpose of these observations feels very different from the observations that were part of Lesson Study. Very few teachers feel that the purpose of these evaluative observations is to help them become a better teacher, although that is ostensibly their purpose.

Last week I had the privilege of hearing from and speaking with faculty members at Mission Hill School in Boston. There are many wonderful things about this school (I recommend that you Google "A Year at Mission Hill" and view the videos). One thing that stood out for me was the autonomy staff members and students are granted. Much more teaching and learning goes on in an environment that is cooperative, compared to one that is top down. This school is a Boston public school. There are district mandates they have to follow—it is not a free for all. However, this school is free of many restrictions and, for example, they are able to implement the required evaluation system in a way that is helpful, not punitive.

Barbara, I would like you to consider taking a hard look at the impact the current CPS evaluation system, REACH, is having on teachers. It is contributing to a negative and fearful atmosphere in the schools, which is the opposite of what is necessary for improved teaching. The system needs to be revamped. The end results would be much better if the system was non-evaluative and based instead on building an autonomous, thoughtful, engaged school community.

Sincerely,
Carol Caref

Carol is not talking about autonomy without responsibility or accountability at all. She is talking about a more powerful kind of accountability that she experienced, which was in the company of other teachers, who were growing better as teachers in deep dialogue with one another.

Molly Cohen speaks out about her two very different experiences of preservice teacher education and two contrasting views of what matters in an education.

Dear Eva Moskowitz [founder and CEO of Success Academy Charter Schools],

Three short years ago I jumped on the opportunity to become a part of your vision. "An urban school with better test results than

Scarsdale," I boasted to friends and family members—I had to work there. I still remember being strongly warned to wear a suit to my interview because I wouldn't be hired if I didn't. That should've been the first red flag, but it wasn't. I received and accepted a position in the fellowship program and began nine weeks of being spoon fed your Kool Aid. The program was intended for students with little to no experience teaching. That might shock some, but it makes perfect sense. It is easier to brainwash the naïve. I didn't fall for it though. Today, I'm wrapping up my masters in teaching in a program specifically for urban teachers. Their attempt is not to send us through a crash course the length of a long vacation and expect an output that matches their cult-like culture, but rather to take 24 long months devoted to the craft of developing teachers, with unique philosophies of education—teachers for life.

The more I learn on my path to becoming an educator, the more I have a problem with the Success Academy test-prep, zero-tolerance culture. Flashback to my first grade placement in Harlem Success Academy 4. London, a first grade student, was moved down to kindergarten mid-year. Talk about trauma. Was there any healing or restorative justice provided? No; rather his father was forced to sit in the back of the classroom in order for London to even come to school. While I don't know if London still attends Success Academies, I think we can safely assume that he is part of the skyrocketing attrition rates we rarely hear about at Success.

Student voice is very important to me, and I hope it will become a cornerstone of my classroom community. What does student voice look like at Success? Eva, how can students have a voice if they're assessed on how still they can sit, how long they can track the speaker, and how perfect their "Magic 5" is? This is not a measure of engagement. I'd like to challenge you to sit on the rug still for 45 minutes. It is difficult, and instead of preparing students for college, it is preparing students for prison, military, or working class jobs where obedience, as opposed to creativity, is expected.

Test preparation does not, and will never, create lifelong learners.

All my best,

Molly Cohen

In the final letter we include here, Ryan Bates writes to the students he teaches and wonders, what would they imagine for their own education? Here we are circling back to student voice and teacher voice, the

importance of imagining together and coming up with "something different."

Dear High School Students,

Education stakeholders have dictated what public education has meant for over the past 100 years. How many times have we stopped to listen to what you think your education should look like and act? Sometimes I wonder if you could even answer a question like this, or has the current status quo of public schooling been so ingrained into you, nothing can come to mind but what you already know?

Prior to any other time in American society, the current era of standards and accountability has created a more bureaucratic and regimented schooling system. However, I think that a progressive, critical-constructivist type of education can coexist with a system that holds all education stakeholders accountable. It can provide a responsive and fully enriched education for you that will prepare and engage you in the constantly evolving globalized world we live in today and for tomorrow. I ask you, our students, if you could design any type of educational experience that would benefit you the most on how you learn, function in society, and relate to others, what would it look and feel like? Is there any part of our current educational system that truly works for how you learn, or do we need, as a society, to start from scratch? Do you like attending 6 to 7 different classes a day with different students and teachers, or would you like to work with a small group of peers with a teacher adviser in a more project-based, experiential setting? Or something completely different?

When H. G. Wells first published *The Shape of Things to Come* in 1933, he hypothesized about the future of humanity based on the current state of the world. Even though World War II had not begun yet and it was decades before the height of the Cold War, the fall of Soviet communism, or even the current "war on terror," Wells fully understood the tension in the world at the time and what may very likely occur as a result of those tensions. Where this literary work veers from fact to fiction is that the global leaders of the time decided it would be better to reset the world and start human civilization all over. With Wells's alternate chronology of world history, the entire globe rebuilt all of its societal structures, belief systems, and ways of life. This included the dismantling of the factory model of public education. What struck me about Wells's work is that if society was ever to truly transform, its education system must be one of

the institutions to be completely overhauled for this reset to occur. "The starvation and obliteration of the old-world teaching machinery was a necessary preliminary to social recovery. The common school . . . had to be born again, had to be remade fundamentally. And before that could happen it had to be broken up and well-nigh destroyed" (Wells [1933] 2005, 141). Students, is this what must happen so you gain the educational experience you deserve and truly need for happiness and success in the twenty-first century?

Even though drastic actions like this seem incomprehensible, transforming our education system over time for you and the future generation of students is possible. Our society needs to question and brainstorm in the realm of the imaginary for this to occur, and it should really start with you. I alternately feel that you are both the luckiest and unluckiest generation in that you get to live in this age of high tech gadgetry and global awareness. The world is literally at your finger tips, which makes you more connected to the rest of the world than any prior generation, but in some ways it makes you even more isolated as you encounter less human and more virtual interaction. As a result of this, you are potentially a lot more acutely aware of the world we live in today and what needs to happen, even if you are not consciously aware of this relationship.

So, what do you want your educational experience to be? Anything is possible. I am listening, and hopefully other adults are as well. Let's hear what you have to say.

Your fellow student,
Ryan Bates

When teachers and administrators come together from very different school settings to share and reflect on their practice, they are taking part in and helping to grow progressive, democratic education. Strengthening trust and collaboration means stressing that none of us has all the answers, but the key is working together, communicating, and learning from our practice.

Across these diverse teaching backgrounds and schools, commonalities do exist. These educators want active student-centered learning, critical inquiry, and teachers who are passionate and supported in their practice. They want an educational system that fosters the whole student, not just a test taker. They want education equity. This roundtable experience provided a crack for educators to explore these notions; more such experiences are needed and at a systemic level. Just as we ask our students to explore and wrestle with the subject areas they are learning, educators need that same

space to create approaches to curriculum that will nurture students for the realities of the world they find themselves in as individuals and part of society. Above all, students and educators need educational environments that honor each individual's power to imagine and create new possibilities for the greater collective being that they are part of—humanity.

The "shared text" of Mission Hill in all its forms was a rich, powerful, and very accessible source of inspiration and ideas. It provided a real school example that was hopeful, imaginable someday, here with glimmers possible now. When educators are given space to actually practice education, democracy expands. This article is an example—the participating educators' writings kept pouring in as we wrote, long after the seminar had ended. We hope you readers will continue the process, checking out "A Year at Mission Hill" yourselves and finding ways to expand your own opportunities for collaborative reflection so visible in the school for children, teachers, and parents alike—and so visible and active in the roundtables as well.

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