

**PORTRAITS OF SECONDARY PARTNER SCHOOLS
IN THE
NATIONAL NETWORK FOR EDUCATIONAL RENEWAL
1996-1999**

**Reflections on Practice Series no. 3
Center for Educational Renewal
University of Washington**

*Expanded and Updated
June 1999*

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AIKEN ORIGINAL PORTRAIT:

A Partnership of Possibilities: Aiken High School and Miami University

William Kreuzmann, Aiken High School

The complexities of urban education are formidable. The renewal process under way at Aiken High School through a partnership with Miami University is a grassroots attempt to address some of those complexities in a pragmatic fashion. Through this partnership, issues are being addressed at the school level as well as at the university level. Our efforts at reform originate from a common concern for our students as they attempt to navigate their way through an increasingly complex world within a system of education that places economic efficiency as its main priority rather than the education of a democratic citizenry. A direct result of the education of a democratic citizenry is the empowerment of our students oppressed by the dominant culture. Therefore, our interest has evolved into an attempt, through the partnership, to deal with the issues of student empowerment via democratic education and an attempt to bridge the growing gap between inner-city and suburban America. As stated by John Goodlad in *A Place Called School*, "There is in the gap between our highly idealistic goals for schooling in our society and the differentiated opportunities condoned and supported in schools a monstrous hypocrisy . . . We will only begin to get evidence of the potential power of pedagogy when we dare to risk and support markedly deviant classroom procedures."

This portrait is my interpretation of this partnership. It is my trying to make sense of the discussions that have happened over the past year. It is a recognition of how we began and where we are attempting to go. Within this context, it is also important to examine the benefits being received, not only by Aiken

students and faculty but by Miami students and faculty as well. Also, while not within the scope of this portrait, it is important to acknowledge that broad organizational change must be linked with the above-mentioned benefits. For the results of this renewal process to be most effective, they must be supported not only at the local level but at the broader administrative levels as well, both at Miami University and Cincinnati Public Schools. Such support is very important in order to maintain an ongoing program of improvement.

The process of renewal began with the intellectual and philosophical recognition that traditional methods of educating urban students were not working. Those involved in the initial process saw the need to accept the challenge of taking responsibility for our students in a holistic fashion. We recognized that attempting to deal solely with academic standards and discipline without addressing the social, emotional, and economic realities of our students' lives is irresponsible policy and pedagogically indefensible. We also realized that the "crisis" in public education is primarily a reference to urban public education. The institution of education is, as are other social institutions, cumbersome and slow to recognize and respond to social change. Therefore, our motivation for renewal was derived from a desire to accept the challenge to do a more effective job of serving our students as well as identifying with the conditions of their lives, thus lifting the veil of crisis from urban public education and placing it on society at large.

A History of the Partnership

“Aiken High School is a comprehensive neighborhood school serving a variety of students. The average daily membership of Aiken is 1,267: 85 percent are African-American, 13.24 percent are Caucasian, 0.60 percent are of mixed race, 0.15 percent are Native American, and 0.15 percent are Asian. Fifty-two percent of our students are female and 48 percent are male. The composition of our certificated staff is as follows: 38.6 percent male, 61.4 percent female, 30.1 percent African-American, 68.7 percent Caucasian, and 1.2 percent Asian” (Aiken’s 1995-96 *Annual School Report*).

Near the end of the 1994-95 school year, a group of eight to ten progressive-minded teachers from Aiken and a professor and four graduate students from Miami University’s Department of Educational Leadership began meeting outside school. Within weeks of forming the discussion group, the members’ attention began to focus on teaming and the concept of a “school-within-a-school.” During this period of time, several of these teachers visited Fairdale High School in Louisville, Kentucky, in order to observe a practice of teaming in progress. The trip and necessary substitute teachers were paid for by Miami University, furthering its activist role in school reform and renewal.

The teachers were impressed with what they saw in Louisville and, within the next six months, began to organize “the team” for the coming 1995-96 school year. The team included faculty and graduate students from Miami University. Participants began to lobby for team members, team space, and the opportunity to put the process into action. A proposal was written and presented to the administration to establish an interdisciplinary team that would focus its attention on 125 to 150 ninth-grade students for two years. The team proposal was approved as long as the process would not incur any additional cost. Therefore, with virtually no budget and no formal support, the concept of teaming and the partnership with Miami University began at Aiken High

School.

Initially, within the context of working with our students in a holistic fashion, the team wanted to inject a sense of the democratic process into the classroom. A great deal of what has been done was based on the idea of trying to create an environment in which our students would connect with one another and their teachers. It was hoped that such an environment would create a sense of community among the students as well as ownership of one’s education. It was believed that in so doing students would no longer feel threatened by school and, at some point, begin to feel empowered to guide their own education. By dealing with the issues in our students’ lives that hindered the educational process, our expectations were that we could help them stay on track academically so that in two years they would receive the necessary credits to move them toward graduation and they would have access to the tools of democracy. The idea then, was to use teaming as the delivery system for our attempts to positively influence our students.

Contending with the entirety of our students’ lives requires a flexibility that does not exist in a philosophy that encourages a “one best way” or a most “efficient way” of doing things. Therefore, the process of change we have embarked on flies in the face of the positivist paradigm currently in practice in many school systems. It is ineffective to present material to students with the hope that it will eventually improve the quality of their lives when, too often, their current life situations beg immediate attention. Thus, adapting curriculum in an attempt to address issues relevant to students is vital. Such a connection hopefully produces an interest in and a desire to remain in school. Within this context, we hope that our students begin to see how they “fit” in the world, not just today or tomorrow but in the foreseeable future. It is part of our purpose to help our students decide the directions in which they need to move in order to help them identify and accomplish their goals.

Current Connections with Miami

It is important that we have the tools at our disposal to address student concerns that may have a direct impact on the educational environment. This is a fundamental need when one is concerned with the entire student. It is difficult to work with students who are preoccupied with child care, abuse in the home, or whether a "true home" in fact exists. Therefore, if effective renewal/reform is to take place in the urban environment then a progressive democratic discourse must take place, not only between teachers but within classrooms among students. There should also be a variety of social services present in the school working to help students cope with their situations and help teachers better understand the implications and complexities these situations will create in the classroom. Although I refer to our efforts as those of the partnership and the team, these entities include individuals with diverse life experiences. One of the valuable aspects of our partnership is that the people involved have arrived at the process of renewal and reform from different places. The factors that brought us together are, in my view, issues that are inevitably inseparable. First, as educators, how do we view the purpose of education? Flowing from that question is the issue of urban education. Is urban education struggling because the dominant cultural view of education does not address the needs of urban students? Our partnership with Miami University is fueled by these issues. They call into question how new teachers are trained for careers in urban education and what the urban classroom will look like in the future. In addition, if the work of our partnership shows positive results over time, how will our change in philosophy be received by the larger educational system? Although our team is the unit around which this partnership formed, the partnership is not limited to teaming. As alluded to earlier, the team is the conduit through which ideas developed by the partnership flow.

This partnership addresses, from a variety of perspectives, a relationship between public

education, particularly urban schools, as modernist institutions in increasingly postmodern times. Dr. Dennis Carlson, the partnership liaison from Miami, contends that curriculum, as viewed by the state, is seen as reified fragments of knowledge that are transformed into educational outcomes and thus become the standards against which students are evaluated. The evaluation of student performance based upon uniform standardized norms then tracks students into paths aimed at either promising futures or futures filled with risk.

One result of our discussions with Dr. Carlson is the concern that if curriculum continues to be designed to reproduce dominant culture, the result will be a limiting of the potential schools have to be sites of democratic empowerment. This is especially true for those students marginalized by class, race, and gender. As a partnership and a team, we must be very cautious about such a limiting process. We, as a team, had most of our success in the prevention of such a process. We were able to develop, in two years, a strong sense of community among our students. They identified with the team which, in turn, created a sense of security that, I feel, contributed to the great majority of the students staying in school. In addition, we are building much of our curriculum for the 1997-98 school year around the notion of democratic process; therefore, we must be careful not to allow ourselves to be limited by such a process of cultural reproduction. This, I believe, can be done by constant reflection by partnership/team members. Dr. Carlson has expressed, in discussion, the importance of maintaining a willingness to be different and to try new ideas, even at the risk of failure. His concern in this regard is that schools must not allow themselves to be seen as totally determined sites. Sue Murphy consistently reminds us to think "outside the box."

One of the initial members of our partnership/team was Elizabeth Lokon. As a graduate student at Miami, Elizabeth based her doctoral dissertation on the teaming process at Aiken High School. In it, she

identified the sense of community among our students and teachers as “social capital”: “Social capital is embodied in the relations between persons. Trust, trustworthiness, and collegiality are all examples of social capital. They are forms of ‘capital’ because they facilitate the achievement of goals that could not be achieved in its absence or could be achieved only at a higher cost” (Lokon, 1997, p.38). I believe that the following statements by several of our students taken from research done by Elizabeth are representative of “social capital” developed in the first year of teaming at Aiken (Lokon, 1997, p. 6-7).

Student #1: It helps [being on a team] because we see the same faces everyday. We know each other well. So, when someone is capping [teasing], we know it’s just capping. We don’t fight because we know each other. We’re making friends because we see each other not only one hour, one year. We’re making friends for life.

Student #2: With the team, the teachers know how you work. You don’t have to worry about them jumping down your throat. They know when you are in a bad mood and they let you be.

Student #3: You have to get used to people, how they teach, get to know each other. In the team it’s easier.

Student #4: You try more because you can relax. So, you get to focus more, concentrate more. You don’t have to worry about what other people are thinking. It’s more like a challenge.

Student #5: We have more freedom in the team since [the teachers] **know our limits**, what we need to do to make us learn.

Student #6: We know [the teachers] care. That makes it easier.

One of the important factors in creating a successful team is a similarity in philosophy among the teachers on a team. One of the

problems that we have faced and continue to face is finding team members that share a philosophy and commitment to teaming and the partnership. When teachers move on and off the team, “social capital” is difficult, if not impossible, to create and maintain.

We have been successful at creating an environment that encourages feelings of caring, belonging, and security. We are, however, a long way from presenting ourselves to anyone as an example to be modeled. We are very much a work in progress. That work is currently focused on three principal areas. First, we are working toward developing a radical pedagogy that will encompass aspects of “education as empowerment” that we feel are necessary to adequately address our students needs. Second, we are working on developing an interdisciplinary curriculum that will interest students because it has an authentic application to their lives. Within this context, we are working with Dr. Fuller of Miami’s Department of Teacher Education to create a model through which preservice teachers can have a greater impact on our students and have a more meaningful experience for themselves. Finally, as stated previously, we are interested in trying to contribute to the narrowing of the growing gap between urban and suburban America. Dr. Simcock, a professor in Miami’s Department of Sociology, is working closely with us in doing what we can to accomplish this goal. Radical pedagogy is an overarching philosophy rather than a body of knowledge. It seeks to instill in students a sense of the critical. That is, “Critical education operates on two basic assumptions. One, there is a need for a language of critique, a questioning of presuppositions. Radical educators, for example, criticize and indeed reject the notion that the primary purpose of public education is economic efficiency. Schools are more than company stores. They have the much more radical purpose of educating citizens. Which is why the second base assumption of radical education is a language of possibility. It goes beyond critique, to elaborate a positive language of human empowerment” (Giroux,

1992, p.10). The reason Giroux's concept of radical pedagogy fits our partnership so well can be explained by three distinguishing traits: "Radical education is interdisciplinary in nature, it questions the fundamental categories of all disciplines, and it has a public mission of making society more democratic" (Giroux, 1992, p.10).

The challenge to us as "radical educators" is to create a curriculum that motivates our students to buy into the idea that education can be a liberating experience. That is, if students participate in our curriculum, they will recognize that through experience comes empowerment.

Empowerment, in this sense, means to become critical thinkers as well as critical actors. Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, identifies critical thinking as being able to understand, analyze, pose questions, and affect and effect the social, political, and economic realities that shape our lives. As we move toward a strong democratic basis for our curriculum, we as a partnership/team should bear in mind that democracy is a celebration of difference. This, to me, means that our students are to be encouraged, within an academic context, to critically question dominant social institutions rather than merely adapt to them. This, we believe, will be accomplished through the eventual development of an authentic project-based curriculum developed and implemented by our partnership team.

The importance of an authentic project-based curriculum can be further explained through the concept of "bricolage" brought to the team by Dr. Carlson. The concept, as applied to education, suggests that we base our curriculum in the here-and-now and use what is at hand to address our students' concrete needs. In other words, we should remain open enough to build on and take advantage of educational experiences and opportunities as they present themselves to us.

One such opportunity of a sort is Co-Nect, a project-based curriculum that utilizes technology as a tool in the classroom. Co-

Nect is a model that was presented to us by New American Schools and is going to be piloted by our team at Aiken. While we recognize the importance of technology for our students, we believe it will be the authenticity of the projects and their relevance to our students' lives that will make the difference. The technology will enhance our ability to bring current resources into the classroom.

One of the very promising developments of our partnership with Miami is the connection we have made with Dr. Fuller. We first met Dr. Fuller at an NNER meeting held at Aiken in the fall of 1996. Dr. Fuller's focus is primarily the improvement of teaching in secondary schools. He is concerned not only with the quality of education our students receive but, just as importantly, the quality of training that preservice teachers receive prior to entering the job market. In our conversations, an observation that Dr. Fuller has frequently made is that student teachers tend to teach the way they have seen teaching modeled for them; thus, if one's professors and cooperating teachers stand in front of the class and lecture, student teachers will do the same. In an attempt to combat this one-dimensional teaching style, Dr. Fuller is quite selective in the placement of his student teachers.

From our standpoint as urban school teachers, we feel that it is very important for our students to have teachers that truly want to teach in this kind of environment. As a consequence, we have discussed getting education students out of the college classrooms and into the field as early and as frequently as possible. The hope is that as a result of a wide variety of experiences, students may begin to identify the type of environment in which they would like to teach. If such an identification can be made, they can focus the remainder of their college careers on the development of methods and skills that will serve them best in the environment they have chosen. While there is no guarantee students will be hired into their district of choice, they nevertheless can guide their careers in their chosen direction.

It is obvious to our students at Aiken when they have teachers who do not want to be there. Also, the sooner student teachers are out in the schools, the sooner some may recognize that teaching is not what they really want to do—again, a service to both our students and the student teachers who make that recognition.

Future Directions

Some very exciting and motivating ideas have been the center of discussion within the context of our partnership team. While these ideas are still in the conceptual stages, I believe they hold a great deal of promise for urban education and our partnership with Miami. First, teachers and university professors team teach methods classes at Miami. At the same time, university professors periodically team with partner school teachers in the school environment. Second, develop a new model for student teaching experiences and, finally, alter the current method for supervising student teachers.

It seems that there is a great opportunity for partner schools to share material and intellectual resources. Having teachers and professors team at both the school and university sites provides a chance for both to maintain an awareness of the climates that exist at each location. It is a way for the teacher to discuss issues of concern for students planning for careers in teaching. It is also a way to provide information about a variety of teaching methods—what has worked and what has not. The opportunity also exists for university professors to get into a high school classroom periodically and refresh his or her memory as to the experiences once had. The hope is that the more experiences that can be acquired by teachers and professors at each site, the more students will benefit.

In discussing new models for preservice teaching, Dr. Fuller and I have agreed to place two preservice teachers in my classroom simultaneously in the fall of the 1997-98

school year. The opportunity to have three teachers working together in a classroom has several implications. Students learn in a variety of ways and at varying rates of speed. This will be a great opportunity to work with students on a more personal level, providing encouragement, providing remediation when needed, and constantly challenging students to improve the quality of their work. I also believe that working closely with our students can help raise their self-esteem. In addition, there is potential for preservice teachers to be less intimidated by an urban school setting and thus have a better student teaching experience. It will, I believe, serve to “humanize” our students for those preservice teachers that come into our school with preconceived notions of what an urban school is.

Finally, the possibility has been discussed of training teachers on site to serve as supervisors for preservice teachers at their schools. This, of course, is in the very early stages of discussion but could conceivably improve the quality of supervision for preservice teachers. At the same time, it could improve the level of communication between the university professor and the sites at which students are assigned. However, as stated earlier in this portrait, successfully implementing any of these changes will require wide-ranging change within the administrations of both Miami University and Cincinnati Public Schools.

The partnership/team is also attempting to address, as stated earlier, the larger social issue of the growing gap between inner-city and suburban America. Dr. Simcock, an integral part of this process, recruited Miami students to travel to Aiken in order to tutor and assist in our classes. Because Dr. Simcock is a sociologist, many of the volunteers have been sociology majors. However, flyers and announcements for volunteers were spread across the campus resulting not only in sociology majors but also students from many other majors motivated as much by general social concern as by career interests in teaching or social service work to volunteer. The rationale for this aspect of the

partnership is put best by Dr. Simcock: "Many, but by no means all, of Miami's students come from socially advantaged homes and families. If they were to do no more than do well in their studies, their career futures would already be relatively secure. But many of them also realize that the larger society in which they and their children must live is dangerously threatened by divisions of wealth, class, and education. Therefore, as a complement to their studies of American society, they are provided an opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of the world in and around inner-city schools." Volunteerism also has the potential of increasing the civic responsibility of those students who participate in the program.

After utilizing this aspect of the partnership for most of the 1996-97 school year, we recognized some improvements that must be made in order to make this process more effective for the 1997-98 school year. Initially, our volunteer format was fairly loose; that is, Miami students came down to Aiken and tried to fit themselves into whatever was going on in class as best they could. As a result, there were instances when some of the volunteers felt awkward and out of place. I had a sense, at times, that we were wasting their time. This year, however, we are determined to do a better job of building the volunteers into our lesson plans. As a result of including volunteers in our class plans, we will need to have a minimum degree of continuity in the Miami students coming down to Aiken. It will be helpful to know how many students are coming and if they are the same as had previously been down. In addition, it may be possible to offer internship credit to the students who participate as volunteers.

While it is too early to tell what the long-term effects this aspect of the partnership are on Aiken and Miami students, it is clear that Aiken students enjoy the attention they receive from the Miami volunteers. The impact of the relationship is often shown through the expression of hopeful questions about when volunteers will come next. This gives us cause for optimism and reason to

work toward more effective use of Miami's volunteers.

Conclusion

Henry Giroux, in *Border Crossings*, states very clearly a problem in urban education that we are also concerned about when he asks, "Can learning take place if in fact it silences the voices of the people it is supposed to teach?" He answers, "Yes. People learn that they don't count" (1992, p.15). I think a large part of this partnership is creating a space in which people learn they do count. Based upon what I have experienced, I now value in a much deeper sense the possibilities that the partnership offers. Our goal, I think, is to nurture a democratic community in which all students—school and university alike—have both a voice and a relationship with each other that goes well beyond the traditional academic setting. We are not working just to support and benefit ourselves and our students, but to support the university teachers and their students, too.

The core of the partnership, it seems to me, is the connection between people; you cannot change institutions alone, but you can build connections between people. Through human connections, we change institutions. If you had visited my classroom this past year, you would have seen the partnership in action. Four preservice teachers planned and presented a lesson about the development of national identity and immigration laws. By breaking into small groups, they engaged students in meaningful dialogue for the entire class period. Usually, students begin zipping their coats and putting on their backpacks several minutes before the bell rings. That day, however, when the bell rang, nobody moved and one student complained audibly, "Damn, this went too quick!"

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AIKEN UPDATE:

Aiken High School and Miami University: A Continuing Partnership

William Kreuzmann, Aiken High School

“There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active cooperation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying. But the meaning of purposes and ends is not self-evident and self-explanatory” (Dewey, 1938, p.67).

An implication can be drawn from the chapter in which this quote is found that has direct relevance to the work toward educational renewal that has begun as a result of the partnership between Aiken High School and Miami University. Dewey suggests that developing purpose in education is a “cooperative enterprise.” Thus, it is to be accomplished by a concerted effort among teachers, students, parents, and communities.

Currently, the purposes of public education are determined by a dominant culture that dictates such purposes in order to secure and maintain its position, particularly its economic position, in society. The methods for the selection of such purposes are far from collaborative and less than inclusive. This portrait will show, through our partnership, how we are trying to include our students, as well as those from Miami University, in the development of more

meaningful purposes for learning and teaching. In so doing, we will be rejecting the mainstream purpose of education that all too often is the reproduction of the dominant ideology in society. In essence then, our purpose is to take progressive ideology and theory and to put it into practice within the context of an urban school/university partnership.

Progressive Ideology and Theory

The heart of the partnership between Aiken High School and Miami University is developing in our schools the potential to be sites of democratic empowerment. I believe this should be the case for all schools but particularly for those whose students are marginalized by race, class, and/or gender. The use of progressive ideology and theory is meant to move us away from the status quo and toward a meaningful reform that does more than simply rearrange the current system. It is not simply the structure of school districts that must progress but, more importantly, what goes on in the classrooms. We have reached a point at which the gap between progressive theory and practice has to be bridged in order to better address the needs of urban students. We cannot allow our schools to continue as totally determined sites that serve the political, economic, and social needs of society’s dominant culture.

In order for us, as a partnership, to become a site for collaborative democratic empowerment, we must begin to integrate our students, whenever possible, into the process of decision making: to involve the

pupil in the construction of the purpose involved in his/her studying, as John Dewey suggested. In order to do that, however, we must overcome the conditioning that teachers and students have received throughout their lives via traditional education. That conditioning is primarily one in which students are presented with official information that is received through teacher-talk. There is very little dialogue or discussion because, historically, both teachers and students have been otherwise trained to receive transfer of knowledge through lectures. We as teachers and students seem to have a difficult time liberating ourselves from this practice. The teachers and students involved in this partnership should begin to move away from classrooms in which information has been stripped of its political value. "This is a great discovery, education is politics" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 46). Textbooks need not be taken as gospel. In fact, they need not be used at all. Selected readings, however, will have underlying meanings depending on who reads them. Thus, an appreciation should be developed for the educational value in political difference that results from a dialogical approach in the classroom. This, of course, is difficult because student-involved discussion in the classroom is not *laissez faire*. On the contrary, it must be rigorous. "Traditional methods, the transfer-of-knowledge approaches, are burdensome precisely because they cannot work! They produce a tremendous student resistance that we have to trek through in class. The dialogical method is work also, but it holds out a potential of creativity and breakthrough which gives it unusual rewards, mutual illumination" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 49). Such a process contributes to the redevelopment of the students to see that their interpretation of materials can be a beginning of self- and social-transformation—"a moment when learning and changing society are joined" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 50). Rather than reproducing the social relationships between the classes, we work to break down the traditional "reproduction of

the hierarchical distribution of class and power relations" (Giroux, 1981, p. 71). In addition, cultural reproduction, or the transmission of the culture of the dominant class, must be challenged as well. In so doing, we are questioning the legitimacy of the dominant culture to create curriculum that is considered official or legitimate. Thus, it is through challenging the reproduction of the dominant culture that we challenge social reproduction as well. And this is one of the primary purposes of education: to develop schools that provide democratic education, so as not to be hemmed in by a hidden curriculum that serves a relatively small percentage of society. Such reform will help develop students who are able to be constructively critical of their environment and themselves, and who are able to work toward change when necessary.

This, of course, is a radical departure from the way education is currently structured. In essence, this approach to reform shifts the responsibility for curriculum development from central administrators, who are primarily concerned with satisfying a test score-hungry public, and politicians, who believe that true educational reform lies in the use of economics such as vouchers and a free market environment, to teachers. However, it is not competition among teachers but rather collaboration among teachers that will help to reform schools. Teachers are hindered when overly determined curriculum plans are handed down to them from administrators. The teachers know their students best, especially in schools such as ours, where teaming has begun to take hold. It is primarily the collaboration among teachers, students, parents, and social service agencies (if present in the schools) that helps us understand the baggage many students bring to school. Therefore, we need to be able to adjust the curricula to our students.

Radical Pedagogy and a Progressive Partnership

A great deal of my hope for effective

urban educational renewal has been placed on the metaphorical shoulders of the partnership between Aiken High School and Miami University. We are the vehicle through which progressive change will take place. Beyond the money made available to this partnership through grants is the value in the collaboration that has begun to take place within our school, and between Miami University and Aiken High School. Our efforts at renewal/reform have taken two paths. One can be characterized as working from within Aiken, which involves curricular issues as well as instructional methods. The other is the direct result of our partnership with Miami University and, in a sense, is as complex as the first in that it requires the cooperation and renewal of two institutions simultaneously. Our partnership with Miami University is currently focused on teacher education by working to become a professional development school. Both of these efforts are meant not only to renew urban education but also to challenge the more powerful institutions that, in the long run, generate structural inequalities and access to resources. The structural inequalities, as mentioned above, consist of social inequities and cultural reproduction of class relations.

It is only rhetoric to talk about cultural reproduction and a liberating curriculum if one is not prepared to lay out a plan for moving in a progressive direction. We introduced the seeds of such a plan in our previous portrait and used the 1997-98 school year to pilot some ideas and critique our results. The remainder of this portrait will be our plan for continuing to move education, via our partnership, in a progressive direction. This portrait will end with some thoughts on our future direction, focusing primarily on spreading the partnership to the rest of Aiken High School.

New American Schools and Co-Nect

As was expressed in our earlier portrait, the challenge to us as radical educators is to

create a curriculum that will help our students to recognize that education can be a liberating experience. That is, if students participate in our curriculum, they will see that empowerment comes through experience, both practical and academic. In a democratic curriculum, empowerment means to become both critical thinkers as well as critical actors. As such, one must be able to understand, analyze, pose questions, and affect and effect the social, political, and economic realities that shape one's life. As we move toward a strong democratic basis for our curriculum, we must remember that democracy is a celebration of, as well as a respect for, diversity. To me, this means that our students are to be encouraged both practically and academically to critically question dominant social institutions rather than merely adapt to them.

It is here that the New American Schools model, Co-Nect, fits into the larger context of school renewal/reform at Aiken. Last year (1997-98), our team at Aiken piloted this model. This year, three more teams will be using the Co-Nect design. It is a model that utilizes the development of an authentic, project-based, interdisciplinary curriculum to involve students in experiential learning. The idea of project-based learning suggests that we partially base our curriculum in the here-and-now while remaining open to build on and take advantage of educational experiences and opportunities as they present themselves. Co-Nect utilizes technology in the classroom. As such, a tremendous amount of information can be brought directly into the classroom. In addition, through technology creative limitations are diminished and student creativity can be expanded. However, though we recognize the value in technology, we believe it is the authenticity of the projects and their relevance to our student's lives that will make a difference. Co-Nect is a vehicle by which we, as teachers, can incorporate and cushion the overly determined credit-granting standards required by the district within authentic projects organized by teachers but modified by students.

Before I describe our process of project design let me briefly describe our team. There is potential for us to work with as many as twelve teachers on our team—six special education and six regular education teachers. We have roughly one hundred and twenty students on our team. We recognize and accept our purpose as working to address a wide variety of our students' struggles, whether academic or otherwise. And because inclusion is practiced on our team, there are few if any distinctions with regard to the roles played by the teachers on the team. We see ourselves simply as teachers of students. We take all of our students from where they are now, and go as far as we can with them. We try to be careful not to base the value of our students solely on the academic skills or the content knowledge that they bring with them to school.

In describing a project, it is important to say that the project created with flexibility in mind. That is, students must be able to take a project description and make it their own. With that as a prerequisite, we design the context of the project with the idea that students will work to fill in, what is to them, meaningful content. We then examine the district's credit-granting standards to find the ones that fit the project. It is also important to note that these projects are designed, for example, in Social Studies to be used in U.S. History, World History, Economics, and U.S. Government. Thus, by designing projects that are suitably undetermined, we can address a wide variety of courses and at the same time allow for students' significant input into the projects. Such input allows the students and the teachers to counter the hidden curriculum too often present in schools.

Each project is designed with a driving question or issue that is the focus of the project. In addition, each project must be interdisciplinary in nature—that is, each subject area must produce a culminating product or event that contributes to an overall product, demonstration, or display. The Cincinnati Public School District has created a set of credit-granting standards for each

subject area and requires that students meet these standards in order to move on in school. Therefore, as stated earlier, after our project is conceived, we examine the standards to find the ones that apply to each specific project. Project evaluations are based on a set of rubrics designed by us and, ideally, by students too. Students receive copies of the rubrics, the credit-granting standards that apply to their project, as well as any other information they may need. No information is kept from the students regarding their projects or the evaluation of their projects. Students may take their projects in any number of directions as long as they discuss that potential direction with their teachers. We have the capability to post project designs on the internet as well as examine those posted by other Co-Nect schools from around the country.

There are many issues that should be discussed when considering curriculum reform/renewal. Two of those issues that ought to be addressed, especially when quality student participation is required for projects to be done well, are: 1) how much student participation in such projects actually exists? and 2) how rigorous can a curriculum be if it does not rely, necessarily, on paper and pencil objective tests?

One of the many significant challenges for teachers that results from the questioning of the fundamental purposes of education held by those in power, is to try and undo some of the conditioning that many of our students have undergone in their years as students in our schools. Much too often at Aiken High School, we have students who are all too willing to allow teachers to lead them by the hand through every aspect of their education. We as teachers, being products of similar systems, are also quite willing in this process. Thus, it is very difficult to get students to take an active responsibility for what goes on in the classroom. It seems that we, as well as our students, have become used to having education objectified to the point that intellectual challenges are reduced to clear choices of right and wrong; yes or no; a, b, c, or d. There are, necessarily, right and wrong

answers for all issues, and the teacher is the keeper of the truth. There may be class discussion within this model, but it is up to the teacher to bring the class back to the objective truth. It is rare, however, that such a truth ever exists. As stated earlier, education is politics, and as such the classroom has to be a place where what students say matters. This cannot happen until we begin to understand the experiences and struggles of our students' lives, incorporate them into our curricula, challenge them academically, and then join their struggles ourselves. As it stands now, it seems that we as teachers are becoming more and more responsible for getting students to pass tests, and less for providing experiences that challenge their intellects. Part of our purpose as teachers in this partnership is to challenge the stifling nature of education as currently espoused by those in power, from Washington, D.C., to Columbus to Cincinnati. It affects the creativity and the risk that teachers, student teachers, and students are willing to explore and take. It is through grassroots partnerships that these issues are most effectively challenged because when challenges are directed to the center of power, change becomes diluted in compromise. It will take a great deal of time and effort to break down the layers of societal influences and educational practices that together intimidate and hinder the responsibilities students could be accepting for their own education. Too often, I hear students say that what they think does not matter. Such a characterization is the result of a process that began early in the lives of our students, probably before they began school, and so is something that ought to be addressed, in our case, before they reach high school. Henry Giroux, in *Border Crossings*, clarifies the issue in answering the following question posed to him: "Can learning take place if in fact it silences the voices of the people it is supposed to teach?" Giroux answers, "Yes, people learn that they don't count" (Giroux, 1992, p. 15). As we develop and adapt the Co-Nect model to fit our students and our school, we are trying very hard to have a

positive impact on the value our students see in themselves, not only as students but as human beings.

Rigor in Progressive Education

Too often, it seems, a rigorous curriculum is considered to be one that requires a prescribed number of books to be read, essays written, or tests given. Such overly mechanized curricula seems to take teachers out of the developmental and creative process of curriculum development and, in a sense, makes education both teacher- and student-proof.

Administrative pedagogy presents itself as a professional model of teaching very architected, with learning easily quantified and measured, easily tested, and conveniently monitored by supervisors. The managerial counterrevolution in education has installed a curriculum shaped for administrators and accountants. The school bureaucracy absorbs a huge chunk of school monies and thinks that schools could be run perfectly if only teachers and students did not get in the way. Business interests predominate in society and control the election of public officials through mass media, lobbies, campaign contributions and the two-party system. Business-oriented officials then construct and administrate a nominally "public" education system. This "public" schooling mandates a curriculum that socializes each new generation into the values of private enterprise. Education is thus a complicated and indirect agency through which corporate interests are promoted in the public sector" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 76).

Against this backdrop potentially progressive teachers rightly ask, in the spirit of self-preservation: Is the progressive liberating approach to education a helter-skelter, do-your-own-thing episode without direction?

The answer to such a question is a clear and resounding No! The challenge and the difficulty of a liberating philosophy used in

the classroom is to be able to use democracy, freedom, and authority together. The interpretation of reality becomes central to the underlying purpose of coursework. The rigor of a class becomes apparent when the teacher and student help each other realize that the particular object or concept of study is not in and of itself complete. That is, it is related dialectically with other concepts, which then constitute a totality. Therefore, the more a class goes beyond mere description, the closer it gets to a concept's reason for existence which, in turn, helps explain the concept. It requires extreme rigor for a class to accomplish the above, and it is a process that must be left to the teacher and the student to develop. It is emphasis placed on quality of work rather than quantity of work. It is also serious reading that is the key to a rigorous liberating class. Freedom within a class allows us to recognize that subjects read cannot be confined by what the dominant ideology of the time demands or attempts to limit within a curriculum. Democracy within our classes does not allow us to silence relevant dialogue within the context of discussion. The difficulty is using authority without being authoritarian. Students are accustomed to teachers being authoritarian, and thus classes are frequently a test of one side against the other, each struggling for control. It is important to struggle against such mutual antagonism. However, "the student needs to know that in some moments freedom must be punished when it goes beyond the limits of democratic authority. And the punishment has to be made by the authority (the teacher)" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 93). In so doing, I think it is important that when we say "no," students understand the reasons for such a response. As an example, it seems absurd when a district's standards for English require a prescribed number of novels to be read while at the same time use grade levels to limit novels available to our students for reading. This is the antithesis of rigor; it is the emphasis of quantity over quality.

Thus far, this portrait has described our efforts at renewal/reform at the curricular

level. The final part of this portrait will address our collaboration with Miami University, our efforts at expanding the partnership to include more of Aiken's teachers, as well as our hopes of becoming a professional development school.

To a large degree, the long-term success of urban educational renewal depends not only on current teachers but on future teachers, as well. By that I mean the training and experience received by preservice teachers is very important to the renewal of public education in general and, more specifically, urban public education. It is quite important for us to find potential teachers interested in teaching in an urban environment. Once they are found, it is equally important for them to have experiences that are supported by teachers who value mentoring new teachers. This is how our partnership with Miami University can have its greatest impact on educational renewal/reform. In addition, it can serve as a vehicle to expand the partnership to other teachers at Aiken High School as well as at Miami University. It will be a slow process, but a process that is currently in motion and moving in the right direction.

The 1997-98 school year saw the beginning of a cooperative effort with Miami University to place multiple student teachers, when and where possible, on our partnership team at Aiken High School. There are two bottom-line purposes. First, the partnership is intended to help Miami students have as positive an experience as possible and to teach them that education, especially urban education, can no longer be considered an independent undertaking. Teaching is a collaborative effort that requires creativity, cooperation, and freedom to do what is needed for the students. Second, the partnership provides an opportunity for our students to have multiple teachers in the classroom at the same time, teaching and providing assistance when needed. Within this paradigm, cooperating teachers must actively participate in classes by planning and teaching cooperatively with student teachers, as well as providing appropriate support and

critique as needed. Student teachers must become part of the team by participating in decision making, as well as by making curricular development suggestions.

The primary criticism of this model thus far is that student teachers do not get the opportunity to run classes on their own. In other words, they are not suitably abused, and thus they do not feel the same sense of failure and degradation that is necessary, some would say, to become a real teacher. In my view, the traditional model for student teachers does not provide a remedy for such experiences. One simply survives the experience and attempts to move on. Our model, based on teaming, while not providing specific answers to many of the issues specific to urban schools, informs the student teachers about the support and collaboration available from their fellow team teachers. It helps them understand that often there are no specific answers to many things that happen in urban classrooms. Our students bring a variety of issues to the classroom and at any point in time any one of those issues can trigger a difficult situation in class. Our model does not eliminate the need for classroom management; it just spreads the responsibility to more teachers in the classroom. One still feels the frustration and gains the experience, it has been claimed, that only those in traditional placements can gain. However, our student teachers have an opportunity to process their experiences with a team of teachers that helps to temper a wide variety of potentially difficult situations. Such an environment helps to buoy everyone's spirits and to keep experiences as positive as possible.

Our partnership with Miami is particularly important because it is the beginning of the inclusion of school (Aiken) personnel in the training, mentoring, and evaluation of new teachers. Because of the impending changes that the state of Ohio is making in the licensing of new teachers, there will be, in essence, a two-year probationary period during which new teachers are evaluated. As a result of these evaluations, teachers either move on with their careers or,

if the evaluation is unfavorable, must return to school for remediation. Within this process is a program called Pathwise in which current teachers act as coaches or mentors to student teachers, as well as to first- and second-year teachers. The mentoring process begins when prospective teachers are still student teachers.

The Pathwise process is the next step to our becoming a professional development school. It has opened up the opportunity for us to work as supervisors of student teachers at our school. We will be able to hold seminars for our student teachers on site at Aiken. Such an opportunity will help draw more of Aiken's faculty into the partnership process, which is seriously needed. I am hopeful that it will give our teachers a feeling of participation in a meaningful effort to renew and reform urban public education. We are also hopeful that in the future we will be able to team with Miami faculty to teach classes at both Aiken and Miami.

Although detailed statistics from last year are not yet available, some indicators of our impact are. We ended the 1997-98 school year with an average team attendance rate of 88 percent. This compares favorably to the overall school attendance rate of 81 percent and to the 77 percent attendance rate of all the freshmen at Aiken. Eighty percent of our team students returned to our team from the 1997-98 school year. The attendance of team students is currently running on average at about 84 percent. This is roughly four to five percentage points higher than the attendance figures for Aiken as a whole. In addition, we currently have five student teachers from Miami University working as co-equal members of our team. This, in my view, is a very promising development because it is indicative of the simultaneous renewal/reform process at work both at Aiken High School and Miami University.

Conclusion

A large part of this partnership is creating a space in which people learn that they do count. Based upon what I have experienced, I

now value, in a much deeper sense, the possibilities that this partnership offers. Our goal is to nurture a democratic community in which students and teachers, school and university alike, have a voice as well as a relationship with one another, that goes well beyond the traditional academic setting. We are not working just to support and benefit ourselves and our students, but to support the university teachers and their students too.

The core of the partnership is the connection between people: you cannot change institutions alone, but you can build connections between people. Through human connections, we change institutions.

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