Community Leadership: Seeking Social Justice while Re-creating Public Schools in post-Katrina New Orleans
Brian R. Beabout
University of New Orleans

Abstract

As New Orleans becomes an important reform model, many have been attracted to the simplistic logic of decentralized, market-based educational reforms that assume easily articulated and quantified goals and rational actors. In an effort to reclaim a role for social justice in such an environment, this chapter assumes the position that educational leadership for social justice must prioritize community engagement, indeed community leadership, if it is to be both sustainable and just. Guided by scholarship on the ethic of community (Furman, 2004; Furman & Shields, 2003; Shields & Seltzer, 1997), it begins with a history of the Morris Jeff Community School, followed by a series of cantankerous contradictions which highlight points of conflict between community leadership and many features of the currently popular market-based reforms (heroic vs. democratic leadership, competition vs. systemic improvement, state vs. localized goals, and teacher leadership vs. teacher churn). The analysis concludes that urban schools need leaders with expertise rather than expertism and that the development of adult leadership within our urban communities may provide the best hope of reconnecting social justice to the work of educational leaders.

Purpose

Discussions of social justice in educational leadership generally rely on a shared assumption of a human world characterized by inequality of wealth, health, education, housing, economic opportunity and of agency or self-determination (Beachum, 2008). Those who witnessed the human costs of the 2005 flooding of New Orleans need little reminder of this (Brinkley, 2007;
Ladson-Billings, 2006). Seeing shocking inequity, and being dissatisfied, the advocate for social justice naturally expresses a desire for change. The advocate can critique the current (or historical) state of affairs (Katz, 1975; McLaren, 1999; Willis, 1977; Zinn, 1980) or articulate an expression of a preferred future (Freire, 2000; Shor, 1987; Wink, 2000). In either case, conceptions of social justice in an unjust world are of limited use unless they are explicitly connected to theories of organizational and social change. Following Bogotch (2008), concerns for social justice cannot be truly developed in practice until the reverse is also true: our conceptions of change must become tied to social justice. And while the process of change is never simple (Fullan, 2001a, 2001b), change that challenges asymmetrical social relations between groups is certain to face organized and powerful opposition (Oakes & Lipton, 2002). Leadership in the service of social justice then, must be well-organized and creative in seeking and wielding power.

In the context of education, leadership for social justice faces a central paradox in which leaders (often employees of the state) seek to improve social conditions that have usually been created or sustained by the state itself (Beabout, 2008). Such change smells of revolution. And revolutionary change (rather than evolutionary change) is important for thinking about the intersections of leadership, social justice, and educational change. Economist Milton Friedman has stated that, “only a crisis- actual or perceived- produces real change” (1962, p.ix). More recently, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has offered his policy of crisis creation via reconstitution, school closure, and school takeovers as an approach to reform in persistently failing schools (Harris, 2010). Both Friedman and Duncan exemplify the use of crisis to create change that would have been unfeasible in more stable social contexts (see Klein, 2007). What
remains unclear is if this a set of policies that can dislodge entrenched modes of apartheid schooling for marginalized youth, or if it is the educational equivalent of slash and burn agriculture in which tremendous amounts of resources are wasted, and sustainability threatened in order to get one or two good harvests before moving on. This chapter will offer support for the position that educational leadership for social justice must prioritize community engagement, indeed community leadership, if it is to be both sustainable and just. To use Freire’s (2000, p. 180) terms, we should seek educational leaders capable of cultural synthesis rather than cultural invasion. Cultural synthesis emphasizes the agency and wisdom of both leaders and followers, rather than transplanting the ideologies and values of the leaders on to followers. With current educational policies in the USA that serve to sort poor and non-white students into their own racially segregated schools (Frankenburg, Siegel-Hawley & Wang, 2011), this ability to engage in cultural synthesis becomes an increasingly important leadership skill. Educated, middle-class school leaders must find ways to authentically engage with low-income communities of color. This leadership must be characterized by democratic engagement, rather than autocracy. This slow, messy work of relationship building with diverse constituencies is where our best hopes for true revolution lie.

I have intentionally foregrounded the concepts of crisis, change, and power here in order to draw attention to specific aspects of that the market-oriented charter school reform strategies that have unfolded in the tumultuous seven years since Hurricane Katrina and the attendant levee failures forever changed my city and its public school system. I will refer to this approach as ‘expert’ leadership and it is characterized by the movement towards appointed, rather than elected district leadership, strict adherence to test scores as the correct measure of
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school quality, and the vision of districts as portfolio managers rather than operators of public schools (Beabout, 2011; Bulkley, Henig & Levin, 2010). The discussion of Community Leadership relates to the story of the re-opening of the Morris Jeff Community School in New Orleans in this context of portfolio management and expertism. Quite uniquely, the Morris Jeff school that was created from a community organizing paradigm (Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2005) and involved a group of parents, educators and neighbors coming together to create a school where there was once only a storm-damaged building.

The discussion utilizes the ethic of community (Furman, 2004; Furman & Shields, 2003) as it attempts to answer the questions: *who shall lead our schools to become more just institutions?*, and *what forms of leadership might they use?* What follows is an extensive history of the creation of the Morris Jeff school as a case of Community Leadership in urban schools. Implications for the connection of social justice to educational change are discussed as well as lessons that this case has to teach about the definitions of social justice in an educational arena dominated by a politically constrained conception of what constitutes a “good school” (Eisner, 1991; Rothstein, Jacobsen & Wilder, 2008).

**The Ethic of Community as an Interpretive Frame**

Scholars have developed the ethic of community (Furman, 2004) as an addition to other ethical paradigms in the field of educational administration, including: the ethic of care, the ethic of critique, and the ethic of the profession. As a set of moral commitments or obligations, the ethic of community consists of commitments to practicing shared leadership, dialogue, and collaborative work. This set of practices is informed by the post-modern conceptions of community as impermanent, changing, diverse, and unequal.
Shields and Seltzer (1997) contribute the ideas of a moral community, a community of difference, and a community of dialogue that emphasize the non-normative and fractured nature of schools when viewed as communities. Their conception pushes us beyond our often false assumption of shared values, to what we find in our modern lives: communities characterized by enduring differences, by conflicting values, and by imperfect communication (Tierney, 1993). Rather than viewing modern life as the end of community, they advocate a reconceptualization that views community as a set of processes through which diverse groups of people can move towards dialogue, trust, and collective decision-making, even in the face of persistent difference. This collective existence invokes the long history of democratic philosophy in education (Dewey, 1916; Green, 1999; Maxcy, 1995; Strike 1999). Particularly significant for the discussion here are Strike’s (1999) notions of thin democracy characterized by procedural, majority-rules mindsets and thick democracy characterized by dialogue and a commitment to inclusion despite persistent differences between people. The ethic of community also urges us to look for these commitments and practices within schools, as they are connected to some of the more established markers of successful schools: teacher collegiality, student engagement, and student achievement (Furman, 2004).

This description of the Ethic of Community should generate significant dissonance for the reader well-versed in the current school reform policies in many Western nations, as exemplified by the testing and accountability policies embedded in the No Child Left Behind Act and The Race to the Top initiative of the last two presidential administrations in the USA. Furman (2003a, p. 6) offers the following indictment of much of the person-centered leadership implicit in much current reform policy:
Essentially, these arguments for a democratic communal approach to social justice are saying that social justice cannot be realized given the status quo of hierarchical relationships and communication patterns in schools, the assumption that moral leadership is the purview of “heroic” leaders in administrative positions, and the dearth of opportunities for “full participation and open inquiry.”

Notable here is that much of the hierarchical, hero-based reforms of the current era are framed in social justice language, and the mantra that “education is the civil rights issue of our time” has been used to remove schools from local control, dismiss veteran teachers, and allow state takeover of schools in communities of color. The ethic of community forces me to ask of these policies, can socially just ends be served by autocratic means? The answer, of course depends on our definition of socially just. if closing the racial achievement gap on state examinations is social justice, then perhaps. If our definition hinges on marginalized communities gaining some agency in the public institutions that serve them, probably not.

In addition to the focus on community-as-practices emphasized by Furman (2003a), I also wish to emphasize the role of inclusion. While one might be satisfied to build exemplary communitarian practices among a school’s staff, leadership and students, those fully-embracing the ethic of community emphasize inclusion of parents, community members, and other persons over whom the school administration exerts less formal control. Drawing boundaries around the communitarian us to keep out the unpleasant them certainly makes a farce of any meaningful sense of community in the diverse school communities of today. This natural
human tendency to fudge on inclusion for the sake of consensus is the dark side of community
(Noddings, 1995) and plays significantly into the following discussion on the rebuilding of
schools in post-Katrina New Orleans. Significant consideration should be given to conceptions
of the administrator as a representative or leader of the broader geographic community served
by the school (Khalifa, 2012). This definition greatly expands the definition of who is considered
a stakeholder in public schools to include community-members with (or without) formal
affiliations to the school.

The ideas presented above (community as a set of practices, the moral community,
community of difference, community of dialogue, community as vehicle for social justice, and
the dark side of community) serve as the interpretive lenses for the case of Community
Leadership. These ideas will be identified where present and extended where necessary to aid
our understanding of the highly complex interactions that are embedded in approaches to
change in urban schools.

The Creation of the Morris Jeff Community School

The Morris F.X. Jeff Elementary school building is located at 800 N. Rendon St. in the Faubourg
St. John neighborhood of New Orleans. In typical New Orleans fashion, the school was tucked away in
the middle of a residential neighborhood, a few blocks from both the palatial, high-ground homes on
Ursulines and Esplanade Avenues as well as a few blocks from some of the city’s most violence-plagued
streets. Built in 1904, the school originally opened under the name McDonough #31. John McDonough
(1779-1850) was a businessman and entrepreneur who left considerable fortunes to support public

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1 The narrative constructed here is based on a combination of personal experiences, personal correspondence, and
media reports about the creation of the Morris Jeff Community School. I have been involved with the school as a
board member, parent, and classroom volunteer since December 2008.

2 As this chapter goes to press, the vacant and storm damaged building was recently sold at auction by the Orleans
Parish School Board to CCNO Development for $980,000. It is likely to be converted to multi-family housing.
school construction in both his native Baltimore and his adopted home of New Orleans. School district directories show that the school regularly served between 400-600 students with 10-22 teachers. The school was a *co-educational whites-only* elementary school until the New Orleans schools were desegregated after 1960 (Inger, 1969; McKenzie, 2009). The school, like most other non-magnet schools, experienced a rapid shift in student demographics and McDonough #31 rapidly became a predominantly low-income and African-American elementary school after 1960 (DeVore & Logsdon, 1991).

In 1995, the principal of the school coordinated a successful campaign to change the name from McDonough #31 to Morris F.X. Jeff Elementary School to honor the revered educator and city recreation department leader who had passed away in 1993 (Frazier, 1995). A number of schools opted to change their names during this period in an effort to eliminate the names of former slave owners from the names of schools in the predominantly African-American school district.

The more recent history of the school is documented in part by the state’s online data reporting on public schools (see [http://www.doe.state.la.us/data/school_report_cards.aspx](http://www.doe.state.la.us/data/school_report_cards.aspx)). The state has accountability data on the school dating from 1998-2005 which shows a relatively stable school, with just over 300 students, nearly 100% African-American, with 98% receiving free-or-reduced priced lunches. Class sizes were nearly all below 25 students, and the school was never labeled as *persistently dangerous*, one of the indicators used by the state’s report card system. Student attendance was generally near 95%. Student academic performance lagged. The majority of students scored at the *unsatisfactory* or *approaching basic* levels on state testing and around the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally on the norm-referenced Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The school was slightly below average when compared with other public schools in New Orleans, but far from the bottom.

As a public school in the accountability era, it was an African-American institution serving low-income families that enjoyed high regard as a safe and caring place for children. Deep ties between the African-American community and the school are evidenced by its relationship with the nearby Zulu
Social Aid and Pleasure Club and by the photos of parents and children posing with sequin-adorned Mardi-Gras Indians visible on a plexiglass covered bulletin board outside the school (Morris FX Jeff Elementary School, 2008).

**Evacuation and Neighbors Return**

Like most other public schools in New Orleans, Morris F.X. Jeff Elementary was closed in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina struck and the state legislature seized the opportunity to give control of the much-maligned New Orleans Public Schools to the state-run Recovery School District, run by a state-appointed superintendent (Beabout, 2010; Perry & Schwam-Baird, 2010). And as the neighborhood around the school began to rebuild, the handsome school building, spared by the worst of the storm because of its relatively high elevation and a serendipitous roof replacement shortly before Katrina, just sat there, windows and doors left open by storm survivors awaiting rescue or by looters (Morris FX Jeff Elementary School, 2008). As the neighborhood was repopulated in the months after the storm and the building continued to sit there, an un-secured eyesore, people began talking. Neighbor Jenny Bagert said, “We looked at the school over our back fence every day. I began to ask myself where the students from our neighborhood were supposed to go to school” (Himelstein, 2009, p. 19).

In March 2007, clean-up contractors began working on the Morris F.X. Jeff site. The district’s policy was to declare all items inside of schools as *storm debris* and throw them away, even items on un-flooded upper floors. While concerns about mold spores and potential lawsuits was a common official refrain, some have challenged this approach as wasteful and overly-cautious, as tens of millions of dollars in equipment was discarded from schools across the city (Ritea, 2006). Neighbors who saw this at Morris Jeff were disappointed that the first significant official attention given to their abandoned public school was this wholesale filling of
dumpsters with what appeared to be useful books and supplies. A neighborhood blogger reported that one onlooker watching books and computers being tossed out of second-story windows said, "You know somebody could have used it" (N.O. school “cleanup”..., 2007). Another entering the abandoned building and retrieving books for the neighborhood kids to take home. Regardless of the soundness of this cleanup decision, something about the sight of work crews coming unannounced into the neighborhood and removing scarce supplies inspired a reaction.

Much of the critique of post-Katrina educational change has been that self-serving group of well-funded and out-of-town charter school advocates has moved in to replace local educators, thus removing any sense of community that may have existed under the struggling pre-storm system (see Buras, 2010; Klein, 2007; Perry, 2007). The micro-narrative of Morris Jeff’s neighbors parallels the broader macro-narrative in which the post-storm reforms were perceived as being done to a community rather than with a community. The Morris Jeff neighbors understandably defined the school as theirs. It was across the street from their houses, and there was a tremendous distrust of governmental authorities that emerged from Katrina and the catastrophic failures of the Army Corps of Engineers. There was a feeling that something as important to as the neighborhood school could not be trusted to distant authorities. And this feeling was about to grow stronger.

A Community Engages

State superintendent Paul Pastorek hired Paul Vallas in the summer of 2007 to lead the state-run RSD, which directly operated or turned over to charter operators all schools in the state deemed failing according to the state’s accountability policies. Nearly all of the public
schools in New Orleans, including Morris F.X. Jeff, were moved into this district following a change in state policy in November 2005, explicitly intended to wrest control of New Orleans schools from the locally elected school board.

A polarizing figure, Vallas was a former superintendent in Chicago and Philadelphia after serving as the budget director for the city of Chicago. He had supported charter school expansion and strict test-based accountability in both previous school posts. The RSD, faced with having to decide which schools to open, which to tear down, and which to prepare for renovations, began holding public meetings in the winter of 2007-08 in order to gather public input for the school facilities master plan. During a January 15\textsuperscript{th}, 2008 meeting at the Crossman School, about a mile from the Morris Jeff site, several audience members posed questions about the Morris Jeff Building. After noticing their common interest in the building, they gathered after the meeting to talk about their thoughts for the school.

A second RSD facilities meeting was planned Thursday February, 28\textsuperscript{th}, and the group decided to take action to impress on the committee that they wanted their school opened. A neighborhood meeting was called by Broderick Bagert, Jr. and his wife Celeste for the Saturday prior to the meeting (This is the way we save our school…, 2008). The purpose of the meeting was to gather input and prepare their message for the master plan committee. In full-group and in breakout teams, they discussed some unified concerns that included renovating and re-opening the Morris Jeff school. The group organized a neighborhood petition drive, had t-shirts printed, and coordinated rides to the meeting that next Thursday. The group, calling itself \textit{Neighbors for Morris F.X. Jeff School}, included a broad cross-section of residents in the diverse neighborhood including a former principal and teacher at the pre-storm school, alumni from
the school, citizens committed to seeing the historic building preserved, and young families interested in having the neighborhood school re-opened. They planned to have survey data about community wishes, a petition of signatures, and a mobilized group of neighbors to help make their case.

**Taking Direct Action**

In the meeting at the Medard Nelson school on February 28th, The RSD’s planning board put forth their recommendation that Morris Jeff be “repurposed” and that elementary school children be sent to school elsewhere. Leaders from the Morris Jeff group rose to speak at the meeting and argued for their school’s re-opening. The board informed the large Morris Jeff contingent, which took up ½ the seats in the school cafeteria, that no final decisions had yet been made, and since community input was a key factor in the board’s decision-making, their request would be considered. The group posed for an all-smiles photo in the back of the room following the meeting. The group got another 25 people to attend a meeting of the state’s education board on June 18th and presented the results of their community survey of over 500 families and their demographic analysis demonstrating the need for more elementary school seats in the Bayou S.t John & Mid City neighborhoods.. Neighborhood resident Shana Sassoon as concluded that, “Our need for a quality school is undeniable” (Simon, 2008a, n/p). The group had made their case and waited for the release of the RSD’s facilities master plan.

The RSD’s August 2008 facilities master plan included a “New Jeff site at Easton Park” in phase 2 (of 6) of the rebuilding process. This suggested the district wanted to keep the “repurpose” designation on the original Rendon St. site, and build a new school building at a nearby park in the next 5-7 years. On one hand, the group had achieved a small victory:
convincing the board that an additional school was needed in their neighborhood. On the other hand, the historic 1903 building that had been the source of their concerns was still being left out of the rebuilding. Even worse, the price of their new school might mean the loss of one of the few green spaces in the densely populated neighborhood. The city-owned Easton Park is home to a playground, a youth football team, and hosts high school softball games each spring. Another surprise was the call for the nearby John Dibert school to be closed, which was currently serving over 300 students, many from the areas surrounding the shuttered Morris Jeff.

Neighbors for Morris F.X. Jeff called a press conference at the Rendon St. site on the morning of Friday, August 22nd, 2008 to voice its critique of the RSD’s master plan. This included the lack of responsiveness to community input in the master plan and the fears that closing so many schools in one neighborhood would force children into unnecessarily long bus rides. Broderick Bagert, Jr. criticized the current treatment of the neighborhood in the plan harshly, “this is an unfunded plan to take a neighborhood park and to close three neighborhood schools” (Carr, 2008, n/p).

On Thursday, September 18th, the group joined approximately 150 citizens at a public hearing on the master plan held at McDonough #35 high school. The group repeated its call for a new Morris Jeff school to be moved into the first rebuilding phase, and called out the board for its lackluster performance in demographic analysis. Bagert again had sharp words warning that the facilities master plan could, “go down in history as a colossal embarrassment and one of the most unsuccessful failures of planning in our community” if not revised (Simon, 2008b,
n/p). Their arguments at the McDonough #35 meeting earned them an invitation to meet with RSD director of operations, Karen Burke.

As the group emerged from the fall of 2008 with the attention of the RSD officials as an active community force, two things became clear to the members: 1) they were not going to be successful in their bid to re-open the old Rendon St. site, as the state’s refusal was based on state minimum size requirements, and 2) they wanted to continue organizing the neighborhood and there was a possibility that a new Morris Jeff school could be opened on a different site, with significant community leadership. The group held an open community meeting at the Bibleway Missionary Baptist Church, 2 blocks from the school, on Thursday December 11th, 2008 in hopes of expanding community understanding and participation in the group’s efforts. Led by a self-titled steering committee and community organizers Bagert and Aesha Rasheed, the meeting provided information on the history of the group, and attendees participated in several small group discussions on topics such as curriculum, teachers, and leadership for the new proposed school. In groups of 5-7, participants talked about their experiences in schools as both students and parents, as well as their ideas for an excellent neighborhood school. Based on this meeting, and subsequent information gathering events drawing on hundreds of community members, some emerging core values became evident including: student diversity, open-access, community-centered, and high-quality learning.

**Becoming Formalized**

From here, the group began transforming itself from a group of concerned neighbors to a governing body preparing to open a public school. The email address that the group used on its materials changed from savemorrisjeff@gmail.com to morrisjeffschool@gmail.com. This is
indicative of a shift of attention away saving from the old building towards the possibility of designing something new. The group formed several standing committees that would do the majority of the near-term work: principal selection, curriculum research, finance, fundraising, and parent/community outreach.

The principal selection committee placed online advertisements beginning in December 2008 and began meeting to review candidates in January 2009. All told, the group received almost 50 applications for its founding principal position. The committee included a handful of neighbors of the old school building, a high school teacher, a college professor, an insurance claims manager, a daycare administrator, and a community organizer.

The curriculum research committee began meeting in January and visited a number of schools to get a sense of the curriculum offerings at successful schools that had diverse student bodies. Their work was important in articulating the group’s emerging commitments to inquiry-based learning and foreign language instruction. They visited the highly-regarded (though selective) Laboratory School at Louisiana State University, the International School of Louisiana located in New Orleans, and several other local schools.

The finance team opened a bank account and set-up accounting procedures that would get the group operating smoothly for its first tax return and first year of board meetings. Initially, the group collected donations through the Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association, which had a pre-existing 501c3 status. With a relatively small amount of money going in and out over the school’s planning year, getting comfortable with accounting procedures was important as the amount of money, and public scrutiny, would increase significantly once it was operating with students and staff.
The fundraising team collected several thousand dollars in initial contributions from active steering committee members. The group also won a grant for a governance retreat from New Schools for New Orleans, a charter-school support organization founded post-Katrina. Plans were undertaken for an initial Community Gala that took place in August 2009 at the Zulu Social Aid & Pleasure Club, located a few blocks from the still-shuttered Morris Jeff building. The event, featuring live music and food donations from local restaurants, raised over $20,000 to cover training for the school principal and costs for the initial marketing of the school (brochures, website, banners, and yard signs).

The community engagement team recruited parents and volunteers at community events and block parties. An Easter Egg Hunt on April 11, 2009 helped to ensure that the parents of school-aged children were aware that the school, which still had not been assigned to a building, would be opening in the fall of 2010. Members staffed booths at community events such as the Urban League’s School Expo, the International Day of the Child in Audubon Park, and the Fortier Park Festival. They also organized community walks in the spring of 2010 and organized house meetings to hear from interested families.

The full steering committee was still in place and held regular meetings to coordinate committee activity. The steering committee drafted by-laws to become a non-profit corporation and submitted them to the state, receiving approval on February, 13, 2009 (Louisiana Secretary of State, 2011). That same week, on February 12th, Paul Vallas and Karen Burke from the RSD failed to show up to an agreed upon meeting with the steering committee to plan for the hiring of a principal and the governance plan for the proposed new school. At the time, the group was considering entering into a memorandum-of-understanding (MOU)
with the RSD whereby the RSD would retain legal authority for the school, but would cede responsibility for curriculum and personnel decisions to the community board and the principal they hired and supervised. The group had strong reservations about joining the charter movement that was sweeping New Orleans at the time, not sharing in its acceptance of highly segregated public schools or in its broad condemnation of all things related to the pre-Katrina system. Vallas pushed the charter option to the group, and it was perhaps a bit of intentional rebellion that prompted the group to continue pushing back against Vallas, a man who usually got what he wanted.

While the option of entering into an MOU was eventually taken off the table by the RSD, the distrust sewn by that missed meeting and several other uneasy interactions with the RSD helped to solidify the group’s decision to keep the RSD at a distance and apply to the state for a charter. This process included a document review and an in–person interview with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), but if successful, the group could elect its own board, receive state funds directly and not be under the thumb of the RSD. As long as their fiscal and academic performance was strong, the school would be relatively free to pursue its mission.

On May 29th 2009, several members attended a workshop held by the state department of education for prospective charter applicants, and the steering committee submitted a letter of intent prior to the state’s deadline of July 10. The charter was written during the summer of 2009, and primarily was done electronically as many team members were in and out of the city during the summer holidays The 248-page charter application document was submitted to the state on August 21st.
A Formal Leader

The other significant event of the summer of 2009 was the hiring of the school principal, Patricia Perkins, to begin the school’s planning year. The steering committee, and the smaller, newly created board, whose role was formalized in the articles of incorporation, had settled on three finalist candidates (out of almost 50 applicants) by the end of March and conducted interviews in late April and early May in donated board room space at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Approximately 30 community members participated in some part of the interview process, which lasted a grueling 8 hours per candidate and was comprised of a prepared professional development session, small group meals with steering committee members, and separate meetings with parents, educators, and the full steering committee. All this was done, however, without any source of steady funding, as negotiations were still underway with the RSD for the source of the founding principal’s planning-year salary. The group expected this to come from a combination of RSD funding and independent fundraising.

On Thursday, May 28, 2009 the principal selection committee met to make a decision on the two finalist candidates for their founding principal. The group entered into a long discussion that involved tears and long pauses. There was a weight to this meeting that had not existed previously. Previous meetings entailed strategizing, discovering shared values, and were pervaded by a sense of consensus. This meeting was spiked with sense of division. In the end, the votes were split between two candidates, and the steering committee votes split along racial lines.

As the votes were called by hand, the group realized that a division existed in the group that hadn’t been visible before. Within a few seconds of the vote, several group members, from
both the “winning” side and the “losing” side, commented that they were uncomfortable moving forward with the group split this way. It was decided that they would take a few days to think about the choice and to collect additional information on each candidate through personal contacts. The group met again in 4 days and, on the advice from a steering committee member with a background in Quaker education, decided to have the members talk about what they had learned and what they were feeling about the candidates rather than proceeding to a quick vote, that could potentially be divisive. The group, numbering over twenty, sat in a big circle in a member’s house on Dumaine St., and shared new information and personal reflections on the candidates. After about an hour, it became clear that there was much more support for Ms. Patricia Perkins, and those in opposition decided not to stand in the way. Members were drawn to her experience in a high-performing school in the city, her strong sense of curricular knowledge, and an overwhelming number of positive references from colleagues.

This decision making process is a good example of the “commitment to communal processes” emphasized by Furman (2004). Not only did voting and dialogue get used, but group reflections led to an alternative to majority-rules voting that maintained some level of group consensus in the face of persistent differences. In alignment with Shields and Seltzer’s (1997) assumptions about postmodern community, this community of difference negotiated internal conflict and came out altered, but intact, on the other side. Final negotiations with Patricia Perkins took place and she began as the school’s first employee on July 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2009. The group had survived its first crisis, and time would tell how successfully it had managed it. Shortly after being hired, Perkins was interviewed by a community paper and stated,
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My goal is to see a community of students, parents and neighbors. The students will be challenged, held to high expectations. They will see learning as a joy as well as a challenge in their student life. (Himelstein, 2009, p. 19)

Capacity Building

The fundraising team held its first major fundraiser at the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure club on August 19, 2009 (Himelstein, 2009). Up to that point, the group had used small donations (totaling several thousand dollars) from individual members to pay for things. As the group prepared to officially enter its planning year, expected additional costs included teacher and student recruitment, principal school visits, and marketing. The Community Gala at the Zulu club was an opportunity to get the word out about the school, expand its network of supporters, as well as to raise money. As part of the preparation for the event, steering committee members hosted house meetings where strategies for fundraising were discussed and sample solicitation letters were shared. Each member was asked to submit a list of 25 names to the Gala coordinator, from which the master invitation list would be compiled. Those with fundraising experience led the training and first time fundraisers talked about being uncomfortable asking their friends and family for money. Trainers acknowledged their feelings and role-played scenarios in which they asked neighbors to support the school or asked local businesses to support our event.

In addition to a monetary goal of raising at least $20,000 at the event (which it met), they set a goal of 300 donors. This served to encourage members without a lot of wealthy contacts to make significant contribution towards the goals of the event. On one level, the group was raising money to prepare the school’s opening. But on the level of social capital, as
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used by Bordieu (1986), the group was building its capacity to exercise influence within the broader social and political systems it was a part of. While the community already included some individuals with fundraising experience, it was not shared in several important ways. First, those lacking fundraising didn’t necessarily know that their neighbors had those skills. In a city deeply divided by lines of race and social class, this comes as little surprise. Second, the fundraising experience of Morris Jeff community members was not shared prior this effort because there was not imminent reason to do so. Those with fundraising skills used them for their jobs with non-profit organizations or other community entities, but for the most part had never had reason to share their skills with their neighbors. The creation of the Morris Jeff Community School gave them this reason. In this sense, the school was the beneficiary of the fundraising, but so was the community itself, for it possessed expanded skills that it didn’t have before the event. This fundraising example highlights a key element of community leadership: a commitment to not only educating children, but building the skills of their families and neighbors so that self-determination and advocacy are more possible. The broad distribution of skills supports the community by creating a dense support network around the public school. It also benefits the school and its students by having an increasingly skilled, and increasingly organized group of advocates fighting the inevitable battles that a new organization has to fight: from raising funds, to securing facilities, to engaging in public relations activities. As of this writing, the school and its newly minted fundraisers have raised more than $155,000 in grassroots fundraising, from more than 500 individual donors, over $300,000 in private foundation grants, as well as a 3-year, $600,000 Public Charter School Program grant from the US Department of Education. While this is a far cry from the totals amassed by some of the other charter schools in New Orleans, this
money has been raised by public school parents and public school supporters, and every dollar raised signifies an uptick in public faith in the historically unsupported public school system.

The School Today and Challenges Ahead

As of the 2012-2013 school year, the Morris Jeff Community School serves 330 Pre-K through 4th graders and has maintained the notable racial balance it achieved in its first year of operation (Pope, 2010). It has kept a stable staff, while adding teachers as the school grows and new administrative positions are created. As a relatively small school, having enough support staff to meet both the academic and social/emotional needs of students is a challenge.

A second challenge is continuing to negotiate as the School Facilities Master Plan is implemented and the city begins spending the nearly $1.8 billion on school construction money that was allocated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in order to rebuild Katrina-damaged school buildings. While successful organizing among parents and the broader mid-city community earned the school a good location at the recently demolished Fisk-Howard school, less than a mile from the old Morris Jeff building, the new building is only in the design phases and supervising the construction (through Fall 2014), as well as maintaining their temporary school site will remain time-consuming for the short-term.

A final challenge the school faces is leveraging leadership from the low-income families the school serves. The school has a racially and socioeconomically diverse student body, and a racially diverse staff and governing board. But, as was remarked to the group during a 2010 leadership retreat, this was a racially diverse group of adult leaders with “more college degrees in the room than people.” Developing shared leadership across these lines of social class is a goal that the school holds for itself, but has not yet managed to achieve. This is in line with the experiences other community-oriented charter schools with social justice missions, like the Camino Nuevo schools in Los Angeles (Warren, 2005). What makes the problem at Morris Jeff particularly unique is the presence of a wide-range of
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Socioeconomic levels among the parent population. While Warren cites Camino Nuevo for having relatively excellent parental participation, but lackluster parental leadership, they were dealing with an almost uniformly low-income, Latino parent pool. At Morris Jeff, there is excellent parent participation and leadership, but while the participation includes parents of many income levels, parent leadership has tended to come from the more educated and middle class families of all races.

Developing leadership amongst low-income families is an important and challenging goal, so it comes as little surprise that schools have underperformed in this area. Even these rare schools that make parent leadership a stated goal, barriers to this participation are well-documented (Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and include factors on the parents’ side as well as the school’s side of the relationship. Moving from lower-level participation (lunch duty, chaperoning field trips) to higher level leadership (parent-led advocacy, fundraising, participating in curriculum and personnel decisions) presents another level of challenges. It is clear that continued persistent engagement and capacity development with low-income parents are crucial avenues for developing this leadership. Perhaps most important to the school’s future success in leveraging leadership from lower-income parents will be to continue asking, inviting, and expecting leadership from these families.

Morris Jeff Community School as an Example of Community Leadership

This story of the creation of the Morris Jeff Community School gives a picture of a school created by a community. Warren (2005) articulately outlines a typology of relationships between community-based organizations (CBO’s) and public schools: full-service schools, CBO sponsorship of new charter schools, and school-community organizing. All of these approaches involve creating new school-community relationships via pre-existing organizations. The Morris Jeff approach created an organization where there was none. This organization-less emergence took tremendous efforts on the
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part of a few key organizers, but in the end, a group of neighbors achieved some impressive results, and forged a community of difference that persists to meet future challenges. The school is one of the most diverse open-access schools in the city, and the links between school and community are pervasive. It has presented a new model of urban educational reform that offers possibilities other than the charter school incubation model which has been popular in New Orleans. But the opportunities for new school creation in the post-Katrina period as well as the tremendous volunteer efforts of community organizers in establishing a new organization are barriers to replication. A discussion of Community Leadership as a model for socially just educational change seems appropriate.

If leadership for social justice is predicated on altering the ways in which social and material goods are distributed, then this approach of community leadership seems an appropriate model. A community that manages its own institutions is less likely to passively have unjust things done to it. They possess agency and autonomy. Of course, the broader social ills of racism, classism, and all the rest exist within this community, as in all others. Particularly when a community is explicitly diverse, acts of injustice will occur through active and passive means. Maintaining community in the face of such diversity is an arduous process full of reflection, critique, and dialogue. But a community with traditions of dialogue, acceptance of difference, and the patience to work through conflict is well-positioned to do this. Members of a community can build trust through repeated interactions. This trust makes reflection, critique, and dialogue more possible. Bureaucracy cannot perform these functions. Policy cannot perform these functions. Reform models dependent purely on technical fixes or those that divorce the struggles of urban schools from the struggles of urban communities (David & Cuban, 2010; Noguera, 1996; Oakes & Lipton, 2002) do not address the issue of relational trust, even though it is a root cause of many of the challenges of our urban schools: unequal funding, racial segregation, intensely concentrated poverty, and uneven community engagement.
In urban schools, trust is a requisite for school improvement as well as school sustainability (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011). By default, particularly in modern times (Fukuyama, 1999), trust is almost impossible unless there are some shared concerns, time, and geographic space. It is this building of trust across racial and economic lines that might create schools that entwine, rather than separate, individual lives in a community. The existence of the Morris Jeff Community School makes the claim that socially just leadership is leadership that is shared, local, emergent, and built on relational trust in a specific geographic community. Community leadership requires individual leaders to inspire, coordinate, and build capacity. But following Freire (2000) this leadership is not charity to improve the lot of others, but self-serving and self-liberating, as a stronger community improves life for all members. As of this writing two more charter schools have been approved that show significant influence by this community-based approach and the RSD, under the leadership of New Orleans native Patrick Dobard, has convened a working group to explore ways to support community groups in successfully opening charter schools in New Orleans.

In Furman’s definition of the ethic of community, she describes schools governed by a “moral responsibility to engage in communal processes as educators pursue the moral purposes of their work and address the ongoing challenges of daily life and work in schools” (2003, p. 2). Scholars have also pushed this definition further by suggesting that our schools also engage in such processes with their external communities (see Croninger & Finkelstein, 2003; Mawhinney, 2003). Furman advocates that leadership perspectives that support community include: distributed leadership, interpersonal skills, striving to know others, communication, teamwork, dialogue, and the creation of forums where the isolationism that pervades most work in schools (Hargreaves, 1994; Datnow, 2011; Little, 1990) can give way to sharing and support.

**Community Leadership as Social Justice**

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3 See the Plessy School (http://www.plessyschool.org) and Bricolage Academy (http://bricolageacademy.wordpress.com)
Many scholars have outlined the common sense approach that urban school reform needs to take both educational and social actions if educational equity is truly a goal we hold dear (Anyon, 1997; Arriaza, 2004; Noguera, 1996). One promising source for conceptualizations of community leadership in practice is the area of community-organizing approaches to urban school reform (Cortés, 2010; Evans, 2011; Fabricant, 2010; Shirley, 1997). These approaches to reform share common commitments to broad stakeholder participation, the development of political capital via strengthened adult relationships, and the building of trust across racial and socioeconomic lines. Oakes and Lipton (2002) outline three basic elements of community organizing as they might be applicable to social-justice oriented reforms. First, relationships are created so that groups of increasingly connected individuals gain power and exercise leadership through their network. Second, the already forming community engages in dialogue about common problems and preferred solutions in order to generate momentum and focus. Third, the group takes action to move from the present state of affairs towards their preferred future state. Their analysis notes that while more technical school reforms (altered curriculum, new assessments, new schedules) are well-served by the existing reform implementation literature (McLaughlin, 1990), reform efforts that directly address issues of social justice (de-tracking in their case-study, or racial integration in the Morris Jeff case), require broad-based coalitions to be successful. This is logical in that when schools take on broader social forces that exist outside of schools, limiting reform strategies to teachers and students will never be sufficient. Note here that definitions of social justice limited to within-school outcomes are rejected by those exercising community leadership. Improved educational outcomes for students are likely to be a significant stated goal under community leadership, but they must be co-located with broader struggles for equality in the world outside the walls of school (Beabout, 2008).

And while non-school goals must be on the agenda of social justice leaders, the improvement of in-school conditions and educational outcomes must also involve the work of non-school people.
Warren (2005), points out the necessity for equity-focused reforms to recognize that, “addressing the structural inequality in American education requires building a political constituency for urban public schools. Collaborations with broad-based community organizations whose constituents have their children in urban schools can provide an essential piece of the political effort necessary to address these issues...” (p. 135). In a city like New Orleans, where over 30% of children attend nonpublic schools, this goal of constituency building takes on particular significance. With a recent $1.8 billion settlement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to rebuild Katrina-damaged schools, New Orleans will, in a few years will have an entire system of newly constructed or fully renovated public school buildings. But if the majority of the middle-class continues to use the private schools (or Governor Bobby Jindal’s statewide voucher plan), and the public school community remains divided by charter-induced competitive frenzy, will there be enough political support to even maintain these new buildings? Will the current pressures of high-stakes testing close schools that seek to balance academic and community concerns in favor of schools more willing to solely pursue academic goals? These questions do not have easy answers, and answering them is beyond the scope of this chapter. It does become clear, however, that community leadership in urban education, while broad and inclusive, is indeed radical. Current policy arrangements emphasize the role of technocrats as the arbiters of school goals in a process that requires little inclusion and little dialogue. Ernesto Cortés (2010), leader of the national community organizing group the Industrial Areas Foundation, provides an image of what community leadership might look like:

Robert Cordova, principal of Harmony Elementary in the Los Angeles Unified School district, initially saw his work with the congregations and unions of One-LA IAF as a way to deflect the concerns of parents onto different institutions. However, once Cordova began to have conversations with and be mentored by other institutional leaders in his community, he began to see himself not just as a manager of crises, but as an
This idea is echoed by Khalifa (2012) who reports on principals who, through high community visibility and advocacy for community issues, earned the trust of parents and raised achievement for at-risk youth. At its heart, social justice as community leadership in public schools rests on the simple premise that those who are most impacted by our public institutions should have a say in how they are constructed and how they function (Sarason, 1995). A key to successfully implementing community organizing strategies is balancing the specialized knowledge of professional educators with a commitment to community-based decision making.

**Expertise and Expertism**

The Morris Jeff case emphasizes a definition of leadership for social justice that includes both academic excellence for students as well as strengthening the political and social capital of parents and community members. Morris Jeff was created utilizing a community-organizing approach (Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2005) and continues its social justice work by retaining a volunteer governing board and principal leadership dedicated to building capacity for community leadership. Community leadership relies on partnerships so that educational offerings are a product of dialogue between professional educators and parents and neighbors. To understand community leadership is really to understand the differences between Expert Leadership and Expertism.

**Expert Leadership**

Expert school leadership (Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins, 1992), has been defined as leadership that a) manages the school so that basic functions are carried out despite individuals joining and leaving, and b) leads organizational change that leads to school improvement. Expert leaders both influence individuals and manage institutions— they both lead and manage
Accepted for 2013 publication in the International Handbook on Social (In)Justices and Educational Leadership to be published by Springer (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Expert leadership leads to schools in which, in Fullan’s almost poetic simplicity, “more good things happen; fewer bad things happen” (2001a, p. 4). While critics might argue that Fullan’s avoidance of the specification of the goals of education leaves the puzzle undone, this generality is viewed here as recognition that the outcomes of expert leadership appear on multiple hierarchical levels (students-teachers-parents-community) and appropriately vary by community (Beabout, 2008). Just as the appropriate educational goals for students remain contested terrain (Kozol, 1967; Willis, 1977; McLaren, 1999), the specific goals of successful leadership vary by context as well. Nonetheless, expert leaders share some broad sets of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable their schools to reach shared goals. The Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) has published its list of educational leadership standards that include: 1) building and sustaining a vision, 2) establishing a positive school culture, 3) efficient management, 4) communicating with the public, 5) ethical behavior, and 6) awareness of the larger social context. While mastery of all of these standards may not be universal, they at least represent some consensus of the minimum capabilities of educational leaders as they enter the field.

As someone who works to develop leadership skills in aspiring educational leaders, I am acutely aware of the challenges of developing quality leadership. Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1992), in their writing on problem-solving practices of expert principals note that the existence of many swampy problems makes the teaching of explicit skills or procedures only partially effective. To Leithwood and his colleagues, “problems were considered swampy [challenging] when they involved many people, especially including people outside the school whose responses could not be controlled in any systematic way” (p. 53). They also denote the
importance of a principal’s prior experience in determining the difficulty of problems faced in schools. These findings underscore two aspects of leadership: 1) the importance of experience in making difficult problems easier to solve, and 2) interactions with the school’s external environment are a major source of difficult problems for principals. When school leaders are new to the profession and new to their community, swampy problems can consume them. Leithwood et. al. (1992) also note that expert school leaders have a detailed vision of an educated student that “was consistent with the values of the larger public served by the school” (p. 59). Expert school leaders that they studied had goals that centered on what students would be or become, were flexible in their thinking if presented with compelling evidence, and sought goals consistent with the larger school community. Certainly, the final two of these qualities require experience and interaction and deep knowledge of with the school community.

Expertism

Contrasting with this idea of expert leadership is the idea of expertism, which can be defined as:

the sense that we possess [as experts] a wealth of knowledge that we need to bring to our communities. It is this method in which power is bestowed upon experts and reserved from those who posses unrecognized wealths of indigenous knowledge (Carr-Chellman, 2006, p. 7) [italics added]

Expertism has been described powerfully as the white-man’s burden and as the colonizing gaze. At its heart is a belief that certain individuals or groups ought to, by right, have more power in
the design and maintenance of societal functions than others because of certain characteristics they possess: education, wealth, political connections, etc. The concept emerges from the historical power differences that have left human history scared by (and perhaps uniquely identified by) slavery, colonization, and social inequity of multiple forms. Expertism pathologizes the historical tendency of the powerful to design social arrangements, institutions, and programs that will benefit themselves, but harm others. Even when projects have an explicit intent to foster social justice and equity, expertism can be identified when these activities are done with an attempt to make things better “for” the impacted people, rather than “with” the impacted people.

To be clear, pathologizing the dominant form in which even most social-justice oriented work is conducted is nothing short of revolutionary. Freire (2000) explains the role of leadership for social justice work in clear terms:

Domination, by its very nature, requires only a dominant pole and a dominated pole in antithetical contradiction; revolutionary liberation, which attempts to resolve this contradiction, implies the existence not only of these poles but also of a leadership group which emerges during this attempt. The leadership group either identifies itself with the oppressed state of the people, or it is not revolutionary. To simply think about the people, as the dominators do, without any self-giving in that thought, to fail to think with the people, is a sure way to cease being revolutionary leaders. (p. 132)

Freire was not an advocate of incremental reductions in social inequity by the provision of slightly better jobs, housing, education, and medical care to the poor. The goal was not an
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expanded welfare state, but a society in which all people are able to become “more fully human” and are not objectified as units of labor or units of consumption by the system of governance. Freire would agree with Willis (1977) that social inequity is remedied not by providing the poor with the external trappings of wealth (diplomas, fancy houses, or cars), but by groups of individuals altering the way in which they see each other. In this sense, social justice is first and foremost a result changed perceptions, and less a description of the conditions in which some people enjoy more resources (distributive justice) and better protections than others (procedural justice) (Fine, Bloom, and Chajet, 2010). Without re-tooling how we perceive each other, inequality persists unabated. The Morris Jeff case, if nothing else, presents an opportunity for hundreds of diverse families to re-tool their perceptions of their neighbors via their shared engagement with a public school. These opportunities are in short supply in increasingly segregated communities in which many Americans live (Orfield, 2002).

**Expertise without expertism**

And so how is one to mold these conceptual understandings of social justice into practical advice for educational leaders concerned with social justice? Viewing educational leadership as an avenue for social justice work requires high levels of expertise. Such leaders must possess excellent skills in teacher hiring and development, curriculum development, student assessment, public relations, political advocacy, listening to diverse perspectives, facilities management, fiscal management, group facilitation, and building commitment to a shared vision. One might certainly call a leader with all of these skills and expert- and they might be right. But, as a moral enterprises (Starratt, 1994), education and educational leadership for social justice require *expertise without expertism*. That is, it requires the skills and
dispositions to lead a community of learners and the humility that social justice work is done with the communities we serve, not for the communities we serve. As Freire (2000) notes in his discussion of revolutionary leaders,

Revolutionary leaders... cannot believe in the myth of the ignorance of the people. They do not have the right to doubt for a single moment that it is only a myth. They cannot believe that they, and only they, know anything- for this means to doubt the people. Although they may legitimately recognize themselves as having, due to their revolutionary consciousness, a level of revolutionary knowledge different from the level of empirical knowledge held by the people, they cannot impose themselves and their knowledge on the people. They cannot sloganize the people, they must enter into dialogue with them... (p. 134)

The formidable skills of the expert leader must be mobilized in a way that connects the school to the community in dialogue, but never in monologue. Social justice leaders invest in others, share leadership both inside and outside of the school building, and stand with the community even when this puts them at odds with powerful foes (Beabout, 2008). Expertism would advocate the design of idealized educational plans (lessons, schools, systems) by those with the most training and the greatest professional accomplishments. Here, I still advocate for the best-trained and most accomplished educational leaders but let them take a seat at the table (not the podium) alongside parents, students, the business community, elected officials, clergy, and other constituent groups to collectively author plans for the schools they will direct. Leaders exercising influence in this way are developing Community Leadership in which community
engagement, shared leadership, and building community social capital are seen as fundamental, rather than tangential, to the work of schools. It is this final task of exercising community leadership in a current political context that does almost everything to prevent it that I will turn to next.

Four Cantankerous Contradictions

School reform policy in the USA, currently supported by both major political parties, is that student academic achievement is the sole metric of school success, that schools in and of themselves are the vehicle for producing such achievement, and that academic success must be achieved for all students with no excuses or a school should be closed down and reconstituted with new faculty and leadership. These ideas have been operationalized in much of the market-based approach to educational change and the burgeoning charter school movement (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010; Wells & Scott, 2001). These beliefs are in direct opposition to the communal process advocated for by Furman and Shields (2003) and the emphasis on engaging with the broader community and building external constituencies that are key elements of the community leadership as demonstrated by the Morris Jeff case. Below, I explore this dissonance in a series of cantankerous contradictions. I use the word *cantankerous* because these contradictions are not simply irreconcilable ideas, like an erroneous mathematical calculation, soon to be erased from a blackboard. They are noisy and disruptive contradictions that should alter the ways in which we view leadership in schools and animate our actions itowards social justice. They should mold our understandings of leadership for social justice to include some agency on the part of a school’s community, regardless of income, skin color, or educational attainment.

*Cantankerous Contradiction #1: Heroic vs. democractic leadership*

Community Leadership is shared and democratic as opposed to heroic andcharismatic. Yet, this is exactly the mode many charter school leaders in New Orleans have been forced into. Under today’s
market-based policies, principals are responsible for delivering improved test scores to the public in exchange for having authority for nearly all of the functions pertaining to opening and running a school.

In New Orleans, they often select their own board, write their charter application to the state, take the lead in defending that document to the state, sell the school to potential funders, and recruit staff, families, and students. Regardless of the leadership philosophies of the individuals placed in these roles, any notion of shared or democratic leadership is enacted only after hundreds of decisions and thousands of hours had been spent by the principal working essentially alone. The Morris Jeff case depicts a charter school started by a community. This community selected its own curriculum, fought for its own building, hired a principal who was comfortable with significant community leadership, and raised its own funds.

*Cantankerous Contradiction #2: Market competition vs. system-wide improvement*

While the ethic of community encourages leaders to be relational in a world characterized by antagonistic us-them relationships, much of the leadership embedded in today’s market-based reform policies focuses on competition leading to a higher place on the test-score/league tables that are published following state testing each year. Leaders in such an environment are incentivized to push-out troubled students, to keep organizational knowledge private, to poach teachers from neighboring schools, and to design programs that improve their school’s scores at any cost (see Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008). Under the hyper-competitive conditions fostered by modern reform policies, educational leaders are rewarded for having higher scores than the school down the street. This creates a disincentive for relationships between schools rather than cooperative ones. This flies in the face of much recent thought on educational change emphasizing the use of networks of schools (or educators) to improve system-wide performance (Daly, 2010; Hopkins, 2007).

*Cantankerous Contradiction #3 State-control vs. local control of educational goals*
Leadership informed by the ethic of community supports the co-construction of purposes and actions of schools. This inevitably requires dialogue among the diverse groups of parents, community members, and educators that make up the environment of a school. Paradoxically, while the charter movement in the USA has been billed as an increase in autonomy for educational leaders (which it is), other groups (parents/community) often have less, not more, input into setting the agenda for educational means and ends. Charter schools are run by appointed boards, not elected ones. They are authorized by states or universities or school districts, with the express goal of improving test scores. School principals are hired by these boards for their commitment to raising academic achievement levels. In Louisiana, charter schools are renewed after three years and five years of operation. These decisions are based primarily on student testing and fiscal performance, with attendance and graduation rates also being factored in. While charter applications include a section on school-specific goals, they are significantly less important, as the state doesn’t track or enforce performance on these goals. In essence, the “local control” lauded by school choice reformers today applies only to educational means but not ends- as these have been increasingly fixed by the state testing policies.

*Cantankerous Contradiction #4: Developing leaders vs. novice teacher-churn*

Leadership in the practice of community leadership is distributed- and its goal is developing leadership in others (Fullan, 2001a). But the development of distributed and shared leadership requires intentional action, resources, and existing leaders with the confidence and skill to identify leadership talent and develop it. While thin staffing arrangements often require classroom teachers to take on administrative tasks during the start-up phase of a charter school, I differentiate between having teachers help out with administrative tasks and leadership development which is planned, intentional, and includes supervision and coaching from more-able leaders. Multiple factors make the development of teacher leadership challenging in their “no excuses” reform environment. Thin budgets at start-up negatively impact staff development time and expenses. The pressures of state accountability and the hyper-racial
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segregation of many charter schools (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley & Wang, 2011) mean that meeting testing targets requires an all-out assault- leaving little in the way of resources for faculty development. Media reports from post-Katrina New Orleans indicate the high level of charter school teacher burnout (Carr, 2010) and the constant churn of inexperienced teachers working with our neediest students (Carr, 2009). These pressures, of course, are certainly not unique to either charter schools or Louisiana (Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Community leadership suggests that while immediate academic improvements are certainly an important leadership goal, leaders must also set up sustainable investments professional educators to establish true learning gains as well as to insulate schools from the shifting priorities of politically-driven education reform.

Implications for theory and Practice

Public schools are undoubtedly in an age of increased accountability. The interesting piece of this accountability, however, is that it is the state that the main actor here. Instead of the American tradition of locally-elected school boards and open meetings laws as the primary mode of accountability, states are now telling local communities, “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of this. I’ll let you know which of your schools are good and which are not.” Increasingly, states are also prescribing specific actions (closure, charterization, turnaround) for the schools they deem unworthy. This sets up educational accountability as an action done by politically powerful on the politically marginalized. In communities like New Orleans, the level of community-based accountability is almost zero. But when community leadership exists in the school, local accountability is invigorated. Educational goals that are important locally can be safely pursued. By capitalizing on geographic proximity, communities (rather than bureaucrats) can provide more responsive, intelligent, and sustainable accountability than the state can. By advocating for particular curricular or pedagogical changes, they can pre-empt the rather heavy-handed rank-and-reconstitute policies of most states which causes disruption with no guarantee
of improvement (Beabout, 2012). Of course, if this community-leadership is to be wise leadership, particularly in our poorest communities, we need to develop adult leadership in places where it is not often fostered. This is what makes the community organizing approach to school reform a powerful one. It provides for the development of shared leadership at the local level so that communities get inside and participate in the management, operation, and indeed, the defense, of their children’s schools.

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Appendix A- Job Advertisement for Morris Jeff Community School’s Founding Principal

FOUNDING PRINCIPAL, MORRIS JEFF COMMUNITY SCHOOL (ELEMENTARY)

Position: Founding Principal  
School: Morris Jeff Community School (Elementary)  
Salary: Competitive salary and benefits package

Background

The Morris Jeff School Steering Committee seeks a Founding Principal to help build and lead what will become one of the most innovative and successful public elementary schools in the country.

The new Morris Jeff Community School will open as an “autonomous public school”, officially under the Recovery School District, but with full authority over budgeting, hiring of staff and curriculum devolved to the Morris Jeff Community Board and the school leadership team. Morris Jeff Community School will open first as an incubator school with 60 to 80 early elementary students (pre-K through 1st grade), growing over the next few years into a full-scale elementary school.

The school will be in a temporary location in the Mid City area of New Orleans for three years, before moving to a new $19 million, custom-built facility.

The Principal will work with a Community Board with extensive contacts throughout New Orleans to build a top-flight elementary school from the ground up. This will involve engaging with parents’ and community’s vision for the school, recruiting and mentoring top-quality teachers and other staff, budgeting, and working in an ongoing way with Board, staff and community to develop the school’s pedagogic philosophy and curriculum.

The school has the approval to open in the Fall of 2009, if a top-rate school leadership team and founding staff are identified in time. Otherwise, the school will open in the Fall of 2010.

Experience, Background & Qualifications

The successful candidate will have expertise and leadership experience in an elementary setting, familiarity with the developmental, behavioral, social, and academic needs of students in the early childhood years, and a concrete record of success. The candidate should have strong organizational skills, and be able to create an organizational culture that engages and inspires teachers, parents, students and community members in a rigorous dedication to teaching and learning. The candidate should be a creative and flexible thinker, with a strong focus on identifying and cultivating teachers of the highest quality. Experience teaching at-risk students in an urban school district is important.

We are looking for a school leader with the vision to push beyond the traditional structure and narrow expectations that too often limit the potential of public education.