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Education and the Social Construction of Virtue

It is time to face the inescapable conclusion. We are unable to reform American education. Even with all the changes in the past fifteen years, this remains true. These changes probably *have* led to some improvements—not always seen (in hindsight) to have been worth the costs. Indeed, historians of education (Kent 1987; Cuban 1988; Tyack, Lowe, and Hansot 1980) recount the recycling of reform in this century, including the waves of our current reform era. Cuban sees "the inevitable return of school reforms" (1990: 3) as due not to the failings of schools or of reform initiatives but to "conflicts over values" (7). He argues that reform recycles because value shifts in the larger society lead the schools to accommodate; to adjust rather than fundamentally change. This is because the implementation of reforms are limited by the same value conflicts that stimulate reform. Kent sees the issues of the 1980s (the concerns for standards and accountability) as recycling the issues of the 1950s because "the familiar demand pattern for reform, namely a short burst of intense action followed by longer periods of inaction and neglect" (1987: 148), is unable to resolve issues of fundamental values. The recycling pattern helps perpetuate the value conflict by periodically recreating "crises" in education. Whereas Cuban (1988) sees the fundamental value conflict as being excellence versus equity, we will argue that these are modern manifestations of more deep-seated ideas, "oratorical" and "philosophical" (Kimball 1986), about education in our culture.

The last one hundred years shows a lineage to our recycling of reform. The Committee of Ten report in 1893 (NEA), the reforms of the late 1950s, and the reforms of the 1980s express an oratorical conception of excellence. The "Cardinal Principles" in 1918 (Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education), progressivism in the 1920s through the 1940s, and new curricula and programs of the 1960s and 1970s express the philosophical conception of equity. These sets of reforms are not pure in their adherence to any single value. The value conflict is so ingrained in our society that any reform contains elements of both values. Because each reform value contains elements of its

contrary, initiating reform around one sows the seeds of its own capitulation to the other.

All of this demonstrates that we are conservative about education in that we conserve the existence of an essential value conflict. These values and their opposition are reified, taken-for-granted assumptions that unconsciously shape how we think and act regarding education, and we have thus become pawns of this value conflict. We play out one idea then the other—viewing each reform as unique and new, uncognizant of their lineage, legacy, and historical pairing. Unknowingly we recreate the value conflict in each generation, in each reform, in each educational crisis. We do not reform education, we only recycle our educational reforms.

There have been two waves to the 1980s reform efforts (Zeichner 1991) that reveal how the expression of one value about education is soon tempered by another. Each wave of reform is an artifact revealing our value conflict. *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983) prompted a series of top-down initiatives that are now looking less promising than they did in the early 1980s. *A Nation At Risk* justified a call for excellence by declaring that education had failed the nation, undercutting our economic competitiveness by "an unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" (1). The problem was portrayed as a retreat from standards concerning content, expectations, time, teaching, and leadership. Eight solutions were offered: (1) an increase in the number of courses required for graduation, (2) more rigorous standards and higher expectations for students, (3) more time devoted to instruction in the basic coursework, (4) higher standards for entering teaching, (5) rigorous evaluation of existing teachers, (6) a career ladder for teachers, (7) educational leadership that develops school, and (8) community support and state and local responsibility for implementing the proposed reforms. In this we see the value of excellence rhetorically defined as a return to the standards of the past, recreating a past educational and economic glory for the United States.

The Carnegie report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-First Century* (1986), signaled a partial swing of the pendulum away from excellence by warning that the early reforms have undercut *the* fundamental requirement of equitable education—a teacher's ability to adapt instruction to the specific needs of the student. The proposal shows that this was only a partial step away from *A Nation at Risk*, balancing a call for rigorous national standards for teaching and teacher preparation with restructuring schools to allow for more teacher autonomy in deciding how to teach. Even this balance is one-sided. Teacher autonomy concerned only site-level autonomy, primarily the means of instruction. They were still accountable for student achievement. Just as the American

public readily agreed with *A Nation at Risk*, it just as quickly gave its assent to *A Nation Prepared*. While the reforms of the 1980s led to increased centralization and standardization, the reforms of the 1990s are now beginning the swing to decentralization or "restructuring" of education (once again), supposedly to allow education to be more responsive to ways in which children actually learn.

How all of this will eventually sort out remains to be seen, but we believe it is safe to project that both kinds of reform will continue for the forseeable future. They will continue to vie for the public's attention and support, will continue to alternate between these seemingly contradictory logics, not because the public is duplicitous, uninformed, or comprised only of blind followers of educational leaders; nor even because the reforms themselves are inherently inadequate or technically deficient on either side. Reform will recycle for two reasons, the first and foremost being that the American mind is "closed." Bloom (1987) has argued that the American mind is closed because we have failed to inculcate Western values in our youth. For us, the American mind is closed because Western culture has been inculcated quite effectively into the American mind—so effectively, in fact, that most Americans simply play out their culture unthinkingly. We are unknowingly pawns of our culture and its most prevalent beliefs about education.

Cuban's (1988) notion of ingrained value conflict highlights a second reason why we are unable to reform schools. Educational reforms are also framed in the language of technical rationality (Collins 1982; Mannheim 1936). To reform schools, we restructure the school organization, design curricula, train teachers, set standards, and monitor compliance. However, education ultimately is not about these things, as important as they are. Reform recycles because we repeatedly misspecify the essential nature of education in this way. Schooling is fundamentally a moral, not a technical, enterprise. Schools, as social institutions, express our values more than achieve goals. Reforms based in instrumental rationality ignore both the value conflict and its essential message that schools are less about instructing facts and more about constructing morality. Until we understand what this means, reform itself will be a captive of our fundamental value conflict. Therefore, as a second reason, reform recycles because we repeatedly misspecify the essential nature of education. We repeat: Schooling is fundamentally a moral, not a technical, enterprise.

The Ideas That Bind and Blind

What Cuban terms values of excellence and equity have a long history in Western society. Indeed, Kimball's (1986) ambitious history of

the idea of liberal education documents the ubiquity of the value conflict we have been discussing. Before we discuss his work in more detail, we will translate the key terms we have been using for the value conflict into those used by Kimball. "Excellence" is a modern term for the oratorical idea, and "equity" for the philosophical idea. Each idea is fundamentally moral, as all ideas are (MacIntyre 1981). In this case, each idea explicitly offers a moral conceptions of the good and true.

Kimball characterizes the oratorical idea as follows:

(1) Training citizen-orators to lead society (2) requires identifying true virtue (3) the commitment to which (4) will elevate the student and (5) the source for which is great texts, whose authority lies in (6) the dogmatic premise that they relate the true virtues, (7) which are embraced for their own sake. (1986: 228)

For the orators, the source of virtue and morality is in the distant past, and we must strive to recapture it so that we may approach the ideal of a virtuous life.

Kimball defines the philosophical idea in noticeably different terms: (1) Epistemological skepticism underlies (2) the free and (3) intellectual search for truth, which is forever elusive, and so all possible views must be (4) tolerated and given (5) equal hearing (6) with the final decision left to each individual, (7) who pursues truth for its own sake. (228)

For the philosophers, the good and true are located in the future. This requires values of tolerance, individualism, and freedom.

Kimball argues that these ideas are inextricably linked since the time of ancient Greece and that their opposition has led to successive attempts to accommodate each other. Thus, rarely do we see either idea in a "pure" form. Yet these ideas, in our culture, are taken for granted. We take them as assumptions that structure our actions, and are usually not aware of them or their effects on our actions. Moreover, their opposition is also assumed and implicit. These ideas and their opposition are reified in our culture. They blind us to alternatives and bind us in the recycling of educational reform.

It is difficult to become aware of deep-seated moral assumptions. A first step is to make the implicit explicit. Yet this does not lead us to challenge such ideas. We only become aware of what we value. Bowers (1984) argues that one way to problematize ideas is to focus on their history and human authorship, and the text of Kimball's book is devoted

largely to chronicling the human authorship and social conditions affecting the relative popularity of each idea.

Kimball locates the founding of the oratorical idea in ancient Greece. Isocrates, a famous rhetorician, wished to wed the Sophists' emphasis on rhetoric and its expression with a concern for values drawn uncritically from the traditional virtues associated with the Homeric heroes. Isocrates was highly skeptical of Socrates' and Plato's dialectical search for the truth, seeing endless speculation as wasteful. For Isocrates, the goal of education was better defined: as Kimball quotes, "to speak well and think right" (1986: 18). The Isocrates–Plato opposition was the first known instance of the opposition of these moral ideas. The concern was how to understand what *was* truth and goodness. Isocrates turned toward tradition and the eloquent expression of the wisdom to be found in rhetorical argument, while Plato located truth and goodness in the future, to be discovered only as the result of diligent search. Each mode of thought spawned disciples and sponsors, who eventually created firm institutional bases and intellectual pedigrees for each of these ideas about education.

Generally speaking, Isocrates was more successful than Plato in promoting his agenda in their time. The oratorical idea found favor with the elites for both education and public life, and in turn was embraced by the Roman Empire's educational thinkers: Varro, Cicero, and Quintilian. While the oratorical idea was dominant, the philosophical approach, owing perhaps to the immense prestige of Plato and Socrates, was now equally well ensconced in educational thought. This led the Roman thinkers (and their successors) to develop arguments that subsumed the philosophical idea under the oratorical, ironically institutionalizing both ideas. As Kimball notes, "Manifest in this lineage is the orators' perpetual conflict with the philosophers" (33). In the latter years of the Roman Empire, it would seem that educational theory became inextricably linked to two important political struggles. There was the constant threat of the dissolution of the empire coupled with the ethnocentric assumption of Roman cultural supremacy. This somewhat paradoxical combination meant that the Romans were "more sympathetic toward the oratorical tradition with its concern for law, order, noble virtue, and public expression" (Kimball 1986: 32). Second was the Christian conversion of the empire. Christians had originally opposed the ideas of the Roman orators, and were ultimately charged with undermining classical culture. After some four centuries of persecution under the logic of Roman orators, Christians came to consider the modes of classical study and its dominant oratorical idea as necessary for the study of Christian theology. As Christians ascended to high offices in the

Roman Empire, Augustine legitimated the oratorical idea to justify the reliance on teaching of Scripture for all Romans.

This subsuming of the orator-philosopher educational argument into medieval Christian casuistry all but silenced the debate, as the empire slowly faded away, and with it any serious interest in classical education. What did survive was largely in Christian monasteries. Charlemagne began an educational revival when he brought Alcuin (A.D. 730–804) from England to be master of his palace school. Alcuin argued persuasively for education based on the ideas of Cicero, thereby successfully reviving the dominance of the oratorical over the philosophical idea. The final breakup of empire by the ninth century was followed in the eleventh century by an economic revival, paralleling a revival of interest in education and an expansion of cathedral and parish schools. This set the stage (along with the rediscovery of the works of Aristotle and the Greeks) for a revival of the interest in the philosophical idea among those scholastics who employed the dialectical method to their subject matter. Kimball notes, "The archetypal scholastic was Abelard" (1079–1144) (57). Abelard reversed the hierarchy of ideas about education that Cicero established, subordinating rhetoric to logic. The orator-philosopher debate was fully and heatedly engaged throughout the twelfth century, leading to the battle between the clerics and scholastics in the thirteenth century and the supremacy of the philosophical idea in the fourteenth century.

Kimball argues that the meaning of the Renaissance is best understood here as a successful revival of the oratorical idea. Just as the rediscovery of Aristotle boosted the prestige of the philosophical idea in the twelfth century, the rediscovery of Quintilian and Cicero fueled a similar revival of the oratorical idea on the part of Renaissance humanists. Kimball portrays the influential Erasmus (1469–1536) as a powerful orator who broke with other Renaissance humanists when he argued that oratorical studies need not be reserved for the elite. We will see this split revisited in the differences between modern orators Allan Bloom and Mortimer Adler. The Protestant Reformation provided a further boost to the oratorical idea with a scathing criticism of scholasticism. Martin Luther advocated the reform of education to include the oratorical arts, especially grammar and rhetoric. The Catholic Church, attempting to regain its status in the face of the Protestant onslaught, also expanded its seminaries, which embraced an oratorical curriculum. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the battle between the philosophical idea and the oratorical idea continued, with the oratorical idea being dominant.

The origins of American education were oratorically dominated as well. The first universities—Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale—had

largely oratorical curricula, and so did the schools, existing primarily to groom students properly for university study. The gentlemanly ideal soon crossed the sea to America, helping further to justify an oratorical curriculum, the notion that merit and moral worth were connected to education. Education came to be defined as both worthy in itself and capable of transferring that worth to the person so educated.

Kimball sees, in the rise of experimental science and the Enlightenment, a resurgence of the philosophical idea. Emerging from the Renaissance and the empirical research of Copernicus (1473–1543), Kepler (1571–1630), and Galileo (1564–1642), the new science and new philosophy revived Socratic criticism and mathematical sciences. John Locke (1632–1704), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), René Descartes (1596–1650), David Hume (1711–1776), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) all reemphasized the philosophical idea's endless "search for truth," its critical tradition of thought, now coupled with startling new ideas about freedom and egalitarianism. True, most of these thinkers worked outside the established (and more oratorical) educational institutions of their day, but their thought did lead to a degrading or rhetoric in eighteenth-century England to simply the proper form and style of expression. The European universities were largely in decline by then, but later managed to join with established religious orders to resist the inclusion of the new sciences in their curricula.

In colonial America, the major activity involving the new philosophy and science was also taking place well outside established institutions. Championed by Benjamin Franklin (and others), the American Philosophical Society was organized independent of educational organizations. The American Revolution imbued the new United States with Enlightenment thought, including associating liberty, equality, and progress with learning; science and experimentation; and promoting an abiding suspicion of authority and tradition. Yet with all this, most schools and universities experienced little change until after the War of 1812. In the 1820s and 1830s, German universities, with their attitude of free inquiry, were increasingly influential to Americans, and this led to some curricular change, including what we would now call tracking of students, departmentalization of faculty, some student choice in course selection, instruction in modern languages, and teaching via lectures. It is more accurate, however, to understand this as a continuation of the struggle between the two ideas. Indeed, as the new sciences were added to requirements for admission to universities, the standards for classical studies were simultaneously being raised, a pattern that has been repeated numerous times in American educational history, each time noticeably increasing the burden on secondary schools to better prepare students for higher education.

In any case, it is clear that the firm embodiment of the philosophical idea in science was gaining status and that the oratorical idea was being forced to accommodate to its new—lower—status, an accommodation that resulted in the ingenious argument that classical studies were ideal for "training" the intellect. This was clearly a step away from the previous oratorical assertion that classical studies created virtuous gentlemen. Another accommodation was for classical studies to embrace an increasing specialization of research and study, which, in the end, both protected classical studies from the intrusion of the philosophical idea and enabled the oratorical idea to share in some of the new status accorded to the sciences. In any case, it was not until after the end of the Civil War, the passing of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 (which was seen as a move against the oratorical curriculum), and the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859 that the philosophical idea actually gained a stronghold in American education. American pragmatism and progressivism soon carried the philosophical idea to new heights, expanding the applicability of the term "science" to a wide range of disciplines, including education, and thereby encouraging increased disciplinary specialization and elective coursework.

Pragmatism, as developed by George Herbert Mead, Charles S. Peirce, and William James, reframed Darwin's notion of natural selection to include the human animal's ability to shape the environment, thus undercutting the misuse of Darwinism by elites to justify the often oppressive status quo. John Dewey fashioned this radical notion into educational progressivism "oriented against affirming the certitide of any absolute standards and values and toward appreciation of the individuality of each human being and reliance on a free experimental approach to every new situation encountered in life" (Kimball 1986: 169). Politically linked with Populism early in this century, Progressivism evolved into a broad movement of critique and educational reform. Arrayed against this unexpected development were the Neohumanists, such as Alexander Meiklejohn, who argued with renewed vigor for a course of study based on the so-called Great Books, a strategy he justified as helping to sharpen mental discipline and the critical processes. Meiklejohn further pled for universal education based on the idea that, in a democracy, all must have the *same* education, much as Adler and Hirsch now argue. Indeed, it is telling to note that Adler (with Robert Hutchins) led a Great Books course of study at the University of Chicago that closely followed Mieklejohn's basic plan. According to Hutchins, "Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. The truth is everywhere the same. Hence education should be everywhere the same" (quoted in Kimball 1986: 179).

After World War I, the conflict between the two ideas seemed to be promoting too much scholarly disunity, and various efforts were made to force an accommodation. This time it was the philosophical idea that accommodated; and, as Kimball argues, the accommodation was really a covert commitment to elitism, achieved by establishing a hierarchy of knowledge in which the pursuit of scientific knowledge was seen as the highest calling—which in turn became linked to graduate study, meritocratic criteria for selection to advanced courses, and highly competitive examinations. Progressivism adopted this accommodation rather freely into constant calls for vocational education and other forms of student tracking and testing.

World War II led to an enormous emphasis on technical training, and those few orators who objected to such education were often unfairly critiqued as not being clearly in support of the cause. In any event, the war ended with the battle still engaged over which idea would dominate American education. Kimball does not develop a detailed postwar history of this debate, but argues that the conflict has continued unabated. Kimball ends his book by saying that "the Ciceronian and Socratic conceptions of liberal education continue to stand in tension, as they have since antiquity, like two foci of an ellipse whose locus includes the varying approaches to liberal education of any particular time" (241).

To continue Kimball's analogy of an ellipse, we can see that two recent reform foci, excellence and equity, are, respectively, the oratorical and philosophical ideas. The term "excellence" signals an emphasis on reclaiming past, but now eroded, standards. Isocrates and Cicero would see their ideas in this. The term "equity" signals tolerance and the democratic values associated with the search for truth and virtue. Individuals should be free and unhampered in the search for elusive truths. Socrates and Abelard would recognize equity as akin to their ideas. The tensions between excellence and equity are in large part the tensions between the ideas from antiquity.

Understanding that our modern reforms are not new ideas but manifestations of ideas that have been in opposition for centuries also allows us to conclude that the failures to reform education are not due simply to failures of will, inadequate resources, and the recalcitrance of educators or educational organizations. Rather, our reforms recycle because of the tacit assumptions that undergird them, including the assumptions that these ideas are the central ideas about education and that they are opposed to each other. Taking these two assumptions for granted limits the possibilities for reform and makes us blind to alternatives that may exist in our society. We cannot recognize and value alternatives, because they violate our assumptions about what is and ought to be.

Possibilities

We have painted a somber portrait of the current state of education, but there are possibilities for escaping the reified ideas that bind us to a recycling of the history of educational reform. The possibilities lie in understanding these ideas and revealing their human authorship, social bases, and implications, as we have started to do in this chapter (Bowers 1984). Yet this in itself is not enough. Critique problematizes and debunks ideas, but it does not replace them. All too often, critique creates a void, and the ensuing struggle to fill that void leads to reproducing the very ideas critiqued, for these ideas have powerful backers and considerable cultural force, and, in the absence of any other ideas, are the "options" at our disposal. Critique must be coupled with construction so that, instead of filling the void with what we are given, we create alternatives. In the presence of powerful reified ideas, simply asserting a theoretical alternative will not suffice. Alternative ideas in this sense tend to end up as "occulted knowledge" (Southworth 1988) and shunted aside as esoteric sideshow freaks. A better prospect is to look to everyday life and try to discern what people do that we normally do not see because we are blinded by reified ideas. In everyday life, there are countless possibilities for cultural construction—the problem is to recognize them.

The critique of ideas and the search for alternative possibilities are both projects in the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1967). This perspective sees knowledge as constructed through human actions, and reveals the processes by which ideas become legitimated as knowledge. Knowledge is taken to be not a proven body of fact, as in positivistic disciplines, but a set of ideas that become socially regarded as facts. At any point in history there are myriad ideas, many of which fail to become legitimated as knowledge. Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue that, while most early treatises in the sociology of knowledge were concerned with the history of thought, there are also knowledges present in everyday life that need investigation. They write expansively: "The sociology of knowledge must concern itself with everything that passes for 'knowledge' in society" (14–15). In their efforts to promote this expansive view, they even argue that "commonsense 'knowledge' rather than 'ideas' must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge" (15). While we will address both intellectual ideas and commonsense knowledge in this book, it is important to understand why Berger and Luckmann are emphasizing the latter. They are doing so because it is the commonsense knowledge that people take to be reality in their everyday lives. It becomes taken for granted. The practical program that Berger

and Luckmann are proposing is to allow everyday people to understand how their lives are shaped by such assumptions so that "a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street" (3).

We will take Berger and Luckmann's practical program for the sociology of knowledge a step further. In doing so, we will reclaim both sociologies of knowledge—the intellectual and the everyday. We will explore the intellectual ideas that are reified in our debates over educational reform. We will do this because these ideas are "realities" for theorists and policymakers. Moreover, these ideas, we argue, are so imbued in our culture that everyday people use them rhetorically at least to comment and complain about schools. These ideas are so powerful that they blind us to the alternative possibilities that we construct in our everyday lives. We will continue to be pawns of them until we dereify them.

Habermas (1971) proposes that one way to dereify ideas is to engage in a critique of ideology. This, he argues, can take place in an ideal speech situation. Free and uncoerced dialogue about our lives and the forces that dominate us can reveal the ideas that we take for granted, making them subjects for critique. Bowers (1984) argues that in everyday life we experience cultural transitions that give us moments of liminality when we experience being "betwixt and between" (van Gennep 1975: 21) established ways of thinking and doing. In these moments, we recognize our taken-for-granted's. As noted above, mere recognition of taken-for-granted's is not enough to promote change. Instead, they must be seen as somehow problematic and therefore inadequate as a depiction of reality.

Cuban (1988), Kent (1987), and Tyack, Lowe, and Hansot (1984) have all helped to make explicit the value conflict that promotes the recycling of reform. We can now recognize it, but much more is needed if we are to dereify it. This is the central task of this book. We have briefly examined the history of ideas that blind and bind us, and understand that these are not actually modern ideas but ideas as old as Western culture—many date from ancient Greece. This sets the stage for a more detailed analysis of the modern manifestations of these ideas. The goal of these analyses and critiques is to problematize these ideas *as ideas*. This is an ambitious task in itself, but it is insufficient for our purposes. We wish to wed critique to construction. In doing so, we want also to avoid reproducing the original problem of reified ideas by looking not to theory but to everyday life for alternative possibilities. The reified ideas are present in everyday life, but not to the extent or in the way that those who promote these ideas would have us believe. People in everyday life do something more and something other than what these ideas propose. The people we worked with on an oral history of two schools (which we

will discuss in detail) engaged in a social construction of virtue. These people suggested interesting options for overcoming the seemingly timeless value conflict over education. We intend to use what they taught us to go one step further with the sociology of knowledge than Berger and Luckmann's (1967) practical project. We want to do more than "congeal" a taken-for-granted reality: We want to reveal that people in everyday life offer new possibilities for understanding the moral nature of education and thus how we might reform schools.

The Social Construction of Virtue?

We will examine education and morality from a unique perspective. Much recent thinking tends to frame morality as a problem of behavior and belief that can be remedied by curricula that exhort one or more ethical positions or processes that teachers and students should assume (cf. Purpel 1989; Sichel 1988; Straughan 1982; Jarret 1991). In themselves, these approaches all seem worthy of consideration and discussion, but we also see an irony here. Most of these approaches lament the increasing instrumentality of education but in the end succumb to it, as do so many of our reform attempts, by focusing on curricula and a goal of moralizing the youth of our society. The result of this instrumentality is that these recent works end up defining morality as a short-term goal, even when it is clear to us that all these authors are ultimately concerned about how schools play into the moral nature of adults and the society as a whole. What is needed are investigations that look to the moral influence of schools directly on adults and communities. A rather different approach to education and moral life may result.

We are much closer to, though still profoundly different from, the work of Philip Jackson and his associates that produced *The Moral Life of Schools* (1993). Both our similarities and our differences with their work are critical. Their work, like ours, is ethnographically based in schools. But whereas they are focused specifically on classrooms, we look at classrooms as only one part of a much broader context in which morality is constructed. They look at the activities, interactions, and relationships that go on in classrooms, as do we. But we do so primarily historically and also primarily from the standpoint of seeing the classroom as one location in a social context that includes the school, the community, the family, and the relationships that are constructed across them. Obviously both their work and ours is about morality. Jackson and his associates say that their book "is about moral matters as they impinge upon the work of the school" (xi). They further state, reiterating our point above about our differences, "What we offer instead is *a generalized way of*

looking at and thinking about what goes on in classrooms, one that highlights the moral significance of much that occurs there" (xi–xii). As will be evident below, our project is of a different sort.

Following our discussion of reified ideas, we will examine how adults use their elementary school experiences to construct moral views. We will discuss the histories of two schools in this endeavor. Cedar Grove School is traditionally white but now desegregated. Rougemont School was traditionally African-American but was closed when Cedar Grove School was desegregated. In interviews with us, the people in each of these communities did much more than recount history. They were engaging in the construction of moral narratives. These were not simple recountings of facts but a recollecting and selecting of those values they saw as being important in the present. That is, the moral narratives tell us as much about the values of these peoples today as they do about the nature of the schools then. Further, inasmuch as these narratives were constructed as part of an oral history project, these tales were constructed to be carried into some future discourse about these schools and communities and possibly about education more generally. We were writing a history of the schools that was solicited and sponsored by Cedar Grove School. The project was a collaborative venture. This means that the tales were more than individualized stories. People talked to each other and to us, and, in so doing, constructed collective moral narratives, narratives in which they located themselves (MacIntyre 1981) by their relationships with the schools, the communities, and with historical figures whom they have made into icons of virtue.

We argue that the moral significance of schooling is found not so much in what is taught to children nor in the oratorical and philosophical ideas as in what children and adults *do with their schooling experiences*. The moral and the virtuous are created with, more than learned in, schools. This view is at odds with some views in moral philosophy and ethics. We signal this in our title: *The Social Construction of Virtue*. Traditionally, "virtue" refers to features or qualities in people that confer superiority: distinction, excellence, merit, goodness, effectiveness. Frankena describes virtue as "dispositions or traits of character" that people acquire over the course of their experiences. He is careful to distinguish dispositions from the principles upon which they might be based. The former guide action, the latter justify the actions. The former defines "what we are to be," not just what rules we are to follow (1963: 49).

"Virtue" traditionally is defined in somewhat absolute terms, based on some set of principles that justify the terms and make them universal. Our concern is with what this definition of virtue excludes or denies. We define virtue as an assignment of moral traits to individuals

by others as well as by themselves. We make moral meaning by creating people whom we regard as virtuous. Our use of the term "virtue" is grounded in four points: (1) We reject the reified way in which virtue is usually discussed. Absent its human authorship, it fails to inform us about how to create moral action. (2) As above, virtue is a social construction. People make morality when they construct narratives of virtuous people. (3) Virtue is interpretive. It refers to the meaning of things and less so to actions that virtuous people are said to have engaged in. (4) What constitutes virtue is contextually specific. The schools we studied constructed their own sets of virtues. These virtues can teach us much about how schools are implicated in moral life. Yet the tales of virtuous teachers constructed through our work with these communities are situated in communities and temporally located. Moral tales are deeply embedded in their contexts. They are not just about the past of these schools and communities, nor just about pursuing a moral future, but also about what is the moral today.

The social construction of virtue has implications beyond the above proposals for moral education. The perspective critiques our reified ideas about education in general, suggests new possibilities for understanding the moral nature of education, and offers a different approach to educational reform—one that may allow us to escape recycling reform again and again.

A Perspective on Oral History

Oral historians have long been besieged by their colleagues who wish a more "objective" basis for history. The traditional historian wants evidence based in some record of an event, and then seeks evidence to corroborate this record. When sophisticated, such objectivist historians also question the availability and intent of the record itself. They ask why a record would have been made, under what conditions, and to what end. They would then ask about the extent to which the production of the record alters the factuality of the event in question. Such historians are in pursuit of a factual history, a history of things that did occur. This is an elusive goal. Ultimately, we cannot know to what degree the record has altered the event being recorded. Records are the province of the privileged, who have their own reasons for keeping a record. An objective history is also selective. Nonliterate peoples value oral traditions and, in any case, cannot write a journal. The poor have few resources to expend in producing a record of their existence, and records made by the stigmatized are not likely to be preserved, for they are not as valued by those privileged to preserve records.

The oral historian bucks this tradition by arguing that, given these and other conditions, we should seek another view of history. This view values an oral tradition, recognizes that without the efforts of oral historians there would be little record at all (and that selective) of some peoples, and cautions that all records are fundamentally subjective accounts that become objective only when people treat them as such. The efforts of oral historians are a healthy corrective to the more traditional history and to the disciplines that rely on history. Oral history is documentary, seeking to create a record where none would otherwise exist. We know much more about the less privileged because of oral history. It is clear, for example, that we would know much less about the lives of women textile workers if Jacquelyn Hall and her colleagues (1987) had not done an oral history of them. Their stories would have been lost in history.

We laud the efforts of oral historians. Indeed, our initial project was to create an oral history of two schools, and to create a document that allowed the people associated with these schools to consider their histories. In itself, this was a valuable and important enterprise that, as we will discuss, had some significant effects on these communities and schools. Further, the social construction of virtue that we recount in this book is derived from this attempt at oral history.

Yet any oral history, including this one, is imbued with the context of its creation. The oral histories of these two schools were not an academic enterprise for these people, done simply to create a record where none existed; rather, oral history was a moral enterprise through which people constructed the meaning of their schools for their own lives and the lives of their communities. The central project of this book is to understand these constructions. Here we depart from the usual meaning of oral history. Instead, we are building on the work of anthropologists (Vansina 1985; Finnegan 1992) who locate oral history in the context of oral traditions and sociologists of knowledge (Halbwachs 1992; Berger and Luckmann 1967; Dilthey 1977) more than in the discipline of history. In our view, oral history *and* story telling are both "ultimately based in, perhaps constituted by, social processes" (Finnegan 1992: 2). Further, when people recount their histories, they are not just reporting history but also constructing meaning out of those lives past and present. As Vansina writes: "Reminiscences are then not constituted by random collections of memories, but are part of an organized whole of memories that tend to project a consistent image of the narrator and, in many cases, a justification of his or her life" (1985: 8).

The social constructions of virtue (as we term them) for the schools we discuss in this book are not only of the past but of the present. They are products both of memory and of current beliefs. As Halbwachs puts it:

> Social thought is essentially a memory and . . . its entire content
> consists only of collective recollections or remembrances. But . . .
> only those recollections subsist that in every period society, working
> within its present day frameworks, can reconstruct. (1992: 189)

Oral history and our sociology of knowledge approach share an important characteristic, even if some oral historians will argue that we put an "interpretive veil" (Carlton 1991: 13) over the accounts told to us. Both oral history and the sociology of knowledge owe a debt to historicism (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 7), the idea that historical events have to be understood within their situation. For Dilthey (1977), this means moving history from the study of overarching periods of history to the study of the history of lived experience. Giddens sees it as a "consciousness" of how time is related to the development of social life by those living that life (1979: 199). Both oral historians and sociologists of knowledge are dedicated to capturing historicity, if to somewhat different ends. The oral historian seeks to capture it, while the sociologist of knowledge studies what people are accomplishing with the historicity they construct. The oral historian is rightfully concerned that scholars who use oral history analytically may be misrepresenting the historicity of people's accounts. Often this can mean that the oral accounts are distorted to fit grand theoretical schemes. However, the implications of historicity for the disciplines is now better understood. A long-standing feature of the sociology of knowledge, history has found new purchase in the explorations of postmodernity. Lyotard sees the "postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives" (1979: xxiv).

Our approach is probably best expressed by Marcus and Fischer, who, writing about anthropology, argued that the social sciences have reached an "ethnographic moment" that signals a change in views of the nature of social research. This moment is concurrent with an "experimental moment" in anthropology which "marked the practical suspension of its grand nineteenth century vision of a science of man." The root of both moments is an "intense concern" with the "way social reality is presented" and "the acutely felt problem of description" (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 165). In response to these concerns, the authors argue:

> The only way to an accurate view and confident knowledge of the
> world is through a sophisticated epistemology that takes full
> account of intractable contradiction, paradox, irony, and uncer-
> tainty in the explanation of human activities. This seems to be the
> spirit of the developing responses across disciplines to what we
> described as a contemporary crisis of representation. (14–15)

As a result, there has been a "shift in stress from behavior and social structure, undergirded by the goal of a 'natural science of society,' to meanings, symbols, and language, and to a renewed recognition, central to the human sciences, that social life must fundamentally be conceived as the negotiation of meanings" (26).

Our use of oral history in this book is clearly not that of an oral historian, but we share the concern with being representative of people's lives. Further, whatever disagreements oral historians have with us, we believe they will share our belief that our work is to foster people becoming moral participants in their culture. As Freire writes: "We need to be subjects of history, even if we cannot totally stop being objects of history. . . . As active participants and real subjects, we can make history only when we are continually critical of our very lives" (1985: 199).

The virtues that the communities and schools discussed in this book created in their recollections are both historical and current. They are constructing with us a view of the past that has relevance to the present, including how we think about educational reform. Yet, for us, these accounts are also about the future. When we met with these people and recorded their recollections with the promise of some product that would be available to a wider audience and preserved over time, their accounts were also contributions to the future. This notion of continuity is truly noteworthy and will be discussed further in the final chapter.

Reclaiming and Reconstructing Values: Research Methods

Our study is qualitative in nature (Patton 1992; Goetz and LeCompte 1984). It employs research techniques borrowed from history, oral history, and ethnography. Taken together, the research methodology may best be termed "ethnohistorical" (Precourt 1982). Our interest is in capturing what the peoples of College Park and Rougemont (all place and personal names are pseudonyms) would "recollect" when we asked them about the histories of their schools. We discovered they were telling moral tales. However, this masks the real research process and the experiences that led to this framing of the study. In fact, this study is based on two studies that seemed at the time to be conceptually separate, but were not and are not.

Our original involvement with the school was the result of the newly appointed principal coming to talk with us about how we might create some sort of university–school partnership. He had taken courses at the university and we had become acquainted. He had both altruistic and practical reasons for our original discussions. First, he wanted to be able to serve Cedar Grove School truly well. The school, an inner-city

school, was remarkably successful. With 70 percent African-American students, it tied with another school, 70 percent white, for the top test scores among elementary schools in the district. This school broke the low performance stereotype associated with African-Americans so common in the South and in the inner city (Sizemore 1987) The principal, who was white, respected this achievement and wanted to figure out ways to work with the teachers that did not imply that he judged them as "needing improvement." He also clearly did not want to do anything that would "mess this up." It seemed to him that one way to bring some new resources to these able teachers was to create a new link with the universities in the area. He also had some practical interests. He was the fourth principal for the school in three years. The personnel manager for the district joked when giving him the post that he was being sent to the "graveyard of principals." Indeed, the school had a powerful, white-dominated Parents and Teachers Association and a powerful (60 percent) African-American teaching staff. They had repeatedly "ejected" (as one parent put it) principals who did not understand or respect what was going on with the school.

The school, while majority African-American, was jealously guarded by College Park, the white community in which the school was located. It was their traditional neighborhood school and they were still proud of it. They saw it as a central institution for their affluent community's survival in the inner city. They sent their children to the public elementary school, and promptly withdrew them from the public schools for middle and high school. The white community's promotion and defense of the school was legendary in Treyburn, the city in which Cedar Grove and College Park are located. They were reputed to have a "direct, white line to the school board," in the words of an African-American we interviewed. As we will discuss in some detail, there were historical reasons for such attachment to the school. The new principal, Mr. Michaels, understandably did not want to be the next principal to be "ejected." Practically, he had to find a way to demonstrate his leadership, avoid damaging the high levels of achievement, and satisfy the white community and the African-American and white teachers. In the end, he came up with a number of initiatives to accomplish his successful walk on this tightrope.

In collaboration with us, he designed his first initiative: doing an oral history of the school. It seemed a way to celebrate the school, allow him to learn more about the school and community, and to establish the school–university link. We were well aware that such a project was not threat free. Learning one's history may bring back things that you want forgotten. Mr. Michaels was also clear that the history could not deny

the history of the African-American community who attended Cedar Grove School and whose Rougement School had been closed during desegregation.

We started the oral history project in the Fall of 1987. Our explicit agreement was that in exchange for doing an oral history of the school and writing a documentary and celebratory history, the research team would have the right to use the data for professional research and writing. We also designed the project, as we will discuss in chapter 3, to include students from the fourth- and fifth-grade Junior Historians Club. We helped the students design a interview guide that was of interest to them, and, with the help of the PTA, the students arranged and conducted interviews. Our interview guide was less concerned with dress codes and lunch menus than was the students', and more concerned with eliciting names of people, descriptions of classes and the school, curricula, and the community. We wanted to generate all the remembrances of the schools that we could. In the course of two years of data collection, we interviewed more than seventy people: current and former teachers, principals, students, and parents of both schools. They included people who had attended the schools as early as 1924 and teachers who had taught them as well. We talked with people who had lived in the communities in the 1910s. We talked to current teachers and parents, and so on. We used a snowball sampling design, asking each person who else we should interview. We also took people who walked in off the street and offered to be interviewed and people we met as we moved around the town in the course of our private lives.

We sought out more traditional historical sources as well. Guided by Butchart's *Local Schools* (1976), we searched widely for documentary evidence. At Cedar Grove School we found a wealth of documents covering much of the school's history. The PTA had, since the 1920s, compiled scrapbooks of memos, letters, photographs, newspaper articles, and other archival materials concerning the school. We had access to scrapbooks from the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and the 1960s. There were minutes of the PTA meetings from the 1920s and 1930s. We examined Board of Education minutes from 1915 through the present. We made repeated forays into the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina and into the public library collections in Treyburn. Interviewees also lent us their personal documents. At Rougemont School we were less fortunate. While we searched all the records above for materials and found some, the legacy of segregation and racism meant that materials were scarce. Further, after the school closed in 1975, much of the documentary data was either destroyed or lost. We were able to peruse church records in Rougemont, had the advantage of a

history of churches prepared by a Rougemont resident, and found some references in the Board of Education minutes.

In addition to the oral history and historical studies we had ethnographic studies. This was due in part to the research team having more members drawn from sociology and anthropology of education than from history of education. We kept ongoing field notes of our interactions in and with the community during the oral history project. These enabled us to contextualize the history in the ways we will do in this book. We had regular research-team meetings to interpret these data, and wrote a series of professional papers that melded our developing historical understanding with our interpretations of the cultures of the schools and communities. Moreover, after the two years of historical data collection, and as we were writing the documentary and celebratory history of the schools, we also embarked on what we thought at the time was a separate ethnography of classrooms in Cedar Grove School. For an academic year, the ethnographers (Dwight Rogers, Margaret Terhaar-Yonkers, Reeda Toppin, Jaci Webb, and the authors) spent one day a week in the school. Each of us focused on one or two classrooms, took running notes, and wrote up field notes as soon as possible after the observations. Again, the research team met weekly to review findings and develop preliminary interpretations. These also have led to a series of professional papers and publications. As it turns out, this year also gave us important data on the effects of the written history of the school and a school play written and produced from the written history, and allowed us more fully to contextualize the historical study for our purposes here.

We had several mechanisms by which we could corroborate our findings which would in some qualitative studies be seen as indicators that our story is representative. Yet we argue that studies such as ours have few facts that can be confirmed through triangulation or member checks. Instead, what we have is a constructed tale or set of tales. The tales are constructed by those who talked to us, by ourselves, and by the mechanisms we used to check out our findings. Instead of insuring validity, our feedback mechanisms fed the process of social construction. Each was simply another scene for negotiation and for meaning-making. Reframed in this manner, we can see each interview as a cultural performance rather than a recitation of historical fact. People in our study saw "history" as something apart from them and apart even from those they knew in the past. When pondering the schools' pasts, they did not see their memories as part of "history." They felt that they did not "know any history" of the schools to tell us. These people saw their memories as "stories" rather than as history. Moreover, in many cases they also