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The Public Purposes of Public Education: The Evolution of Community-Centered Schooling at Benjamin Franklin High School, 1934-1944

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Abstract
In 1934, Italian immigrant Leonard Covello and others set up Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem. Its purpose was to coordinate the educational influences emanating the neighborhood's many institutions, and to inform local citizen decision-making with intensive local social research. A leader in urban education, Benjamin Franklin High pioneered a distinctive community-centered schooling. Covello insisted that "education for social living" be based on solving real community problems in order to prepare students for leadership and civic participation. Problems ranging from poor housing to leisure opportunities to intergroup relations were channeled through Franklin's system of school-community committees.

This dissertation describes the evolution of the vision, one of active public purpose, that inspired Benjamin Franklin High in its early years. How did the ideas that guided such an unusual school mission evolve? How were they shaped and changed by their interaction with local events, national trends, demographics, personalities, and social conditions? Though an institutional history, this essay attempts to capture the interplay among a wide configuration of educating agents, in particular the "messy" dynamics of a public school's relationship to its community. Fundamental tensions regarding the nature of the public purposes of schooling, as well as whose purposes are pursued, underlie this intensely local struggle.

Chapter I describes the social, economic, and political context of East Harlem in the early 1930s, including the campaign to establish Benjamin Franklin. Chapter II sets out the broader conversation about community schooling in the early 1930s. Chapter III presents the life of Leonard Covello, examining the complex interplay of religious, intellectual, and personal experiences that influenced his vision of public schooling for East Harlem. In Chapters IV and V, the challenges of promoting cultural democracy - through local research, storefront units, adult education, teacher training, curriculum and public rallies - flesh out the idea of community-centered schooling as it evolved in East Harlem.

Drawing upon varied traditions of community research, early urban sociology, social Christianity and settlement house traditions, Covello shaped a distinct vision of schooling's public role in the democratic development of a diverse people. Implications for current education policy are suggested.

Comments
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SCHOOL, 1934-1944

by

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ABSTRACT

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Drawing upon varied traditions of community research, early urban sociology, social Christianity and settlement house traditions, Covello shaped a distinct vision of schooling’s public role in the democratic development of a diverse people. Implications for current education policy are suggested.
Acknowledgments

Of the many intellectual and personal debts that will be evident to the reader, two must be acknowledged at the onset. Had I not had the pleasure to study with the late Professor Lawrence Cremin, I doubt I would have ever pursued doctoral studies in the history of education. His broad and humane vision of educational history inspired me deeply. He nurtured an intellectual excitement for a field of education that would resist any academic ghetto, education understood broadly enough so as to be integral to the large and important questions of our society. I have been further blessed with the wise and compassionate guidance of his colleague and student, my doctoral advisor Professor Ellen Condliffe Lagemann. She continues a proud legacy of formidable historical scholarship that extends the boundaries of our civic commitments and intellectual imaginations. I have benefited greatly from her keen insights, sound judgment, and warm support.

One can not countenance the breadth and depth of gratitude owed to one's parents. From impassioned dinner table discussions to countless childhood field trips to endless support to late night counsel, my education continues to extend from the warmth and sacrifice of my mother and father.

They have spent their energies and love on our education, so shaping history that the grandchild of a penniless immigrant could complete these studies.

Finally, the sweet strength, keen mind, and easy humor of the most beautiful person I know has made my work a rich opportunity for growth. Maria del Rosario Conde's patient support and balanced judgment have greatly enhanced whatever worth this essay will have. May I be worthy of Rosario's rich love, and the family we have started with the gorgeous Francisca Javiera.

CAMILA WOLBII

And the best daughter in l
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PREFACE

On the first day of the first high school history course I taught, I asked my students why we were going to bother with all these dead people for 50 minutes a day until next summer. Once the depression of that prospect gave way to thinking, students first blamed graduation requirements, parents, ignorant system bureaucrats, and even a not-so-quiet conspiracy among hapless history nerds searching for employment. One student, perhaps pitying me as a greenhorn teacher, ventured forth that we needed to know the past in order to learn from it, that history offered us "lessons" if we were only attentive enough to learn. Most felt that this was the answer I sought; they had certainly heard it before, even if they had never believed it.

This pedagogical exercise never quite satisfied me, and each year I pursued the questioning further. I had not majored in history, but had begun to enjoy it immensely, though not for its reputed "lessons." I could never quite clearly determine what those lessons were, nor understand their application in such a different context as the present. Beyond general insights into human nature, history's defense on utilitarian grounds seemed limited, and a few students suggested we simply use it as a vehicle for "mental training," like so much bad tasting medicine, on the faith of its curative value at some point in the future. Needless to say, this elusive future did not motivate anyone very well.

Yet it was strangely appealing to the adolescents I taught to have opportunities to view their lives in radically different ways, ones that escaped the confines of present pressures to conform to present-day assumptions. And this seemed history's lure, to invite them to worlds very much unlike their own, to other conversations about other ideas born of other worries and joys. They were searching to build their imaginations, not of fairy tales and airy dreams, but of the very different lives real men and women made for themselves in places one could only reconstruct through artifacts. A renewed imagination might then free them from the sense of frustrating limits with which they lived their lives, and in this way provide an almost sacred service to them. As this answer to my question began to make more sense to me—and I believe to many of my students—it also began to dovetail with my concerns about education as a field, a field that was gaining my allegiance. Lack of imagination appeared to correlate well with an almost amnesiac pursuit of "one-best" practice.¹ History, and specifically the history of education, promised one means of restoring imagination to the cultivation of our youth. One chapter in that history—the story of Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem during the 1930s—provides a lens into another vision of urban schooling, a vision of how the public can educate itself in a democracy. If we can hear the voices of the people who made Benjamin Franklin and see their

¹David B. Tyack, The One Best System (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).
school, we may be able to imagine a very different kind of public school, a school with a sense of purpose and set of policies and practices quite unfamiliar to current reform efforts. If this essay allows for an expansion of imagination through an exploration of the past, then I will have met the challenge of those students I first met in class some ten years ago.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly sixty years ago, after a long struggle with the New York City Board of Education, a group of East Harlemites won the right to establish a local public high school for boys in their largely poor and immigrant neighborhood in 1934. An Italian immigrant educator named Leonard Covello, who had helped to lead the campaign for the school, was selected its first principal. His vision of a school intimately serving its local community largely shaped the school in its early years.

In order to educate the local area youth effectively, the school set itself up as the coordinating body for all of East Harlem's educational influences, from settlement houses to tenements to health centers. A coordinating center for intensive local social research, the school marshaled information and forces toward the development of East Harlem, weaving together a network of agencies in local social action. Teamed up with assistance from the WPA, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York University and a variety of local groups, Benjamin Franklin High School pioneered community-centered schooling to a degree that brought it national attention, at least until the end of World War II. Some saw the school leading the next stage of educational
reform. Educators frequently placed Benjamin Franklin among the top progressive and innovative urban high schools. When the *Journal of Educational Sociology* dedicated an issue in 1936 to school-community coordination, for example, Benjamin Franklin was featured as a model school.

The Educational Policies Commission cited Benjamin Franklin as a school that "leads its community in great social advances." And in 1942, in an event covered by a prominent teacher magazine, some 500 people gathered at Benjamin Franklin for a symposium it co-sponsored concerning "The Emerging Community School." The founding principal of Benjamin Franklin, Leonard Covello, insisted that "education for social living" be based on solving real community problems in order to prepare students for leadership and civic participation as adults. "Discussion of concrete situations and participation by students in local community research projects bearing upon social problems," he maintained, should be integral to the students' schooling. Problems ranging from poor housing to leisure opportunities to intergroup relations were channeled through Benjamin Franklin's system of school-community committees, which were composed of faculty, community representatives, and students. Covello frequently cited Benjamin Franklin's Housing Committee in order to explain the school's educational relationship with the community. Through this group's efforts, 1,300 low-rent public housing units were constructed in East Harlem. Covello observed that

The school championed local causes and coordinated neighborhood agencies. Benjamin Franklin students paraded in the streets to mark New York City's Golden Jubilee, celebrating East Harlem's history of diversity. At a time when the railroad's "Chinese Wall" on Park Avenue marked the "social frontier" along which Puerto Ricans clashed with Italians, Covello preached to the press that "our differences are our strengths. We don't want to erect any


2 Samuel Everett, ed., *The Community School* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938) features a chapter on Benjamin Franklin; the book was a product of the Society of Curriculum Study's Committee on the Community School. Benjamin Franklin co-sponsored the symposium with New York University, Teachers College of Columbia University, and the East Harlem Educational Bureau. The conference was covered in a teachers' magazine and featured the work being done at Benjamin Franklin. See *Understanding the Child* 9, no. 3 (October 1942).

3 *Journal of Educational Sociology* 9, no. 6 (February 1936).


5 Benjamin Franklin co-sponsored the symposium with New York University, Teachers College of Columbia University, and the East Harlem Educational Bureau. The conference was covered in a teachers' magazine and featured the work being done at Benjamin Franklin. See *Understanding the Child* 9, no. 3 (October 1942).


7 Ibid., 8.

cultural monolith in this country, but rather a cultural democracy, a great symphony of cultures.9

Between 1930 and 1950, East Harlem was among the most densely-populated districts in New York City; Benjamin Franklin sought to address the attendant problems. For example, residents witnessed more babies die before their first birthday than was the case in any other neighborhood, owing largely to poor sanitary conditions.10 In order to promote community sanitation efforts, over 2,500 boys marched in a Benjamin Franklin-sponsored clean-up campaign. Younger students passed out 4,000 questionnaires in three languages throughout the tenements promoting health reforms. The school hosted multi-agency conferences insisting on, and obtaining, such concrete remedies as one landlord-provided trash can per family. The school converted store fronts into reading rooms and social centers, reaching out to the broader community. Lobbying for better city services, improved housing, a new YMCA, or a public library branch, Covello and Benjamin Franklin organized a besieged people. Down to its lesson plans and homework assignments, the school operated as a center for both community activities and community research. It resembled a social settlement as much as a traditional public school.11

Benjamin Franklin High School closed its doors in East Harlem at the end of the 1982 school year. The founding principal died the same year in Messina, Sicily. In its final years, Benjamin Franklin attendance rates had plummeted, and dropout rates had soared. The New York Times called it "a failed high school."12 Today the spruced-up building houses several schools reputed to offer solid academics and creative methods. Few visitors stop to read the dedication plaque for Benjamin Franklin in the entrance; a blue and white board plastered over the entrance columns hides the school's former identity. The Italian funeral parlor remains across the street.

The Evolution of Public Purpose

A natural reaction is to ask what happened to Benjamin Franklin and explore reasons for its eventual decline. This approach is consonant with a tendency to emphasize the negative in American schooling. Alternatively, one might explore the full story of Benjamin Franklin, from 1931 to 1982, a period in dire need of critical local accounts if historians are to move beyond the


11 See Leonard Covello Papers, Box 117/Folder 13, Box 10/Folder 36, Box 38/Folder 10; Leonard Covello, The Heart is the Teacher (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1970); Leonard Covello, "The School as a Factor in Community Life," The School Executive 59, no. 9 (May 1940); Leonard Covello, "Neighborhood Growth Through the School," Progressive Education 15, no. 2 (February 1938); Michael Lombardo, Joseph Bayza, and Leonard Kramm, "Franklin High is Community Centered," Junior Red Cross Journal (October 1939).

broad sweeps offered by Joel Spring, Diane Ravitch, and others. I have not chosen those routes. Instead, I would like to ask a different question, one more likely to be of value in expanding our present imagination in the service of school improvement: What was the vision that inspired Franklin High School in its early years? How did those attempting to carry out "community-centered schooling" understand the school's role in East Harlem? What were the chief influences upon those teachers, administrators, community members, and university professors chiefly responsible for designing and implementing Franklin's varied curricular and extracurricular efforts? How did the ideas that guided such an unusual school mission evolve? How were they shaped and changed by their interaction with local events, demographics, personalities, and conditions?

The history of community schooling has yet to be written. That history promises to enhance our understanding of the critical local detail of the very local enterprise of schooling. But educational history focusing upon the community level needs to build upon clear notions of the various visions included under that banner, such as the community-centered schooling attempted at Benjamin Franklin.

The evolution of community-centered schooling at Franklin revealed the complexity of defining and implementing public purposes in local schooling. More specifically, Franklin's history reflected the interplay of two sets of tensions fundamental to all local schooling in the United States. First, if the local school is to fulfill its public purposes, what is the nature of those purposes? Do they derive from pedagogical or civic aims? Should the school's relationship to its community extend only from its mission of educating individual students? Does the school serve its public duties solely by producing well-educated citizens? If so, any involvement in community affairs should serve strictly pedagogical ends. Alternatively, do schools have public purposes independent of, though interwoven with, the education of individuals? Does the school serve also as an instrument of "the public's" broader education and development? Does the school's educational mission include the promotion of community harmony, the development of local democratic processes, and the integration of educational agencies? In practice, community-centered schooling at Franklin often drew from both pedagogical and civic aims, even for the same set of activities, as was the case with the campaign for public housing. The nature and range of social research, the degree of social activism, the extent of the school's role in community affairs, and the proper preparation of staff reflected, in turn, the ambiguity in the school staff's response to this essential tension.

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14"Community schooling" refers here to the effort by schools to serve directly the broad educational needs and civic development of their local communities. The literature is sparse that provides any history of this type of community-centered schooling. Various educational histories have treated schooling in local communities and cities, particularly as they relate to the history of the broader city school system, e.g., Jeffrey Mirel, The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-1981 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Paul E. Peterson, The Politics of School Reform, 1870-1940 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir (Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal (New York: Basic Books, 1985); David Labaree, The Making of an American High School: The Credentials Market and Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838-1939 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988). Labaree's work is discussed later in this introduction.
The second set of tensions had to do with the interaction of local and non-local influences upon Franklin. As a school eager to serve its local community, though subject to forces beyond the community, Franklin was often caught between purposes determined at local and non-local levels. Further, the nature of those purposes often varied according to who was understood to constitute the local community or the non-local authority. If the first tension evident in Franklin's history involved what its public ends were, the second tension involved who determined those ends. This was difficult to gauge even if one only considered the "local" influences. The shifting composition of East Harlem, the variety of distinct groups within it, and their varying roles in community affairs presented an uncertain and changing picture of who the "local community" was. Identifying the non-local authority offered similar ambiguity—was it the Board of Education, the state government, university professors, Italian associations, political parties, or educational organizations?

The evolving vision of community-centered schooling in East Harlem, then, reflected considerable ambiguity as to both the nature of public ends and who was meant to determine these. Obviously, local and even national politics played critical roles; to start, the school was established as a result of an impressive display of Italian political strength. Yet, while noting the role of politics, this essay is not primarily a political history of Franklin's early years. It deals with politics only in relation to a much larger and more neglected topic—the public purposes of schooling. That story, in turn, reveals the complex tensions of what those purposes were and who determined them.

Current School Reform—Trapped in the "Client" Box

Educators urgently need to hear this story, the complex interplay of these tensions, and to sit again at the table with Leonard Covello and his colleagues. School reform today cries out for a renewal of imagination, a reinvigorated sense of public possibility. Educators need to recapture the conversations—such as those in East Harlem during the 1930s and 1940s—in which the role of public schooling in democratic development implied concrete actions and strategies, and in which the broader influences on students were directly confronted as educational issues.

Numerous obstacles hinder current efforts at improving the educational experience of today's youth, including inequitable school financing, violent community conditions, poverty, ethnic prejudice, and the negative impact of popular media. However, a more fundamental barrier is the commonly-held conceptions of the school's purpose, its mission as a public community institution. The present school reform climate relies upon disturbingly narrow rationales for public education, rationales that are ultimately economic and doggedly individualistic. Efforts on behalf of the fondest hopes for the nation's children and the nation itself are justified upon dubious and barren economic grounds. Effective and enduring school reform requires reconceiving the public school's mission, shifting away from a service agency model justified by its economic utility and satisfaction of clients, toward a community research model justified by its ability to develop local democracy and train an active citizenry. East Harlem's experiment describes one community's effort to do this, and illustrates the complex tensions entailed.
A dominant view of schooling today understands the institution as essentially a social service agency, colored by consumerism and labor specialization. The schools are seen as akin to hospitals and social work offices in rendering a specific service to individual clients. The service agency model rests upon the premise that the fundamental unit of interest is the individual and that the mission of the institution is the satisfaction of the individual's needs. Accordingly, psychology provides the academic discipline that most informs practice. This does not, of course, mean to suggest that schools necessarily render good service, but simply that this is how their mission is generally understood. Many reformers speak of improving the "delivery" of curriculum to students and remind us that "students are the ultimate clients and products of schooling." Reforming schools means adding new services to the school site, integrating those services more effectively, and customizing the school to the ethnicity of its clientele.

The service agency model largely justifies the school in terms of its contribution to the labor market, preparing workers for an internationally competitive economy. U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley recently described his educational vision for the country as a "high-standards-driven human resource management system," proudly pointing to his department's close cooperation with the Department of Labor in shaping a competitive workforce for the 21st century. The rhetoric of economic competition saturates much of the school reform literature and serves as primary justification for the current national goals, even though the empirical evidence is shaky at best. The service agency model, justified in these terms of economic utility, limits effective local school reform in at least four ways: by increasing centralization of authority, by minimizing community involvement, by endangering support for the common school, and by promoting a barren utilitarianism.

Justifying school improvement efforts on economic grounds has facilitated an increasing tendency to pull control to the federal and state levels and away from local communities. Recent federal legislation attempts to bring greater federal control over America's schools in the hope of winning the international economic competition and tightening up the human resource management system. This further centralization of educational authority indicates the distance that stands between current views and the visions of Covello and others in East Harlem in the 1930s. For them, the school's effort to coordinate the development of the local community was intended to develop the very foundation of a democratic republic. Often overlooked is the fact that participation in local public school decision-making, however heated, can form an important part of the public's education in a democracy.

Even when family and community involvement are sought today, they are meant to improve the service rendered to individual students; individual

15 The service agency model is not a recent phenomenon. Early in this century, reformers perceived various institutions to be failing under the new industrialism. Since the home, community, shop, and church could not perform their educational roles well, school reformers decided—in what Lawrence Cremin called "the grand jeté of twentieth century educational theory"—that schools should take over these unmet tasks. Lawrence A. Cremin, The Genius of American Education (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965), 7.

16 Martin L. Maehr and Stephanie A. Parker, "A Tale of Two Schools—and the Primary Task of Leadership," Phi Delta Kappan 75, no. 3 (November 1993): 237.

pedagogical ends justify the school's links to the community. Within the service model, the chief actors are the school and the student; the community, by definition, is supplemental. Indeed, school systems rarely assess the performance of their institutions in terms other than as aggregates of individual student performance. Many educators may be hard pressed even to imagine what a school performance assessment might look like that is not based on aggregate student performance data, so accustomed have they become to the service agency model of schooling. Public goals for schools—for example, in terms of community cohesion or democratic development—receive little attention and less evaluation. Whether or not public schools are privatized may not be so terribly significant; by and large, the purposes of public schooling are already private.18

Still, the current choice debate says a good deal about how narrow the discussion of public education has become and the danger the common school may face. For all the rhetoric, pro and con, few educators have been able to defend public schooling based on its role in promoting the democratic development of the United States, beyond the terms of economic distribution. Hardly able to imagine what accountability for schooling's public goals might look like, educators need to recover conversations lost in the past.19 For if schools do not serve purposes beyond the individual student's academic achievement, there is little defensible ground for preferring a public "delivery system" of that service.

Lacking a broader vision, school reform often focuses on the component parts of the school itself and shapes them in terms of their future utility. Administrators mandate a teacher training workshop on cooperative learning, a conflict resolution workshop for staff, and an AIDS education course for the students. Educators seek the indirect effects of these program components on our democracy. Developing an infrastructure for a richer citizen participation in the resolution of conflicts, as one example, is not the goal. Rather, critically-thinking and cooperative individuals will someday earn more and pay more taxes, will better understand complicated policy issues in the future, and eventually will be conflict-free and disease-free members of the community. The direct and present effects of schools on the democratic development of the nation and the enhancement of the public sphere are rarely treated. Focused on a distant utility and increasingly controlled from a distant place, schools can often increase what philosopher Cornel West calls "the threat of concrete nihilism" in our most troubled communities.20 They may be experiencing this tragic convergence of the "rolelessness" of adolescents with a rolelessness of the institution in which youth are to spend their days.21 There is no new service, no new add-on program that can address this creeping cynicism within our school system. Educators must do what they tell their students to do: think critically about fundamental questions

18Lazerson and Grubb's observation that vocational education, while an uncertain success programmatically, reshaped the purposes of schooling seems a related historical development. See Marvin Lazerson and W. Norton Grubb, American Education and Vocationalism (New York: Teachers College Press, 1974).


21On the rolelessness of adolescents, see Elena O. Nightingale and Lisa Wolverton, "Adolescent Rolelessness in Modern Society," Teachers College Record 94, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 472-86.
and resolve to act upon the best answers. Educators cannot sustain "teaching for understanding" if as educators they do not understand the school's mission in the community. The story of community-centered schooling at Benjamin Franklin can assist in that process.

Present conditions make it less likely that educators will be able to continue within the service agency construct and make it more likely that a community-centered approach will provide a useful direction. Several factors are forcing educators and policy makers to move beyond individual student outcomes as the sole basis for evaluating school quality. Psychology, recent school reform experiences, and the deteriorating social conditions in which many students live are driving a reconsideration of the exclusive focus upon individual-based measures of schooling. Psychology, long the primary basis for the training of teachers, has begun to focus increasingly on the contextual factors that shape learning, extending to a student's "cognitive background," including such factors as past pedagogical experiences and the quality of learning processes in the home and community. School reformers such as James Comer, Theodore Sizer, and Robert Slavin continually assert the critical role played by the quality of a school's mission and its understood role in the wider community. Indeed, Comer's model builds directly upon such an assertion. And the increasingly dire social conditions in which students live force schools to face directly the problems of the larger communities in which the schools exist. In many schools, this has simply resulted in a greater push for housing more services within the school building, the "integrated services" approach, or attempts to protect the school from the community with elaborate security programs. But the limits of this client-based service model or a defensive isolation approach are becoming evident to many and are forcing educators to reconsider whether public schools exist primarily to "deliver curriculum" to individuals or, rather, to develop local communities into richer educational environments. Necessity may this time play a role as the mother of re-invention.

Regardless of the immediate outcome, all of these elements press upon the individual-based conception of schooling, urging a more balanced view, one that incorporates the school's larger mission within the community. Further, the increasing difficulty of basing school practices almost solely upon individual-centered disciplines such as psychology predisposes educators to


appreciate a vision of schooling like Covello’s that drew heavily upon a community-centered method in educational sociology. Educators may begin to refuse to equate public education with public schooling and seek instead to determine public schooling’s proper role within “the public’s” education. At that point, educators and other citizens will need to understand the complex and fundamental tensions involved in determining public educational purposes. The story of how community schools like Benjamin Franklin High evolved may help deepen that understanding.

Educators must share the blame for the current lack of interest in public schooling’s role in democratic development. Greater familiarity of educators with their past may help, and certainly the training of educators must address such broader concerns. As Lawrence Cremin lamented nearly thirty years ago:

> A political scientist friend of mine is fond of remarking that most people do not care about freedom of speech because they really have nothing to say. Similarly, too few educational leaders in the United States are genuinely preoccupied with educational issues because they have no clear ideas about education. And if we look at the way these leaders have been recruited and trained, there is little that would lead us to expect otherwise.26

The greatest obstacle to enduring school reform today is the lack of imagination and vision with which citizens and educators understand public schooling in our republic. Shortcomings in ideas produce real shortfalls in institutions and wasted resources in the education of youth. The past must be mined for other models and visions, not in order to transplant panaceas wholesale across time and space, but to nourish thoughts about the broader purposes of schools and the humble efforts of others to attain them.

### History of Education

Presentism sits like a gaping pit ready to catch fallen historians. Educational historians must walk with particular caution, lest they be nudged into the abyss by a pleading policy maker or by the haunting “Ghost of Perpetual Irrelevancy.” What’s an educational historian to do?

Certainly, the topics chosen by historians should in some way interact with broad and enduring issues of education and should continue to address pivotal gaps in the historical record of teaching and learning. Research is also needed that helps to explain how the present came to be, finding roots, suggesting causes, noting recurring themes, and offering interpretations. This dissertation, on the other hand, presents a case study of an effort by a New York City high school to define its role within its local community during the 1930s, and in so doing traces the evolution of the ideas through which the school staff operated. Case studies of so narrow a focus can only be justified when they present what Donald Warren recently called an “historical intersection” with larger issues.27 The community-centered schooling approach pursued in East Harlem—its origins and evolution—speaks directly to enduring questions of the relationship of public schooling to its community, and thus the role of public education in a democracy. The detailed study of


one answer to that question as experienced at a single school and in a single community combines the intensively local responses with the translocal concerns they addressed.

I am not aware of many school histories that focus upon the evolving nature of the school's educational relationship with its community; only a few histories of individual high schools, and particularly public schools, have been written. Gary Hermalyn's history of the creation of Morris High School in the Bronx is one of the few histories of a public high school. Hermalyn focuses on school Americanization efforts as well as the efforts to "centralize, professionalize, and de-politicize the schools." A notable recent history of a public high school is David Labaree's *The Making of an American High School*, the story of Central High School in Philadelphia. Labaree utilizes the story of Central High as a rather narrow case study of "credentials market" effects on school practice. Central's relationship with its community receives treatment only insofar as it was apparently affected by shifts in "demand" for high school credentials. The literature on the establishment of Beverly High School last century focuses on a single high school and its relationship to the local community. This literature has stirred controversy concerning what local votes imply about the origins of public schooling.

A number of histories of private high schools have been written, though many are in-house and largely celebratory histories published at anniversaries. Susan McIntosh Lloyd goes beyond narrow institutional bounds in her treatment of Abbot Academy and the Putney School, writing sensitive and humane "biographies" of the schools and placing each within larger themes of social and cultural history, especially the history of women and education. Peter Buttenwieser's history of the Lincoln School raises larger questions concerning the conflicting institutional aims in the formation and operation of lab schools, and his study, quite appropriately, focuses on

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the school's role in curriculum experimentation during various periods of its existence.\textsuperscript{33}

In contrast to this literature, my study of Benjamin Franklin does not intend to chronicle the life of the school. Rather, I want to describe how individuals involved with the school conceived and developed the school-community relationship during a period in which particularly innovative approaches to organization and programming were attempted. I am not trying to establish the place of an institution within the history of education; I wish to use the history of the school to better understand the "messy" dynamics of public schools' relationships to the communities they serve.

Most histories of U.S. schools treat the development of public school systems, as opposed to the stories of single schools. In describing the historical formation of school systems, educational histories have emphasized variously the role of economic forces, wider social movements, business management practices, class formation, political conflicts, local-state tensions, bureaucratic growth, vocationalization of purposes, local economic and demographic changes, and the role of grassroots movements.\textsuperscript{34} Though few historians focus on specific schools, a number of works include extended historical treatment of actual school practices, such as Larry Cuban's attempt to describe actual teaching practices over time or Paula Fass's use of extracurricular club membership in her analysis of high school Americanization efforts.\textsuperscript{35} A number of recent works have attempted historical treatment of school curricula during this century, though the efforts suffer generally from a severe lack of context.\textsuperscript{36} As is the case with the only history of secondary schools, these works provide a useful but underinterpreted description of actual school activities.\textsuperscript{37}

By using an institutional history as a lens through which to examine visions of schooling in a community, I am attempting to get away from the narrow school focus of much educational history in order to capture the

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\textsuperscript{36}See, for example, Daniel Tanner and Laurel Tanner, \textit{History of the School Curriculum} (New York: MacMillan, 1990); Herbert M. Kliebard, \textit{The Struggle for the American Curriculum} (New York: Routledge, 1987).

\textsuperscript{37}The single history available on high schools is Edward A. Krug, \textit{The Shaping of the American High School}, vols. 1 and 2 (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972).
interplay among a wider configuration of educating agents. I would like to use the history of Benjamin Franklin to illuminate the public school's relationship with its community. Lawrence Cremin's insistence on the configuration of educating institutions challenged the history of education to move beyond the boundaries of the school, and writing the histories of institutions beyond the school is certainly essential. However, even that does not get us to a more comprehensive method that can get at the interaction, the complex interplay of forces, that produces the conditions for educational change in human communities. I want to write a history of education, not a history of educational institutions. My interest is in the evolution of ideas in context, the interactions of vision and practice. Ellen Condliffe Lagemann effectively uses the lens of institutional history to inform wider questions concerning the "politics of knowledge." The history of Benjamin Franklin provides the institutional lens through which to study the wider questions of school-community relations.

This approach has the advantage of avoiding the limits of both a narrow institutional history and an impersonal analysis of social forces.

38One of the most direct attempts of which I am aware to implement Cremin's broad notion of education in a historical work is Vincent P. Franklin, The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900-1950 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979). The effort, while a useful supplement to the educational history of Philadelphia, remains an example of a rather static interpretation of this approach, falling into a description of educational activities by various categories of agents.


Benjamin Franklin must be scrutinized within the larger organizational and cultural networks of East Harlem. The practical advantage of this method is that it limits the context that needs to be analyzed; all of society in the 1930s need not be included! As Paul Mattingly explains,

One need not examine all of society to insure thoroughness or breadth of perspective. Even the study of a single institution often identifies the center of communal discourse. The expansion of that center through historical analysis generally reveals even local complexities or at times translocal connections, which a mere structural analysis would overlook. In these senses the institution acts as a kind of historical prism, identifying individuals, rhetorics, and groupings of a significant collective endeavor over time.

Another practical advantage of focusing on Franklin's vision of school-community ties reflects what the general discipline of history can offer today—the challenge to imagine a different world through others' eyes, including those worlds that may not have succeeded in shaping our own. Historians need to see from within the "losing" visions of our past and recover what Henry James termed the "surprises" within our broad and varied land.

The limited treatment of Benjamin Franklin in educational histories has placed it largely within the literature of Americanization programs in public schools, and it did, indeed, seek to Americanize its largely immigrant...
population. An exception is Tyack and Hansot's Managers of Virtue, in which Franklin's first principal Leonard Covello is characterized as a community organizer and in which the community-centered school concept receives more direct attention.

While the school certainly pursued Americanization efforts such as citizenship drives, it largely faced the problem of second-generation Americans. As Paula Fass notes, "In the thirties and forties, the children of immigrants began to make choices and to adopt values that have left a lasting imprint on the schools and the culture they helped to shape." Franklin's community-centered model reflected an immigrant principal's intensive study of and experience with the problems of second-generation youth. The question was not whether the WASPs imposed Americanization upon yet another immigrant group. At least part of what happened at Franklin reflected immigrants and immigrant children trying to decide what "American" was going to mean to them, and how the school they sought would reflect that vision.

Finally, though Franklin ran counter to the longer-term shift away from local control, as well as the "sanitized version of the corporate model of school governance" advocated by the "administrative progressives," it was forced to work within the larger centralizing trend. The tension between the school reflecting the community's desires and serving the translocal goals of the democracy (or the non-local goals of the bureaucracy) that may not have coincided with local desires arose frequently. Covello may have sought to empower the local community, to use more modern language, but he also sought to counter the social pathologies he found there.

Benjamin Franklin resists categorization along some central lines laid out historiographically. While sharing with the social reconstructionists their reaction against individualism, most at Franklin apparently chose to emphasize the role of the school in organizing the local community, addressing its immediate concerns and training local leadership—not changing the social order nor creating a centrally-planned society. Far from being an imposition upon lower-class immigrants, the politics, consistent with Paul Peterson's findings, seem to have been at least as "complex, pluralistic, [and] multifaceted" as those in Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco, especially as

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44Fass, Outside In, p.6.

45David Tyack, Robert Lowe, and Elisabeth Hansot, Public Schools in Hard Times (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 54; the "longer-term shift" is argued by several different interpretations, such as Ravitch, The Troubled Crusade; David Tyack, "Restructuring in Historical Perspective: Tinkering Toward Utopia," Teachers College Record 92, no. 2 (Winter 1990), 170-91; Tyack, One Best System; Cremin, American Education: The Metropolitan Experience; Robert Nisbet, The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

46This understanding of the social reconstructionists reflects Tyack et al., Public Schools in Hard Times, among others; for a more nuanced view of one social reconstructionist, see Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, "Prophecy or Profession? George S. Counts and the Social Study of Education," American Journal of Education 100, no. 2 (February 1992): 137-65.
East Harlem was contested terrain for different political machines. The establishment of Benjamin Franklin was a prize eagerly sought by local professionals, working class and poor community members, reflecting the rising political fortune of New York City's Italians in the early 1930s.

Too often, the past has been interpreted to explain the present, or perceptions of the present. When historian Thomas Bender writes of the need to move beyond a history of the "winners," he suggests a history that is not simply critical of the winners. Too often humans have dropped out of what historian Geraldine Joncich Clifford has called "prosecutorial historiography." Neither common school triumphant nor social forces hegemonic capture the human complexity. The work of Carl Kaestle moves beyond this literature in a balanced manner, attempting to capture the tensions and dynamics more properly of the era studied. William Reese's *Power and the Promise of School Reform* provides a necessary shift toward a broader, more sympathetic interpretation of the history of U.S. educational efforts and is indicative of the subtle, profound tensions that characterize education in a democracy.

The intensive local study of Benjamin Franklin, in an era less studied than others, will allow a look at the complexity of the interplay of educational forces, as actually found in personalities, neighborhoods, and local politics. The lens chosen for this study—the evolution of school-community ties—will allow such local detail to inform a broader synthesis.

**Chapter Plan**

Recapturing a past vision forces a methodological, indeed epistemological, question. Ideas do not float above the earth, nor are they simply derivatives of abstract and inevitable forces. They roam and bump incarnate within people and places. If one is to capture a vision incarnate, one must pursue an approach that accepts the power of ideas qua ideas in people's minds. Refusing to view ideas as completely independent factors over time, one must attempt to describe the "messy" interaction of the ideas

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48Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975) is an insightful example.


51William Reese, *Power and the Promise of School Reform*.

52Paula Fass calls the 1930s and 1940s a "period largely ignored by historians," *Outside In*, 6. A recent synthesis of work on this era can be found in Tyack et al., *Public Schools in Hard Times*; regarding curricular effects of World War II, see Roy Lowe, ed., *Education and the Second World War: Studies in Schooling and Social Change* (London: The Falmer Press, 1992); Jeffrey Mirel and David Angus, "The Rising Tide of Custodialism: Enrollment Increases and Curriculum Reform in Detroit, 1928-1940," *Issues in Education* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 101. Though few studies have focused on the 1930-50 period, a number of general history of education sources do include material on this period, e.g., Lawrence Cremin's *The Transformation of the School* and *The Metropolitan Experience*; Tyack's *The One Best System*; Fass's *Outside In*; Kliebard's *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*; Ravitch's *The Great School War*; and Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA*, 1900-1980 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990). A growth of interest seems apparent in the number of papers treating World War II presented at recent History of Education Society meetings.
individuals express and seek to fulfill and the social conditions that help to shape their lives.

Chapter I describes the constraints and opportunities presented by the social, economic, and political context of East Harlem in the early 1930s, within which Franklin's effort at community schooling evolved. Covello and his staff's struggle to define community schooling, to determine who constituted Franklin's community, and upon what basis community schooling should be justified, revealed the tensions involved in developing both the nature and sources of the school's public purposes. The dire poverty, the intergenerational tensions, the inter-ethnic group relations, the cultural richness, and the local politics helped to shape what the school sought to accomplish as well as who would accomplish it. After long efforts on the part of well-organized community activists, the coordination of an established network of local service agencies, the experienced and tireless leadership of Covello, and opportune lobbying of Fiorello La Guardia after his mayoral victory by the school's advocates, Benjamin Franklin High School opened in 1934. The school's founding testified to growing Italian political and economic maturity in New York City, and its design reflected centrally the notions of its founding principal, Leonard Covello.

Chapters II and III examine the social history of the ideas underpinning community schooling notions in the early 1930s in two ways. Chapter II sets out the broader conversation about community schooling that was taking place from the late 1920s to the 1940s, along with several attempts at the time to analyze that conversation. The chapter locates Franklin's version of community schooling within the various conversations about schooling that occurred during the Depression, and among the wide range of school-community programs then in operation. The analysis concludes with an examination of how the community coordination movement, diverse social research traditions, and curriculum trends shaped the school's approach.

Chapter III presents the life of Leonard Covello, examining the complex interplay of religious, intellectual, and personal experiences that influenced his vision of public schooling for East Harlem. Covello, an East Harlemite Italian immigrant who lived blocks away from Franklin as a child, came to Franklin as an experienced New York City high school teacher from the prestigious De Witt Clinton High School. Covello's vision of community-centered schooling reflected his chance early ties with Protestant churches that became a lifelong bond; his extensive experience teaching Italian students at De Witt Clinton; his active involvement in East Harlem social agencies; and the confluence of Chicago-influenced educational sociology with settlement house experiences.

Covello's actions, however, did not simply go from paper to practice, as Chapters IV and V will demonstrate. The community-centered approach taken at Franklin reflected the complex social relations, intergenerational strains, interethnic rivalries, national crises, and economic depression of East Harlem, as well as the values and commitments made by Franklin colleagues and community supporters. The challenge of implementing the Franklin approach in an ethnically and racially diverse neighborhood, at times suffering from strong inter-group tensions, will flesh out the idea of community-centered schooling as it evolved in East Harlem during the 1930s and early 1940s. The school community's efforts at local social research, community organizing,
The Conclusion briefly summarizes the chief historical findings regarding the evolution of community-centered schooling at Benjamin Franklin, suggests areas for further fruitful research, and offers several implications for current school policy and practice.

Chapter I
THE BIRTH OF COMMUNITY-CENTERED SCHOOLING
IN EAST HARLEM—CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Introduction

In the mid-1930s, a group of determined community activists and local leaders brought to life a distinctive notion of public schooling in the struggling immigrant community of East Harlem. Administrators, teachers, students, residents, and supporters from around the city shaped a vision of community-centered schooling that would soon be seen as exemplary by urban educators. They did not begin with a set model that they sought to implement, but simply a set of hard-won convictions that guided their work. The vision evolved, as did their understanding of the needs and opportunities the school could address in the complex world of East Harlem. Some felt the vision did not go far enough; others apparently resisted its potentially radical premises.

Benjamin Franklin High School, a typical "cosmopolitan" high school in many ways, grew out of and then fostered this vision. The school resolutely

53 A "cosmopolitan" high school usually included three main courses of study: one academic or general, one commercial, and one technical or trade; Josephine Chase, New York at School (New York: Public Education Association, 19270, Ch. 4. Benjamin Franklin was originally proposed by community activists as including three courses of study: Academic, Commercial and Arts/Crafts (which included machine shop and electrical training, as well as pottery and carpet-weaving; "A Boy's High
placed itself in the center of East Harlem affairs, viewing its educational role broadly, and linking itself to nearly every community organization through its Community Advisory Council, which was created within the first year of the school's existence. Benjamin Franklin arranged a system of some 15 school and community committees that brought students, faculty, and community members together to address such East Harlem concerns as housing, intercultural education, social welfare, the influence of film and radio, citizenship, and health. Working through associated clubs and local agencies, as well as the school's formal curriculum, the high school implemented programs recommended by the committees, coordinating the various efforts through the Community Advisory Council.

For example, in cooperation with the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies and the Civil Works Administration, the school set up an afternoon community playground for neighborhood children from 3:30 to 6:00 P.M. To expand its utility to older residents, the school operated as a community center and evening elementary school for adults from 7:30 to 10:00 P.M. With assistance from the W.P.A., an adult school enrolled as many as 3,500 local students in courses ranging from English to business skills. Students conducted health and language surveys, converted vacant stores into supervised day care centers and reading rooms, transformed abandoned lots into parks, and investigated solutions to juvenile delinquency. One converted storefront near the school on East 108th Street provided space for various neighborhood social events, including the dances hosted by the Community Friendship Club. The Club, run by the Alumni Association for those boys who had left Benjamin Franklin without graduating, sought to "keep 'drop-outs' in a close friendly contact with the school and their former classmates." Faculty served on several neighborhood committees as well, such as those of the Yorkville Civic Council and the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies. The Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Community Advisory Council, who also served as Chair of the Social Studies Department, spoke proudly of the school's efforts to train the youth of one particular community to live intelligently in a democracy and to mold political and economic forms to new conditions. . . . If we forget the old precepts of civics and begin to think in terms of an active citizenship that is to be lived, we can make of our educational processes something that will pulsate, that will provoke action and common, personal interest.


56Michael Lombardo, Joseph Bayza, and Leonard Kramm, "Franklin High is Community Centered," Junior Red Cross Journal, October 1939, 55. The authors were students at Benjamin Franklin High School, and they donated the money they earned for the article to the school's student welfare fund.

57Covello, "A High School and Its Immigrant Community."

Something exciting was happening in East Harlem in the mid-1930s, and the local public high school was at the center of it. What notion of public schooling developed there? And how did it relate to the very particular time and place in which it evolved? This chapter first describes the notion of community-centered schooling as understood by those who shaped it at Benjamin Franklin. It then elaborates upon the way in which the poverty, ethnic mix, intergenerational tensions, organizational infrastructure, and local politics helped shape community-centered schooling by offering it both opportunities and constraints. The chapter concludes with the story of the successful campaign to establish Benjamin Franklin, a reflection of East Harlem's political maturity, as well as the campaign's influence upon the evolving nature of East Harlem's bold experiment in community schooling.

Community-Centered Schooling at Benjamin Franklin

At first, those involved with Benjamin Franklin High School did not have a common term for their active, community-oriented notion of schooling. Assistant Superintendent Dr. John L. Tildsley, in announcing the school's founding, described it as "a neighborhood school," "an experimental school" that "will become a great social centre" for East Harlem.59 Early on, Leonard Covello, Franklin's first principal, referred to the school's efforts as "a community-center program."60 Within the first few years, though, the school became known as a "community-minded" or "community-centered" school, the latter of which Covello would use in his unpublished manuscript describing the school's approach.61 However it was labeled, the central focus of the school remained the community from which it drew students. Only with such a focus, claimed Covello, would it be possible to develop an educational program "through which the school and the community, working together, can shape not only the child himself but the forces by which the child is molded in the life outside the school walls."62

Defining the "community" in this type of program presented an initial challenge on both practical and theoretical grounds. In practical terms, the definition evolved, shrinking in geographic area as the complexity of community-centered schooling became more apparent. The school staff began by considering all of East Harlem and Yorkville as its community, an area of some 200 city blocks on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Within the first school year, that definition appeared a bit too ambitious, and the target community was scaled back to East Harlem. Later, the school began to tailor its efforts to individual "social blocks" within East Harlem, hoping with

59Report of Dr. John L. Tildsley, Assistant Superintendent and Acting Head of the High School Division, to the Board of Superintendents, Board of Education of New York City, 2 June 1924; reproduced in Leonard Covello, "The Community-Centered School," CP 18/1, Balch Institute, Unpublished manuscript, 1940 ("CCS mss" in future references), Ch. IV, pp. 3-5, CP 18/13.

60Covello, "A High School and Its Immigrant Community.

61CCS mss.

innovations such as community-school storefront units to build the community education program block-by-block63 (see Figures 1 and 2).64

In theoretical terms, Covello borrowed from Frederick F. Stephan of the University of Pennsylvania and Louis Wirth of the University of Chicago. Stephan, himself borrowing from rural sociologists like C.J. Galpin, described a community as a "zone of participation" in which people associate "in most, if not all, of the activities which take place outside the home and family group."65 From this association, the community's institutions, traditions, and culture developed. Wirth distinguished "community" from "society" by describing them as "two mutually complementing aspects of every form of group life, emphasizing that every social group exists in a territorial, physical, substantive, as well as social psychological, bond, respectively."66

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63CCS mss., Ch. 1, 19-21; Covello did not apparently define "social blocks," though apparently by usage he meant roughly a city block area within which residents held most non-family interactions.

64 Figure 1: Mayor's Committee on City Planning, East Harlem Community Study (New York: Mayor's Committee on City Planning in Cooperation with the Works Progress Administration, 1937). Figure 2: The Guilds Committee for Federal Writers' Publications, Inc. The WPA Guide to New York City. 1932 edition. NY: Random House, 1939.


66CCS mss., Ch. 1, p. 15; from Louis Wirth, The Scope and Problems of the Community (Publication of The American Sociological Society) 27, no. 2 (May 1933).
Community referred to "social life when viewed from the standpoint of symbiosis" and society, "when regarded in the perspective of consensus." While the school staff apparently did not set out any unambiguous definition, the school's "community" tended to refer to the social interaction of residents in the physical area of East Harlem, with an emphasis on the local culture as reflective of the qualities of social participation.

Consistent with this understanding of community, the "community-centered school" rested upon a view of education as essentially civic. Covello began with the premise that education signified "a leading forth, from within, of latent abilities, and of a process of guiding such abilities." Education thus functioned in "a dual manner," addressing the intellectual as well as the civic development of the child. Building upon the individual's intellectual development, education's influence would expand outward into the community and then the nation as a whole. Covello explained that education at the individual level must "broaden the child's intellectual grasp and the horizon of his mind," while building disciplined study habits, as well as logical and coherent thinking. In addition, one's education should enable students not simply to tap current knowledge, but also to begin "branching out along lines that are original and constructively valuable; [education] must encourage..."
initiative in discerning and deciding problems of practical importance in
relation to the life he is to live. But education does not stop here, as its twofold nature carries its
influence into the wider community. The child's status as tomorrow's adult
citizen implies education's socially constructive role, as schools should "sense
in the growing child, the citizen of tomorrow." It is upon that future adult
citizen, insisted Covello, that
both his small community and the nation must depend for
intelligent contributions to civic progress, for the nation is
but the sum total of its small communities, and the
communities themselves are but the sum total of homes
from which school children come.

Covello and others saw no necessary conflict between these two
aspects of education; on the contrary, they served to enhance each other.
The community-centered school built on academic education and broadened it
considerably, based on "knowledge of, and experience in, the community." Centering the school on the local community promoted the traditional goals of
academic education by fostering students' interests and incentives. Unless
one were willing to accept unsupported beliefs about a subgroup's I.Q.,
claimed Covello, the real causes for student failures in school lay in the fact
that "we have not created programs through which interest can be developed
as an incentive to learning." But if education were tied to the actual needs
and conditions of the students' community, then "life itself becomes a part of
the educative process, in the school, as well as outside."

Consistent with Covello's definition of education, the school would be
able to guide individual student interests into expression in the community.
Such an education provided a real-world motivation and relevance to
academic work, linking the individual's training to the community's goals, and
"attaching a sense of importance to the individual himself as well as to his
education for a larger responsibility." Motivation inevitably improved, and
civic participation would ultimately rise, as this
sense of reality and of unity with large aims, and important
activities provides the best incentive for the student,
particularly the high school student. Moreover, community
centered education develops ability as well as interest and
prepares for democratic participation in community life.

Not only did Franklin staff members understand community-centered
education as a leading forth of the individual into civic participation, but they
also viewed the community as exercising a broad set of educational influences
on the individual. Contrary to the assumptions of "the traditional type of
academic isolation . . . the school child does not live in a social vacuum . . .

70bid.
71bid.
72bid.
73CCS mss., Ch. 1, p. 2.
his educational process involves not only the home and the school but the total community." This required that the school establish "an 'education for social living' as a process in which the child in the school must be considered in relation to his entire background, i.e., his home, his groups, and his community." The community-centered school's role, as understood by those involved at Benjamin Franklin, was to serve as the coordinator of educational forces—promoting the positive and countering the negative—in the community.

Given each locality's unique characteristics, claimed Covello, communities should become educational "neighborhood spheres of influence" as an aid to our social progress and as a means "to raise the general level of citizenship in the community." The school staff early recognized, for instance, that the school alone could not compete with movie houses for influence; research in the community indicated the tremendous influence films had on local boys, and staff candidly admitted that the school on its own was a weak competitor for the youths' attention. The same would apply to decrepit and unsanitary housing conditions; their ability to frustrate the school's educational objectives was daunting, which is one reason housing received early attention by Benjamin Franklin's committee system.

According to Covello, the school faced a community that reflected the general decline of small tight-knit communities, a place in which neighborhood bonds had declined dramatically. Life no longer centered around the home circle and well-defined social group. As Covello lamented,

The diffusion of social interests... has made the home and the small community... less conscious of the importance of the ties that bind family and community together. This has contributed to the breakdown of neighborly associations and cooperative activity.

The growth of a consumerist materialism exacerbated this breakdown for the poor, encouraging the wider society increasingly to view residents of places like East Harlem as inherently inferior. The community Benjamin Franklin engaged suffered from a breakdown of local bonds, a broadly-felt resentment, and a creeping indifference. Combined, they weighed down all efforts to revive community life, requiring "some sort of galvanizing stimulus" to counter fatal despair.

The school had to reach out to the community because the "education of the young people in the 'art of social living' had to parallel the education of the entire community in the same direction." The school staff faced a myriad of community problems that affected the education of community youth, and

78Italo, p. 413.
79Italo, p. 413.
80CCS mss., Ch. 1, "Corrected Copy," p. 23.
82CCS mss., Ch. 1, pp. 3-4.
83Covello argues this in CCS mss., Ch. 1.
84CCS mss., Ch. 1, pp. 3-5.
85CCS mss., Ch. 1, p. 6.
the school found it could not detach or attack separately any one of these problems. Poverty, housing difficulties, ethnic conflicts, international tensions, community prestige—all were "concomitants of a general problem of maladjustment affecting each of the cultural groups within our East Harlem community." In order to familiarize staff with local conditions, faculty conferences were held outside the school at a number of East Harlem institutions, such as Union Settlement House, Haarlem House, the East Harlem Health Center, and the Neighborhood Music School. Within a few years of its founding, the school's Community Advisory Council coordinated a wide variety of programs and organizations, including several neighborhood clubs, community research bureaus, recreation units, an adult school, a supervised nursery play center, and a neighborhood garden. As Social Studies Department Chairman Harold Fields would later explain, this had a beneficial effect on one set of skeptical school allies, the parents:

A year ago you could not have gotten the parents to come near the school. The parents are [now] part of our responsibilities. We show them that we are trying to improve the conditions of the neighborhood, and now they come to us when they need help. They wanted a play street recently; they asked the school to get it for them, and we got it. An element of confidence has developed that wasn't present before.  

But was this the proper role for a public school? Why should the public school take on the job of this broadened community education? Covello and staff argued for a central role for the public school on essentially four grounds. First, the school was the people's property; as a tax-supported institution it should be to some degree guided by the local community and should do its service. Second, the school had more resources, as well as more contacts with homes in the community, than any other agency. Especially in a poor community like East Harlem, the school's facilities provided some of the few suitable areas for recreation, social life, and civic activities in the area. While the school could not and should not substitute for the home, it did need to draw the home into the school in order to learn how to better serve its students. Third, although private agencies perform an invaluable service, they tended to be narrowly focused, to operate within restricted areas, to reach a limited sector of the community, and to suffer from a lack of coordination with other agencies. The community-centered school could provide the necessary coordination and planning to maximize these private agencies' effectiveness. Finally, the public school, as a non-sectarian and non-partisan institution, accepted "all creeds and favor[ed] none." Yet the school represented the civic and social ideals that should be common among community residents, and these needed to be nurtured in order to shape a finer citizenry.  

The public school, sadly for Covello, had failed truly to accept "frankly and unequivocally, the responsibilities of education in relation to the..."
democratic needs of both the community and the nation as a whole." So serious was this for Covello that he warned of the dire situation this lack of attention to local democratic development had created. This disregard of the democratic development of local communities had so alienated people that they increasingly saw themselves as "mere cogs in the vast and complicated machinery of modern life," a machinery operated by an elite that was little interested in the community's self-expression or social well-being. As a result, indifference or resentment grows, which finds expression usually in either misdirected activity or in a deliberate desire to retard plans for community programs sponsored and brought in from outside the community. An attitude of indifference, which is worse, perhaps, than that of resentment, becomes finally a weight upon the progress of the community.

In order for the local public school to maintain "the essential ideas upon which the great principles of our democracy are founded," it must "find its way back to active and intimate identification with the daily life of its community." Inspired by the examples of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, Covello insisted that the only way to train restless young people for citizenship was to involve them in addressing the real problems of the local community. This at least was what the experience that Lincoln's civic education suggested to Covello. At a time when books were difficult to obtain, and at an age of current high school boys, Lincoln not only read and studied; he also participated as a young member of the community. The wilderness did not allow a theoretical democracy. Citizenship meant knowing what your community needed and carrying your share of the work. The young Lincoln, "a 16 year old boy," was expected to measure up to the demands of the situation the same as the older members of the community. In other words, there was a complete integration of the educational process with the practical life of the community.

This may explain, Covello claimed, the quality of many leaders during that period, and why men with aptitude for leadership were able to measure up to their times and to make great contributions to democracy and to the world, after having first made their contributions to the smaller communities to which each belonged.

Only by cultivating such a problem-solving relationship could the community-centered school fulfill its essential role as a local public institution dedicated to the democratic development of the community. Community-centered schooling rested on the premise that the community is the basic unit of the wider democratic life. By directing the forces of the community, schools...
could operate to "uphold perhaps more comprehensively than any other institution the total democratic way of life." Specifically, the school must operate as a "socializing agency in intercultural relationships and the expansion of the local social world; in the development of community-consciousness and communal cooperative effort" (8); as "a testing ground for leadership ability within the school, and for training community leadership" (11).

In sum, the community school notion translated into five major goals for Benjamin Franklin. First, the school should adequately serve "the community along educational, civic, social, and welfare lines." Second, "communal living" must be restored, "as far as may be possible, in a congested city neighborhood." Third, the school's efforts should create "more harmonious relationships between Americans of foreign stock and older Americans." Fourth, the school must train "local leaders qualified to guide and serve within the community itself in creating the finest background possible for the life of the community as a whole." Finally, the school should systematically coordinate the various efforts in the area so as to develop "a complete neighborhood program." To reach these goals, the school needed to convince the community that the staff was indeed committed to the community's welfare, and was willing to cultivate a reciprocal relationship. The school had to guide the education of the community in order to educate the child, but the school also had to recognize that it was part of the community being educated, a "part of the general educational process." Benjamin Franklin's staff had to show the East Harlem community concrete results, "not lip service but genuine help to the community." In so doing, the staff would demonstrate that "the term 'community centered' implied that the school accepted responsibility for the well-being of the community; that the school was willing to become a friend and neighbor as well as a mentor and guide for its children."

That friendship also meant countering the low self-esteem that many felt in East Harlem, a feeling reinforced by the press. The school, an American institution among many foreign-born neighbors, needed to counter concretely the fatalism that crept into and paralyzed poor communities. No one knew that better than Benjamin Franklin's students. In an article four students wrote describing the community-centered approach at Franklin, they expressed youthful optimism that the school's community programs would

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99The key principles of CCS are derived from statements of the founding principal of BFHS, as well as from the writings of others involved in the school during this period. Leonard Covello described the broad principles of the community-centered school most succinctly in "The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child," his 1944 doctoral dissertation at New York University. Numbers in parentheses refer to the numbers of the principles Covello listed for the community-centered school.

100Covello, "Neighborhood Growth Through the School," 128.

101Ibid.

102Ibid.

103Ibid.

104Ibid.

105Ibid.

106Ibid.

107Ibid.

108Covello notes this fatalism in CCS, Ch. 1.
revitalize the community by addressing its "defeatism," by providing "a feeling of hope and pride."  

Then they would no longer be obsessed with the idea that a community such as East Harlem offers absolutely no means for advancement in the world. For the old, worn-out philosophy of defeatism would give way to a new feeling of optimism and a will to take an active part in improving their conditions.

East Harlem in the Early 1930s—Constraints and Opportunities

The conditions in which community-centered schooling evolved shaped the challenges to which Benjamin Franklin would respond, as well as the opportunities it could seize. The very notion of community-centered schooling, through the people it engaged, grew in a symbiotic relationship with the changing demographics, ethnic relations, intergenerational tensions, cultural richness, dire poverty and local politics of East Harlem in the 1930s. These changing conditions influenced both the community purposes the school staff sought to serve as well as who determined those purposes. For if community-centered schooling in practice were to remain consistent to its principles and definition, both its programs and its ideas had to be shaped, in part at least, by the community in which it functioned. This dialectic was evident at Benjamin Franklin. East Harlem set both the limits and the opportunities that helped to mold the evolving approach eventually known as community-centered schooling.

The people of East Harlem where Benjamin Franklin developed were predominantly poor, unschooled, and immigrant in the early 1930s. The community left varied impressions on those who knew it. One observer only found a neighborhood of debilitating problems. As New York University doctoral student Dorothy Reed put it, East Harlem meant

old brick buildings, row on row, dingy, dreary, drab; wash flying like strings of pennants from the fire-escapes... streets littered with rubbish from push carts... "mash" in dark heaps in the gutter... garbage in piles, thrown from kitchens where heavy, oily fare is prepared for gluttonous gourmands... cellar pool rooms, "drink parlors," many curtained or shuttered, suggestive of their real business; human traffic busy about nothing in this squalid congestion.

Angelo Paúl, a longtime resident, concurred and recalled the bitter flavor of the

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109 Lombardo et al., "Franklin High is Community Centered," 54.

110 Ibid.

111 "The greater part of the entire population of East Harlem is of the poorer class. Occupations are chiefly unskilled laborers, such as milkmen, vegetable vendors, street cleaners, truck drivers, dock hands and all kinds of day laborers; others include store clerks, factory hands, builders, plumbers, plasterers, stone masons, painters, auto mechanics, and a scattering of doctors, teachers, and stenographers. The average wage per week is $26.59." May Case Marsh, "The Life and Work of the Churches of an Interstitial Area" (Ph.D. diss., School of Education, New York University, 1932), 57. Concerning education levels, in 1940 only .06% of the population of two Italian East Harlem health districts had graduated from college. "Schooling of Persons Over 25 Years of Age," table probably compiled by Covello, CP. Cited (without box/file reference) in Gerald Meyer, Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician, 1902-1954 (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 114.

burrowing alleys and tiny, sunless courts, bordered with
crazy tenements, swarming with an unwashed population,
fronted with winding stairways, foul from neglect, the
ragpickers, the laborers, the organ grinders, scores of dirty,
naked children, hundreds of women in ragged clothes and
tawdry finery, make a picture of poverty, neglect, ignorance
and superstition, whose misery and squalor can scarcely
be aquaeled. . . . A tenement built to accommodate sixteen
families, houses over thirty. . . . The rooms are small,
damp, dark, and sunless. The plumbing is bad, the
ventilation abominable, the odors unbearable.113

Another former resident, though, remembered a different East
Harlem, one in which community-mindedness flourished:

You know, at that time it was a different life entirely in
Harlem . . . you lived in a different life there. . . . It's not like
this here, not cutthroat . . . Everybody was friendly . . . you
helped one another . . . Christmas Eve, maybe there were
five floors over there, and you would make the rounds, and
each apartment they would give you a drink and spend
Christmas together. . . . Everybody, they all invited you
in.114

Many residents, including Franklin students, apparently shared the
sense that they inhabited a place on the margins of city life, and history
provided some basis for that impression. Loved or feared, East Harlem had
long been on the periphery of New York City. An area for farming and large
states well into the second half of the nineteenth century, East Harlem had
come, as early as the 1830s, a "retreat for sportsmen and a haven of

private estates and less a region given over to agriculture."115 By the 1860s,
the area's remoteness made it attractive for the dumping of city garbage,
followed by its use as a slaughterhouse district.116 Though still sparsely
populated in the 1870s, the New York and Harlem River Railroads provided
increased access to downtown for East Harlem's few inhabitants. Grading the
avenues, though, had blocked a local creek, leading to an undrained and
smelly salt marsh. As the city expanded further in the 1880s, the
Morgenthau, Belmonts, and Hammersteins slowly sold their lands and moved
on, as the Second Avenue elevated pushed farther north. Tenements sprang
up amidst a densely industrialized East Harlem, and housing quickly
deteriorated as residential density increased to one of the highest in the
city.117 It remained, though, a district that non-residents seldom seemed to
visit.

The sense of living in a distinct community, somehow set apart, was
perhaps enhanced by East Harlem's identity as a haven for a succession of
uprooted or migrant peoples. Ever since the Dutch began to replace
Weckquaesgek Indians, East Harlem had experienced a variety of dominant

113Angelo Patri, "Educational Forces Outside of the Public School, Considered
from the Standpoint of School Administration" (M.A. thesis, Teachers College,
Columbia University, 1904), 11-12.

114Interview with "WS-M-2-70" by Orsi, cited in The Madonna of 115th Street, 3.

115Nels Anderson, "The Social Settlements of a Slum: A Developmental Study
of the East Harlem area of Manhattan Island" (Ph.D. diss., New York University,
School of Education, 1930), iv; Donald Stewart, A Short History of East Harlem


117Mayor's Committee on City Planning, East Harlem Community Study (New
York: Mayor's Committee on City Planning in Cooperation with the Works Progress
Administration, 1937). Published by the Mayor's Committee on City Planning as a
partial report on Project No. 165-97-6037 conducted under the auspices of the
Works Progress Administration; U.S. Census for 1930, Volume 1, Number and
Distribution of Inhabitants; Real Property Inventory, City of New York, Borough of
Manhattan, Residential Report; New York City Housing Authority, U.S. Department
of Commerce, Mayor's Advisory Committee on Real Property Inventory, 1934.
ethnic groups, while always maintaining considerable ethnic diversity. In the mid-nineteenth century, black farmers harvested along today's 130th Street as Irish and Germans clustered in shanty towns along the East River to the south of the Dutch village's whitewashed, clapboard churches. A large Jewish community established itself on Fifth Avenue below 110th Street, alongside a Puerto Rican section across Madison Avenue. By the 1870s, Italians began entering East Harlem largely as strikebreakers to build the First Avenue trolley lines and arrived in greatly increasing numbers after the depression of the 1890s and the city's clean-up efforts in "Little Italy" downtown. By the early 20th century, Italians dominated much of East Harlem, especially west of Third Avenue between 104th and 125th Streets, though by 1930, they too were moving out as Puerto Ricans and African-Americans entered in increasing numbers.

A Challenge to Community: Diversity

Thus, in 1930, while Italian-Americans comprised the largest ethnic group, East Harlem's population drew from a diverse set of several dozen ethnic and racial backgrounds, making the "community" for community-centered schooling a highly variegated entity. Reflecting on the neighborhood of his youth, Commissioner of Immigration Edward Corsi recalled East Harlem in the decade preceding Benjamin Franklin:

Perhaps in few other spots throughout the world are so many races to be found in so small an area. The life in many parts of the Old World is re-enacted here. Were it not for the "flappers" and the "cake eaters" of the younger generation, "Americans" to the core, the illusion would be complete.

Totaling over 100,000 residents, the East Harlem from which Benjamin Franklin principally drew its students broke down the major ethnic and racial groups depicted in Figure 3.

118 Stewart, A Short History of East Harlem; Marsh, "Life and Work of the Churches of an Interstitial Area"; Anderson, "Social Antecedents of a Slum."


121 East Harlem (here) = 1930 and 1940 Census tracts 162, 164, 166, 170, 172, 178, 180, 182, 186, 188, 174, 184. Re: 100,000 figure for 1930: Source = Real Property Inventory, City of New York, Borough of Manhattan, Residential Report; NYC Housing Authority, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Mayor's Advisory Committee on Real Property Inventory, 1934; Covello reported some 400,000 residents, but appeared to treat the entire catchment area for the high school as the basis of this figure; see Leonard Covello, "An Experiment in NY City High School," delivered at PEA meeting, 1934; CP 9/8, p. 3, Balch. Source for Figure 3: Covello, "An Experiment in NY City High School," p. 3.
As Figure 3 indicates, less than a quarter of the residents were born in the United States of U.S.-born parents ("Native/Native"), and despite the area's reputation as "Italian Harlem," less than a quarter of the residents were of Italian background. In fact, nearly two-thirds of East Harlem residents were neither U.S.-born of U.S.-born parents nor of Italian background, but rather from an ethnic mix principally drawing from Irish, German, African-American, Russian, Czech, and Spanish-speaking backgrounds.

Owing to this diversity, Franklin's community-centered schooling would often face the challenge inherent in the fact that most residents did not experience East Harlem as a single community, but rather as a series of distinct contiguous neighborhoods. The neighborhood's internal boundaries reflected the distinct compositions of each block. For example, east of Third Avenue, between East 99th and East 119th Street, was 75-90% Italian in 1930. Crossing Third Avenue, Italian residents dropped to between 10 and 30% of the population; Puerto Ricans dominated between Third and Park, until the largely Jewish blocks of Fifth Avenue were reached. Traveling south on the Second Avenue elevated train, a natural barrier was reached just south of

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122 Here, "of Italian background" means either born in Italy, or born of parents at least one of whom was born in Italy. See WPA Guide maps for designation of East Harlem as Italian Harlem. The Guilds Committee for Federal Writers’ Publications, Inc., The WPA Guide to New York City (New York: Random House, 1938; reprinted 1982).

123 "Irish" refers to "Irish Free" or those from Eire; "Spanish" in 1930 referred to those from Spain, though other Spanish speakers may have been included.

124 Chart entitled "Ratio of Italian Population to Total Population—First and Second Generations, by Health Areas, Borough of Manhattan, New York City," prepared by Casa Italiana Educational Bureau, Columbia University, June 1934, from data of 1930 U.S. Census, Division of Neighborhood Statistics, Research Bureau, Welfare Council, and from maps issued by Topographical Division of the Manhattan Borough President’s Office; also, corresponding tables I, II, III, IV, V.
103rd Street west of Third Avenue, the summit of a steep hill; the hill also indicated a social boundary separating the Irish and German populations to the south. To the north, Mount Morris Park served a similar purpose dividing East and Central Harlem. Both north and south along Third Avenue, the elevated train tracks had long been a social demarcation, "snobs" to the east and "lowlbows" to the west. Even within Italian sections of East Harlem, regional differences from Italy often dictated settlement patterns. For example, those from Bari often ended up on 112th Street, the Samesi moved onto 107th Street, those from Pisceto in the north landed on 106th, while many Calabrians settled on 109th and 111th Streets. While extreme regional consciousness ("campanilismo") had declined somewhat by the 1930s, smaller communities within Italian Harlem remained, taking on characteristics based on local traditions, on class, and on race. The professional classes tended to reside toward 116th Street, for example, while poorer Italians lived to the south, closer to the borders of other ethnic groups.

Understandably, Benjamin Franklin had to face directly the challenge of intercultural relations from the start. Franklin's student body reflected the diversity of the neighborhood. Some 34 different ethnic groups were represented among the students that first entered the school in 1934.

Primary among these groups were Italians, Jews (largely Russian), Irish, Germans, and Slavs, as evident Table 1.

The high school student body clearly reflected both the diversity and divisions of East Harlem. Most students lived near the school, the majority residing east of Fifth Avenue, between East 59th Street and East 142nd Street, with some two-thirds coming from East Harlem proper. Roughly half the students were of Italian working-class background, some 14% Jewish, and the rest chiefly Irish, German, and Slavic. The school also mirrored the deep racial divisions between the various sections of Harlem. While East Harlem close to the high school locations was 95% "Foreign White" and "Native White," neighboring sections of Central Harlem were over 95% "Negro." In its early years, though, only 2% of the Benjamin Franklin High School students were "Negro" and just 4% "Latin American & Spanish."

Differences among the school's three sites—a main building at 108th Street, and two annexes, at 117th and 79th Streets, respectively—illustrated the ethnic settlement patterns of East Harlem. While the 79th and 108th Street sites were of similar sizes, the 79th Street Annex, located 30 blocks...
Table 1
1936 Student Ethnicity by Branch of BFHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Annex</th>
<th>Main Building</th>
<th>Annex</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
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</thead>
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<td>117th</td>
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<td>108th</td>
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<tr>
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<td>335</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>Negro</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>677</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

131 Calculated from "Distribution of Benj. Franklin High School Students," OS Folder 1, Covello Papers; the large category of "others" makes finer analysis difficult.

south in Yorkville, enrolled three times the percentage of Irish students, nearly twice the number of German boys, and less than half the number of Italians. In contrast, nearly 90% of the students at the 117th Street Annex, less than 10 blocks north of the main building and in the heart of Italian Harlem, came from Italian backgrounds. In another light, of all the Italians enrolled at Franklin, only 18% attended at the 79th Street Annex. In contrast, of all the Jewish students, less than 5% attended at the 117th Street Annex. Given the "frontier" status of Third Avenue indicated above, Franklin staff faced the challenge of operating out of three annexes, all east of Third Avenue (see Figure 4).132

This internally-divided community was also changing in two fundamental ways—the total population was declining as the ethnic mix shifted, changing East Harlem's internal frontiers in the process. While New York City's total population had risen to nearly 7 million in 1930, Manhattan, including East Harlem, had dropped below 2 million residents for the first time since 1900, largely owing to movement to the outer boroughs.133 From roughly 1930 to 1940, East Harlem's population shrank dramatically. East Harlem's total population declined by over 11% during the 1930s, continuing a decline from at least the 1920s. It appears that Italians, Russian Jews, Poles, Native-Born Americans, and Germans were most likely to leave East Harlem, and Puerto Ricans and African-Americans most likely to enter.134

132 Ibid.

133 U.S. Census, 1930, Population, Vol. 1, Number and Distribution of Inhabitants.

134 Based on table from Caroline W. Leonard, "A Study of the Settlements of East Harlem," 16-17, as cited in Marsh, "Life and Work of the Churches of an
The drop in East Harlem's population did not happen evenly across ethnic groups, and thus shifted the ethnic and racial balance significantly over the decade. For example, while over 75% of the census tract areas experienced this decline, nearly 90% of the decline in population from 1930 to 1940, or nearly 15,000 residents, occurred east of Third Avenue, in areas overwhelmingly Italian. All census tracts in East Harlem east of Third Avenue continued to lose population in the 1930s. The area immediately surrounding Franklin's main building on 108th Street lost nearly 21% of its population in the decade, or over 3,000 residents. In contrast, all tract increases in population over this period occurred west of Third Avenue, though that half of the neighborhood also experienced a net decline. 135

Thus, just as Franklin's staff was attempting to target the needs of the community in which they served, the target was moving. The changing composition affected who the school would serve, who represented local leadership, and what problems schools should serve. Community-centered schooling demanded a tricky balance: the staff needed to address the needs of a changing set of populations while at the same time not become too identified with any one of them. This balance was being attempted just as the ethnic and racial balance was shifting significantly during the 1930s. West of Park Avenue from East 96th to East 119th Street, large numbers of Hispanics and Blacks entered as Eastern European (especially Russian) Jews, Poles,

135 Census Tract Data on Population and Housing, New York City: 1940. Table C-4: Population by Census Tracts: 1930 and 1940.
Germans, and Irish moved out (see Figure 5). Overall for East Harlem, Hispanics and Blacks moved in as Whites moved out; the White population dropped by some 22,000 residents in ten years, a decline of 16%, while the Black population rose by nearly 5,000 residents, an increase of 27%. Blacks particularly began to move into the northwestern comer of East Harlem, contiguous with Central Harlem, at first locating primarily east of Park Avenue and then as far over as Third Avenue by 1940. In some neighborhood blocks, the changes were dramatic. For example, the 14 blocks west of Park Avenue, between East 112th and 119th Streets, shifted from 57% White to 70% Black during the first decade of Franklin's existence (see Figure 6). And as

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136 Adapted from: Population of New York City, 1930, By Age Groups, Color, Nativity and Sex, Each Health Area, Each Census Tract, and Each Borough, compiled in the Office of the Research Welfare Council of NYC, based on 15th Census of U.S., Bureau of Census; Census Tract Data on Population and Housing, New York City: 1940. Table C-2; Foreign-Bom White Heads of Families By Country of Birth, By Census Tracts: 1940; "Hispanics" here referring to the census categories of "Lat Am (Mexico, West Indies, Central and South America)" (1930 = Mex + Cuba + Other W. Indies + Central & S. America) and "Spain/Port" (just Spain in 1930); see also Sollins, "A Socio-Statistical Analysis of Boys' Club Membership," 49·50 (which also cites "Report of Special investigator S.R. Ussher, Director of the Community Study of East Harlem, September 23, 1932"). As a further example, East River Houses, the first public housing project in East Harlem, went from 83% White at initial occupancy in 1941 to 29% White in June 1958; New York City Housing Authority, Research and Reports Division. Table: "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on 30 June 1958, Federal Program," 7/24/58.

137 Adapted from: Population of the City of New York, 1890-1930, ed. Walter Laidlaw (New York: Cities Census Committee, 1932), Table 20, Population of NYC, 1930, by Color, Nativity, Sex, and Age by Census Tracts, Statistical Areas, and Boroughs, etc. (165, 174, 184); Census Tract Data on Population and Housing, New York City: 1940, prepared under the supervision of Dr. Leon E. Truesdell, Bureau of the Census, United States Department of Commerce, Table C-1; "northwestern corner" refers to census tracts 184 & 162; there apparently was some uncertainty concerning the racial/ethnic category into which darker-skinned Puerto Ricans had been placed.
Figure 7 indicates, the racial balance of the Franklin student body changed even more rapidly than the East Harlem community.\textsuperscript{138}

The demographic shifts generated new concerns for Franklin's staff. The new residents, especially the young men, often came into conflict along their contested borders, particularly between Third Avenue and Park Avenue, areas in which both Hispanics and Italians showed relative gains as the Irish, Poles, Germans, and (Russian) Jews relocated elsewhere. The stone wall which carried the elevated tracks of the New York Central Railroad only opened for pedestrians at intersections, and thus became known as the "Chinese Wall" for its role as a border within East Harlem. Where the wall ended, at East 111th Street, open air markets flourished beneath the elevated tracks, marking the frontier further north.\textsuperscript{139}

At times, the tensions along borders broke out into open conflict, as in the Fall of 1938 when a series of clashes occurred between Italian and Puerto Rican youths. On the night of 15 October 1938, Frank Perez and a group of friends chased down three Italians who they felt were trespassing into a Puerto Rican section of East Harlem on East 110th Street, in this case crossing west of the "deadline" Park Avenue. The Italian youths sought refuge in Elesio Crespo's grocery store to little avail, as Perez and company hurled "missiles" through the glass windows of the store. The next night perhaps a hundred Italians and Puerto Ricans skirmished three blocks down, also between Park and Madison, tossing garbage and stones from windows,

\textsuperscript{138} Based on materials in CP 49/2.

\textsuperscript{139}Social Base Map—Local Neighborhoods, New York City 1931 (East Harlem), prepared under the direction of Frederic M. Thrasher, Department of Educational Sociology, New York University, 1932.
heaving chimney bricks from rooftops, and eventually battling it out with fists in the streets until police squads saturated the area. The following night when a young man crossed Park Avenue, he was asked if he were Italian; after answering "yes," he was hit in the head and stabbed in the chest with a knife. Hours later, Italian youths entered the heart of Puerto Rican territory and smashed up the Asturias Pool Room on Fifth Avenue and the cigar store next door. By 18 October, some 100 police, including 14 mounted officers, patrolled the area.87

Ethnic tensions in East Harlem never existed in a vacuum and responded to broader changes in intergroup relations in the United States and abroad; non-local forces shaped local community events. Foreign conflicts rippled into East Harlem, often aggravating tense relations between different groups. Those working in intercultural relations warned of how recent international crises might affect intergroup tensions in the local community, further complicating the school's work in such a diverse community. The Franklin staff was urged to investigate how "Hitler's war on Jews affects relations between Germans and Jews," especially once the presence of the Christian Front, a fervently anti-Communist and anti-Semitic group, was detected in Yorkville.140 "Very lately," Covello warned in early 1939, "I and


140 'Tentative Plans for Work in New York City High Schools," DuBois Papers, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, p. 1; Leonard Covello,
others in the community have received information that leads us to believe there is a definitely organized movement to create differences among our people. This must not be allowed to happen.

The Italo-Ethiopian War further fueled tensions between Blacks and Italians, especially on the border areas between Central Harlem and East Harlem. As Covello recalled, the repercussions of international tensions had to be taken into account:

The Ethiopian War had raised the question of tensions between Negro and Italian; and the persecution of Jews by Hitler raised questions of tensions between Germans and Jews, particularly in Yorkville. The Christian Front was active in the lower Bronx and in Yorkville. Our boys lived in this atmosphere.

Even when not the primary cause of outbursts, such international and domestic conflicts added a bitter edge to events in areas like East Harlem. For example, on the afternoon of 19 March 1935, after rumors spread in Harlem that a shoplifting young Black man had been beaten by employees of the Kress 5 and 10 Cent Store on 125th Street, rioting broke out in Harlem and continued into the early morning hours. Nearly 1,000 police patrolled the streets; some 100 Blacks and Whites were shot, beaten, or clubbed. Storeowners pleaded with Governor Lehman for military protection, while whitewashing their store windows with signs: "This shop is run by COLORED people" and "This store employs Negro workers." Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., assistant pastor at Abyssinian Church, attributed the outbursts primarily to the lack of employment of Negroes in Harlem stores, but noted that the Scottsboro case and the Abyssinian trouble were contributing factors. As a result, claimed Powell, in the midst of their anger, Blacks recalled the "Italian affront to Abyssinia" and then went on to wreck every Italian grog shop they could find in Harlem.

Later that same year, on 3 October, some 1,200 police were placed on special duty in Harlem and Brooklyn "following the outbreak of trouble between Italian-Americans and Negroes in Harlem and Brooklyn . . . as a result of the Italo-Ethiopian hostilities." Blacks picketed the King Julius General Market, occupied by an Italian butcher, and vegetable shops at 118th Street and Lenox Avenue; scuffles outside the markets brought in police. Across from the local police station in Harlem, a man stayed after the crowds had cleared and slowly waved the red, orange, and green flag of Ethiopia.

The Italo-Ethiopian conflict appeared to exercise an appreciable effect upon the attitudes of Negroes and Italians toward one another, and the racial theorists of fascist countries, abetted by their friends here, most probably have had some effect upon the attitudes toward the Jewish group.


Covello, Outline notes, CP 51/19, p. 1.

Reminiscences, CP 51/21, p. 3.

141Covello, Outline notes, CP 51/19, p. 1.

142Reminiscences, CP 51/21, p. 3.

143"Police End Harlem Riot; Mayor Starts Inquiry; Dodge Sees a Red Plot," New York Times, Thursday, 21 March 1935, pp. 1, 16.


145Ibid.

146Committee for Racial Cooperation, Benjamin Franklin High School, New York, "Building Concepts of Racial Democracy," in Americans All—Studies in Intercultural Education (Washington, D.C.: Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction of the National Education Association, 1942), 52; the Committee included Covello, Lee Lombard (English teacher) as chair, Louis Relin (English
Fascism's rise on the international scene further aggravated intergroup tensions within East Harlem and also split those within ethnic groups. During a particularly bitter battle within the Sons of Italy during the 1920s, Congressman La Guardia and State Senator Salvatore Cotillo led a split within the New York State organization of the Sons of Italy from the national body and established the anti-Fascist American Sons of Italy Grand Lodge. Luigi Antonini, president of Local 89, the Italian Press and Waist Makers Union of the ILGWU, spoke out strongly against fascism in weekly radio talks. But at least during the Italo-Ethiopian War, most East Harlem Italians probably sympathized with the Mussolini regime, as reflected by the pro-fascism stance of II Progresso, the dominant Italian-language newspaper in the city. And when Vito Marcantonio, local congressman and avid supporter of Benjamin Franklin High, came out strongly against fascism at a Madison Square Garden rally in 1936, fascist supporters burned Haile Selassie in effigy on Marcantonio's lawn in East Harlem. Alarmed by events in Germany since the early 1930s, Jews in New York City expressed concerns regarding the spread of fascism and anti-Semitism in the United States. These concerns helped convince the New York City Board of Education to mandate assemblies in all schools, stressing "tolerance and freedom for all men," roughly one month after Kristallnacht in Germany.

But the international events that often stirred the embers of ethnic and racial tensions also brought many lives together in richly rewarding encounters. One Franklin student, Irving Danowitz, had come to East Harlem in 1931 after escaping the pogroms in Poland. While he found "some minor racial prejudices" in America, he felt that "as a whole the American people were too busy to give prejudice any consideration. Jews, Italians, Irishmen and Negroes worked together with a remarkable feeling of equality." Ten years old, he spent his first school days among 6-year-olds at P.S. 171 down the street from his new home, trying to read simple English words off cardboard sheets. He recalled years later the education he received through his first friend in the United States, Salvatore Toriere:

Sal was my age and was always a close friend, for both of our families shared the same fire escape. Many a night we would sit on the fire escape conversing in our native languages. The result was that I learned my first English


148 The Guilds Committee for Federal Writers' Publications, Inc., The Italians of New York City (New York: Random House, 1939), 124; Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict, 76-84; Herzog, Herta. Feeling Among Four Minority Groups in New York City – Mayoral Election as a Test Situation (New York: Bureau of Applied Social Research, 1941). If Progresso came out against fascism in September 1941; Bayor, p. 120.

149 Personal Papers—Biographical Notes (apparently interview notes with Mrs. Marcantonio), Vito Marcantonio Papers, New York Public Library, Box 74, p. 1; also cited in Meyer, Vito Marcantonio, 116.


151 Irving Danowitz, "The Story of Irving," CP 51/10, pp. 4-5; the autobiographical sketch was written for Lee Lombard's English class in 1937, and later became a part of the English Intercultural program. Memo from Lee Lombard to Dr. Covello, 3/7/50, CP 51/10.
from him, and he learned a great deal of Jewish from me.152 Whether on fire escapes or in classrooms, many East Harlem youth sat between two worlds. Children of immigrants or young immigrants themselves, they were often pulled between the new U.S. culture and the culture of their parents. The public school represented the former and was thus viewed as both the promise of a new life and a threat to an old one. Franklin's young men, seeking acceptance in a different world, could feel ashamed of looking or seeming too foreign. Parents, reminders to their sons of their foreign roots, feared the threat U.S. culture posed to their family life and their ability to control their children; the school stood as the most visible sign of that danger.153 Franklin students often found themselves living between two worlds, not quite in either, alienated from both. Many contemporary observers posited a link between this alienated second generation and juvenile delinquency.

Covello, who hid the Italian bread of his sandwiches while a Columbia student, saw the tough challenge that this intergenerational tension posed for Benjamin Franklin and for the social control of juvenile delinquency in East Harlem.154 In describing the community-centered mission of Franklin, Covello summarized the dangerous dynamic affecting the second generation's education. The emotional conflict experienced by students with parents who "still have both feet planted firmly and deeply in centuries of European tradition and custom" often resulted in a feeling of scorn and shame in the children of the foreign-born because of the pressure of adverse opinion from without their own racial group. This often produces an antisocial attitude that is dangerous to the boy and dangerous for the community. This antisocial attitude is largely the fertile breeding ground for the crime and delinquency that present such a disturbing problem for school and society.155

A Challenge to Community-Poverty

Acute poverty contributed to this "breeding ground." Benjamin Franklin staff sought to address not only the needs of a constantly shifting, culturally diverse population, but of a community that suffered intensely from the dire social and economic problems afflicting the city in 1930. A central concern for years, the dilapidated state of East Harlem housing only worsened as residents with means took advantage of expanding subway lines and moved to the Bronx, Astoria, and other outlying areas. Many sweatshops replaced the larger housing units, as few existing residents could afford the rent of these larger quarters; by December 1931, the "totally unemployed men" reached 45% of the population in East Harlem, an increase of 100% in one year.156 Population density worsened the housing conditions further;

152bid., 5.
154Covello, The Heart is The Teacher, 70.
156Status of Employment in East Harlem Families; data collected by field staff of the East Harlem Nursing and Health Service, 1 January 1 1932; cited in Sollins, "A Socio-Statistical Analysis of Boys' Club Membership," p. 53; the report further stated that "in December, 1931, our standards regarding regular work had decreased to the point where any man who had two to three days work a week was considered as regularly employed" (original emphasis, p. 2).
between 4,400 and 4,500 people inhabited each block. While desirable housing remained, especially the farther one moved from the contaminated and noisome East River, the area as a whole featured congested tenements, with several families living in "long, dark stairways and hallways, without windows for fresh air and sunlight." The combination of inadequate water supply above the second floors, toilets located in the halls, and poor janitor service produced living spaces that were "filthy, damp, dark and unsanitary." Most East Harlemites lived in "old law" flats, built prior to 1905, of two to five rooms, with no direct sunlight in at least two of those rooms. Most residents depended on gas stoves and bathed in the kitchen sink and set tub.

Efforts were well underway in 1930 for the remodeling of the worst of the tenements, but progress was inevitably slow. In order to establish its credibility in the community, therefore, Franklin staff took on the housing problem from the start, initiating the Housing Committee as one of the first school-community committees in 1935 and hosting a housing exhibit at the school during its first year. It soon took on the coordination of a campaign to bring public housing to East Harlem, achieving federal approval in 1939.

East Harlem suffered the health consequences of its physical conditions and poverty, further impeding Franklin's educational efforts. In 1930, the neighborhood ranked first in New York City in its rate for infectious diseases such as typhoid fever, measles, scarlet fever, diphtheria, whooping cough, influenza, and pneumonia. The infant mortality rate was third highest in the city, 75 per 1000 births, as opposed to 56 for the city as a whole. Also third highest were mortality rates for tuberculosis and pulmonary tuberculosis, as well as for venereal disease; only Central Harlem and the Lower West Side ranked ahead of East Harlem in these areas. Again, Benjamin Franklin worked closely with community agencies in order to address these health consequences. For example, staff from the East Harlem Health Center, a

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157 Social Base Map—Local Neighborhoods, New York City 1931 (East Harlem), prepared under the direction of Frederic M. Thrasher, Department of Educational Sociology, New York University, 1932; Census Tract Data on Population and Housing, New York City: 1940. Table C-4; Population By Census Tracts: 1930 and 1940; Real Property Inventory, City of New York, Borough of Manhattan, Residential Report; NYC Housing Authority, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Mayor's Advisory Committee on Real Property Inventory, 1934.

158 Cimiluca, "Natural History of East Harlem at the Present Day," 4; cited in Marsh, "Life and Work of the Churches of an Interstitial Area."

159 Ibid.

160 East Harlem Nursing and Health Service, "A Historical Sketch," 9-10; cited in Marsh, "Life and Work of the Churches of an Interstitial Area."


162 Initial occupancy was completed in May 1941; New York City Housing Authority, Research and Reports Division. Table "Racial Distribution in Operating Projects at Initial Occupancy and on June 30, 1958, Federal Program," 7/24/58; Gerald Meyer, "Leonard Covello and Vito Marcantonio: A Lifelong Collaboration for Progress," Italica—Bulletin of the American Association of Teachers of Italian 62, no. 1 (Spring 1985), 54-68; Covello, Heart is the Teacher, 220; Congressman Vito Marcantonio to Covello, 2 October 1939, CP 58.

pioneer in community health programs and active supporter of the school, worked on the campaign to establish Franklin and contributed to Franklin's programs from the start.\(^{164}\)

Crime had also long plagued East Harlem, as had its reputation as a criminal hotbed. A New York University sociologist Paul Cressey noted that from East Harlem "had come many of New York's youthful gunmen and desperados of recent years."\(^{165}\) Having worked their way up through local street corner gangs, some had ended up "in gang-land's one-way auto rides," while others "graduated" successfully to live "palatially on suburban estates far from the scene of their early activities."\(^{166}\) Homicide rates were high, gangs claimed turf block by block, and organized crime operated throughout the first decades of the century.\(^{167}\) Of particular concern to school officials were the rates of juvenile delinquency; out of 19,039 boys in East Harlem, 443 were arrested in 1930, the sixth highest rate in Manhattan. While officials and observers often attributed high delinquency to high concentrations of the foreign-born, this does not seem apparent from the data these same observers used; most crimes were done by American-born youth.\(^{168}\) Indeed, East Harlem residents had long complained about the inaccuracy of the ethnic criminal stereotypes perpetuated by officials and the media, and that these images tended to aggravate the dangers that did exist.\(^{169}\) Benjamin Franklin students complained of having to lie about their residency in order to have a chance at employment in the city.\(^{170}\)

\(^{164}\) For example, Selina A. Weigel of the East Harlem Health Center served as Secretary of the General Committee to establish the high school; Grace Anderson of the East Harlem Nursing and Health Service (housed in the Center) and member of the Center's Executive Committee, along with Kenneth Widdemer, Executive Officer of the East Harlem Health Center, were on the original "Committee of Twelve" organized to establish Benjamin Franklin; "Committee for the High School-12 Members," CP 18/13.


\(^{167}\) Gerald Meyer refers to Italian Harlem, especially East 116th Street, as "a major Mafia center" and cites David Durk's claim that the area was headquarters for those who processed and distributed over half the heroin in the U.S. from the late 1940s until 1973; see David Durk, The Pleasant Avenue Connection (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 25, 174; cited in Meyer, Vito Marcantonio, 127; see the reference to the gang-controlled "Murder Stable" on East 123rd Street and an East Harlem "overnum by gangs" in Luc Sante, Low Life: Lures and Snare of Old New York (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1991), 222-33.

\(^{168}\) For example, John E. Jacobi, "A Statistical-Ecological Study of Juvenile Delinquency in Manhattan" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, School of Education, 1933), Chs. III, IV, cited in Tilley, "The Boy Scout Movement in East Harlem." 40-42; by Jacobi's own analysis, the worst areas were below 119th Street, east of Third Avenue (1925-27) and west of Park Ave above 110th Street, and he claims that "the rates of delinquency are highest in the areas where the percentages of foreign-born in the population are the highest (with the exception of Negro Harlem)." Yet, neither section cited qualifies as heavily foreign-born. In addition, an analysis of his own data on the "nationality" of male delinquents indicates that 80% of delinquents were "U.S. White," followed by "Others"; no ethnic or racial group totaled more than 4.5% of the total. Another source cited in Sollins, "A Socio-Statistical Analysis of Boys' Club Membership," 46, claims that East Harlem ranked second in male juvenile delinquency among any Manhattan "natural area with a dominantly white population."

\(^{169}\) For example, Covello, Heart in the Teacher, 160, 189, 237-43; other more prosaic dangers not emphasized in press often concerned residents, e.g., the dangers of local car and bus traffic; 15 East Harlem kids died from traffic in the streets in 1927 alone (Cimilluca, cited in Sollins, "A Socio-Statistical Analysis of Boys' Club Membership," 43).

\(^{170}\) Covello applauded the efforts of the school's Placement Counselor and Guidance and Vocational Counselor, Jean Rendell and Elizabeth Roby, respectively, in countering such employer resistance. See Covello, Reminiscences, and autobiographical notes—BFHS years, "Benjamin Franklin High School," CP 20/16, p. 12.
Organizing East Harlem—An Infrastructure

Perhaps owing in part to the daunting social and economic challenges it faced, and in spite of a fiercely private and family-oriented Italian culture, East Harlem enjoyed a considerable tradition of social welfare activity and community organizing efforts. No fewer than 110 mutual benefit societies provided, in addition to recreational and religious activities, death benefits and occasionally sickness and accident benefits to Italian East Harlemites. This tradition directly contributed to Franklin's success by mediating school-community relations, and by forging the intra-community ties upon which community-schooling depended.

Prominent among local organizations and critical to the campaign for a high school in East Harlem was Union Settlement, one of fourteen settlement houses active in East Harlem in 1930. Founded in 1895 by two graduates of Union Theological Seminary across town, Union Settlement provided an extensive athletic program, health clinics, a music school, and a program for the aged. Another active settlement, Haarlem House on 116th Street, had developed out of the Protestant mission of Miss Anne Ruddy, whose Home Garden of the 1890s had so greatly influenced a young Leonard Covello. Haarlem House provided educational and recreational services to the community and served as a valuable training ground for local leaders such as Vito Marcantonio, later Congressman from East Harlem, and Edward Corsi, who served in various posts including Commissioner of Immigration under President Hoover. The East Harlem Health Center, comprised of 21 cooperating agencies housed on 116th Street, pioneered innovative community health programs, services, and materials later copied in other cities. With the cooperation of area churches, synagogues, settlement houses, schools, movie houses, and local businesses, public health campaigns were carried out several times a season, especially seeking to prevent outbreaks of colds, diphtheria, and tuberculosis. Public library branches sponsored story hours and sponsored children's clubs, especially at


172 Meyer claims that there was one society for every 225 males in Italian Harlem in 1935; see Meyer, Vito Marcantonio, 114; other lists in CP, from school's study of community carried out through several departments, and then analyzed by Alexander Stevens and other WPA workers, as described in Covello, Heart is Teacher, 205-206.

173 See Appendix A; also see Sarah Lederman, "From Poverty to Philanthropy: The Life and Work of Mary E. Richmond" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1994).


the Aguilar Branch on 110th Street. The Heckscher Foundation on Fifth Avenue, founded in 1921 by German-born industrialist August Heckscher, served as a recreational center for the neighborhood, boasting a marble pool on the sunlit top floor and one of the finest gymnasiums in the city. Located on the western edge of East Harlem and serving both boys and girls, the Foundation provided free dental clinics, dance classes, music lessons, vocational guidance, employment bureau, and emergency relief, as well as camps outside Peekskill, New York.

Serving as an umbrella group to some 21 local agencies, the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies coordinated various neighborhood efforts in social work, health care, recreation, and education. Chaired by Grace Anderson of the East Harlem Nursing and Health Service, the Council provided a loose network that would prove critical in garnering local support for the establishment of a high school in the area. Selina Weigel, for example, a representative of the Health Shop of the East Harlem Health Center and member of the Executive Committee of the Council, brought together a number of key community leaders during the campaign for the high school and served as Secretary to two key committees of the campaign. As did other local agencies, the Council approved and sent to the Board of Education a resolution recommending establishment of a new high school.

East Harlem further organized itself around a rich and varied tradition of local political associations, clubs, and parties, providing a broad political education to the local community, as well as an organizational infrastructure upon which community-centered schooling could build. At one point a center of Socialist Party strength, East Harlem, and especially the Italian section, lacked an entrenched Tammany machine and resisted loyalty to any single political party. Thus, while the Democratic and Republican parties figured prominently in local politics, the American Labor Party played a strong role as well, joined by the Progressive Party, Progressive Labor Party, Wet Party, Liberal Party, All People’s Party, City Fusion, and Communist Party. Local worker groups such as the powerful Italian Dressmakers Local 89 of the ILGWU brought East Harlemites together for somewhat related reasons, often contributing to local political life. No fewer than eight labor organizations had offices in the community. The International Workers Order’s Italian-speaking lodge published L’Unita del Popolo for local consumption, as its Spanish-speaking lodges addressed sections west of Third Avenue. El Centro Obrero Espanol spread its message through the community via its La Vida Obrera, later re-named La Voz. Of fourteen political clubs serving the public demonstrations were not common in the socially conservative Italian Harlem, local political tradition managed to establish its own rich folklore, including such landmarks as the “Lucky Comer” at 116th Street and Lexington Avenue. Purported to bring good luck to candidates, the corner became a public gathering space and evoked shared political symbolism and memories among East Harlemites.

Much of this interpretation depends upon Meyer, Vito Marcantonio; also consulted were Salvatore John LaGumina, Vito Marcantonio: The People’s Politician (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1969), and Alan Schaffer, Vito Marcantonio: Radical in Congress, Men and Movements (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1966).
neighborhood, that of Fiorello La Guardia, eventually assumed by Vito Marcantonio, dominated the local political community. A former student of Covello's and a one-time protégé of La Guardia, Marcantonio developed a political association that was deeply involved in the resolution of local residents' concerns, a fine-tuned variation of a padrone system. A former East Harlem parish minister confessed that Marcantonio's organization stood out in its service to the community and in the respect it gained for its ability to solve local problems. While the "God of the Churches" might stay in "celestial splendor far above the earth," claimed a former minister of the East Harlem Protestant Parish, "the God of this life is Vito Marcantonio and his kingdom is the American Labor Party. Obviously, the God who can get the plumbing fixed becomes the center of faith for the great majority."179

Nevertheless, many East Harlemites did organize themselves around church or synagogue life, though these institutions' involvement in the local community seems to have been declining. In a detailed study of area religious institutions, May Case Marsh analyzed the 33 churches and synagogues that operated within a 180-block area of East Harlem, or roughly one every 5-1/2 blocks.180 Overall, she found institutions founded in an earlier era that were unable to maintain congregations as the community changed. The churches appeared to cooperate minimally with other community agencies, and even


180Marsh, "Life and Work of the Churches of an Interstitial Area." The institutions included Eastern Orthodox (2), Jewish (3), Baptist (3), German Evangelical Synod of North America (1), Lutheran (5), Methodist Episcopal (4), Non-Denominational (1), Presbyterian (1), Protestant Episcopal (3), Reformed Church in America (1), Seventh Day Adventist (1), and Roman Catholic (8).

less with each other, concerned primarily with an individualistic gospel and the internal conditions of their institutions. Concluding that "the churches of East Harlem bear little relationship to the life and welfare of the community," Marsh questioned the nature of the community dynamic that this conclusion might suggest. While many of the primary social institutions in poor urban centers appeared to be breaking down, it was difficult to determine to what degree "this breakdown is a symptom of community disorganization or to what extent community disorganization is a symptom of the malfunctioning of such primary institutions." Marsh concluded that "there is a process of mutual influence and interaction which tends to accelerate the process of social disorganization."181

In its informal organization, East Harlem was also a place busy with the quotidian distractions, the local markets, and the petty amusements of a crowded urban neighborhood. Over 500 candy stores dotted the area, serving as get-together spots for youth, while selling sweets, the latest news, and school supplies; more than a few housed the occasional bookie for the numbers racketeers. A drink could be had on almost every corner, with some 156 bars for about as many blocks in East Harlem, and seemingly countless social clubs. Over 200 tailors, nearly 300 doctors, and almost 400 restaurants provided services within easy walking distance. Over two dozen junkyards provided youth with adventures and dangers, too often in easy walking distance as well. Nearly a dozen funeral parlors proffered the final service to local residents. It was a vast array of educational influences and local

181Ibid., 608.

182Ibid.
organizations, in many ways a complete world for the residents within its 200 city blocks, one stubbornly resistant to simple characterization.183

Applying Old Lessons at a New Moment—The Campaign

The history and character of East Harlem not only shaped the evolution of the community-centered schooling approach taken there, but also guided the founding and development of its institutional base, Benjamin Franklin High School. In large part, Benjamin Franklin grew out of the concerns of a dedicated group of East Harlem activists for the educational needs of its community. The group argued that a high school could address both immediate and long-term community concerns, coordinating efforts of the network of institutions already operating in East Harlem. In the short term, the high school could help reduce juvenile delinquency, a considerable worry in Depression-era New York City, by relieving the shortage of high school facilities for boys.184 No high school for boys existed on Manhattan's East Side north of 15th Street, nor south of 168th Street in the Bronx.185 The

activists, led by Covello, argued that the current overcrowding of schools and the long distance East Harlem boys had to travel to existing schools encouraged youth to leave school early. Unable to find work, these boys "turn to the street for recreation and activity which is often of an undesirable nature."186 In a letter to Associate Superintendent Harold Campbell, Covello argued forcefully that "I can positively state that the beginnings of many a criminal could have been turned in the right direction if they had been kept in school doing work in which their interests were satisfied."187

In the long term, a new high school would aid in the overall development of East Harlem by serving as the unifying center for a fractious community life. The school would "coordinate and extend the limited facilities now available for the greater benefit of the children and the community."188 The high school would work with existing social agencies such as Haarlem House, Heckscher Foundation, Boys' Club, and Union Settlement, which were already engaged in "extra curricular educational work with boys of high school age."189 Beyond the benefits to local youth, the school would serve to bring all the members of a diverse community together. "The establishment of such a high school in this district," claimed the flyer the campaign group distributed,
"would aid in unifying and organizing a community social spirit and improving its civic life."190

The discussion given to the high school's expanded role in the community reflected the heightened profile of the high school in the early 1930s, owing to its dramatic growth during the prior decades. While elementary registration growth slowed, high school enrollment shot up 1200% between 1900 and 1930, all the more stunning since public high schools were only first authorized to be established in Manhattan in 1896. Owing to the "greater holding power of the schools" and reinforced by a lack of options during the Depression, day high school enrollment jumped nearly 18,000 students in a single year, from March 1932 to March 1933. 191

Thus, the campaign for a boys high school in East Harlem coincided with a general city-wide need to address overcrowded high school facilities, if not also a need to re-assess the role for secondary education. In many ways, it was a moment "propitious for radical innovations" in New York City schooling.192 The Depression led many to challenge old assumptions about the role of public institutions, including the public school. Many educators "speculated... about a boldly transformed social order... [and] were willing to listen to different voices and entertain prospects of change that had been unthinkable in the profession only a few years before."193 The need to build new high schools meant at least the chance that some new ideas for schooling might be realized. Recent New Deal funding had begun to provide resources outside the normal bureaucratic channels, allowing a new flexibility for experimentation.194 Finally, a state report published in 1933, while acclaiming many of the achievements of the city schools, recommended dramatic improvements in New York schools, including a vastly increased guidance program and a greater attention to "adapting curriculum programs to the individual needs of the children."195 In addition, "teaching ability... should be evaluated not in academic terms but in growth in personality, character, social responsibility and those other characteristics which are essential to the desirable citizen."196 Benjamin Franklin's organizers would benefit from such a receptive climate.

The nature of the East Harlem campaign, as well as its eventual success, reflected a community maturing in its organizational development and political clout. In particular, the establishment of Benjamin Franklin reflected the political power New York City Italians had obtained, a change of________

190CP, Ch. IV, "The Benjamin Franklin High School," 18/13, p. 2.
194Tyack et al., Public Schools in Hard Times, Ch. 3; John David Millett, "The Works Progress Administration in New York City" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1938), published for the Committee on Public Administration of the Social Science Research Council by Public Administration Service, Chicago, 1938.
196ibid., 42-45.
leadership and direction within the Board of Education, and the growing ability of the school's advocates to take advantage of and learn from changes in New York City politics. Building upon a tradition of local organizing efforts, area activists were already working to establish a high school in East Harlem prior to March 1931, when a committee of residents met to draft a letter of appeal to public officials. But only after La Guardia became mayor in 1934, with his greatest percentage of support from East Harlem, did the long effort to establish Benjamin Franklin come to fruition.

From his earlier successful effort to gain recognition of Italian as a qualifying foreign language, Covello had learned not only about the needs of the Italian community, but also about how to coordinate a campaign within the school system. He would later follow a similar strategy in pushing for a high school in East Harlem. In his effort to convince the Board of Education to allow Italian to be used for foreign language credits, Covello presented new research, tapped Italians prominent in various professions, coordinated with interested organizations, and generated substantial grassroots support.

Tapping a favorable climate after Italy's participation as an ally in World War I, a group of Italians and Americans formed the well-financed Italy America Society in 1918. Since a chief argument against recognizing Italian was the claim that it would not help students in their application to colleges, the Society sponsored a survey of the teaching of Italian across the United States.

The survey, headed by Mario Cosenza, then Director of Townsend Harris High School and later Dean of Brooklyn College, indicated that hundreds of colleges accepted credit in Italian towards admissions, as well as taught Italian language and culture courses. Cosenza also served as chairman of the Education Committee of the Order of the Sons of Italy (Ordine Figli d'Italia), the "largest and most influential" of Italian benevolent and fraternal societies. Along with Covello, secretary of the Education Committee, Cosenza tapped New York State Senator Salvatore A. Cotillo, an East Harlem boy and then Grand Master of the Order Sons of Italy and chairman of its Committee on Education. In order to present the case for Italian instruction before the Board, Covello came armed with "the Cosenza survey" and the support of such groups as the Italian Educational League and the Italian Teachers Association. After a short speech by Cotillo at its meeting of 24 May 1922, the Board of Education unanimously passed the resolution Covello and Cosenza had written. Now they needed to find schools, especially junior high schools, willing to implement a new Italian curriculum.

Membership was roughly 25% Italian-American; see Peebles, Leonard Covello, 164-68, on the Coordinated Program of Italian Educational Activities; the Italy America Society was later adopted into Casa Italiana, Columbia University; Roger Howson, "Historical Survey of the Casa Italiana," William F. Russell Papers, Folder "Casa Italiana," Box 10, p. 1 (Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University).

198Mario Emilio Cosenza, "The Study of Italian in the United States," Foreword by Dr. John H. Finley (New York: Italy American Society of New York, 1924).

199Federa( Writers Project, The Italians of New York, 106.

200Minutes of 24 May 1922 meeting of the Board of Education, Journal of the Board of Education of the City of New York, Vol. 1 (New York: Hall of the Board of Education, 1922), 1009-11; noted in the testimony was the fact that Washington Irving High School and DeWitt Clinton High School already offered Italian as a first-year elective to some 399 students.

201The Board had passed a regulation stating that if a group of at least 60 students requested Italian as an elective that they had the right to have the courses taught in their school. Also see First Annual Report, The Committee on Education of the Order Sons of Italy, Grand Lodge State of New York, 1921-22, p. 2.
In order to find a host school, Covello tapped further into the network of New York City Italians he had skillfully used to pass the Board resolution. Italian East Harlem, with an Italian State Senator and Italian U.S. Congressman, appeared the reasonable district in which to start, and the school Covello himself attended, P.S. 83, appeared to be the logical first choice. P.S. 83's principal knew Cosenza from the CCNY Alumni Association; the Assistant Superintendent of Junior High Schools had taught Covello when he was a student at P.S. 83. With the help of groups such as the Circolo Italiano of De Witt Clinton and Italian Teachers Association, Covello and others waged an educational campaign through school assemblies, Italian Festivals, appeals by Congressman La Guardia, State Senator Cotillo, and others. Volunteers visited the homes of families whose sons were eligible to study Italian, urging them to request Italian at P.S. 83. Covello later recalled that the volunteers had "forged the first, very weak, tenuous link between a school and some of its homes—a heart-warming experience, but small, insignificantly small in the face of its tremendous possibilities."202

A new high school, on the other hand, targeted to the particular needs of the community did offer tremendous possibilities. A drive similar to the Italian language course campaign evolved in the effort to establish Benjamin Franklin between 1931 and 1934. A founding steering committee grew out of a group of interested schoolmen and professionals, in which four individuals seemed to have been critical—Leonard Covello, Supervisor of Italian at De Witt Clinton; Angelo Patri, nationally known educator and Principal of P.S. 45 in the Bronx; Anthony Pugiiese, school system veteran and District Superintendent at the time; and Mario Cosenza, then Dean of Brooklyn College.203 The group they led wrote letters, circulated petitions, called public meetings, held conferences with school officials, and passed resolutions from local organizations to the Board of Education. New research from a massive three-year study of East Harlem by New York University, the Boys' Club Study, provided ample research into local conditions and local needs.204 The study "was a potent factor in our argument," claimed Covello, a member of the steering committee, as it provided data to prove that by working closely with students through the school, developing leadership, recreational programs, social awareness, we might be able to counteract disintegrating forces at work on the streets and even in the homes.205

The committee eagerly worked to gain the support of those with the "pull" needed to convince the Board of Education. Prominent Italian political figures such as Congressman Fiorello La Guardia, Vito Marcantonio, New York State Supreme Court Judge Salvatore A. Cotillo, and Judge John Freschi

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202See correspondence regarding the establishment of Benjamin Franklin, especially in CP 32/1; e.g., Mario E. Cosenza, Leonard Covello, Angelo Patri, and Anthony Pugiiae, "High School for Boys in East Harlem," petition on letterhead of Casa Italiana Educational Bureau, 24 February 1934.


205Covello, Heart in the Teacher, 182.
of General Sessions Court lent support to the effort. Covello solicited Cotillo's support from the start, and La Guardia headed a visit to Dr. Harold Campbell, then acting Director of the High Schools Division, as early as the fall of 1931. Local agencies and foundations were soon brought into the campaign. A. Warren Smith, Superintendent of the Jefferson Park Boys' Club in East Harlem, was already keeping his Trustees up to date on the campaign in May of 1931, and offered any support or contacts they might be able to offer. In the spring of 1932, Miriam Sanders from Harlem House arranged to have Covello present the case for the high school to the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies. Selina Weigel of the East Harlem Health Center served as Secretary of the committee and played a critical liaison role in marshaling local agency support. Public meetings held throughout the campaign further galvanized local enthusiasm for the school.

The campaign also revealed the committee's ability to shift with the changing political climate in New York City. For example, Covello and others especially targeted one Italian with significant political and economic influence, Generoso Pope, to speak directly to the President of the Board, Dr. George Ryan. Pope, publisher of the largest circulation Italian daily, *Il Progresso Italio-Americano*, was also known as the "sand king"; he owned the largest construction material company in the world, the Colonial Sand and Stone Company, and was a benefactor to various Italian-American organizations. Covello began cultivating Pope's support for the high school in October of 1931, and provided him letters and materials in order to facilitate his lobbying of Dr. George Ryan, President of the Board of Education, and Dr. Howard Campbell, now Associate Superintendent in charge of high schools. Pope's assistance apparently helped convince the Board to appropriate funds in 1932 for the establishment of the high school, and to provide for an additional principal position in 1933 for the 1934 budget. Campbell indicated that a word from Pope to Ryan and Mayor O'Brien would cement the deal. Apparently Pope wrote Ryan, but never spoke to him personally, and Ryan may have simply passed Pope's letter along. By July 1933, Covello had become frustrated that such a deal would not happen at least until the next year, expressing to Cosenza that "it is a shame that we cannot put this thing over, especially as it is in our grasp. As a race, with exceptions, we do not seem to be able to strike opportunely."

La Guardia's election as Mayor in November of 1933 brought the school within closer grasp. "The possibility of establishing a cosmopolitan high school in East Harlem at this time is very good," claimed Covello a month later. Adjusting to the new political situation, the committee apparently

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207Sanders to Covello, 5 April 1932, CP 32/1; agency list on high school resolution, "A High School for Boys in East Harlem," CP 32/1. (Miriam Sanders married Vito Marcantonio, later Congressman from East Harlem, in 1925.)

208For example, Pope was Honorary President of the Italian Festa at De Witt Clinton High School in 1933, sponsored by Covello's Department of Italian. Copy of program flyer, Appendix O, Peebles biography.

209Covello to Pope, 9 October 1931, 10 June 1932, 26 June 1933; CP 32/1.

210Covello to Cosenza, 1 July 1933, CP 32/1.

211Covello to Pugliese, Cosenza, Patri, 7 December 1933, CP 32/1.
eased their lobbying of Pope, whose pro-Tammany Democrat Progresso had not supported La Guardia in his earlier bid for mayor, and quickly sought out the mayor-elect's support. La Guardia had lobbied Campbell for the school two years earlier, and La Guardia's election meant that a number of friends of the committee gained power. Vito Marcantonio, a student in Covello's first Italian class at De Witt Clinton, assumed La Guardia's Congressional seat and became a critical supporter of Benjamin Franklin. 212

Those sympathetic to a new innovative high school gained authority through a series of key personnel changes at the Board of Education after La Guardia's election. Harold G. Campbell, a favorite of the Progressive Education Association (PEA), became Superintendent of Schools in January 1934, a "key landmark in the triumph of progressivism." 213 Characterized as a "conservative in education," Campbell nonetheless led the "labyrinthic city school system . . . hurtling along the road long mapped out for it by the PEA." 214 Dr. John Tildsley became Acting Head of the High School Division. Tildsley knew Covello from when Tildsley first hired him to teach at De Witt Clinton in 1920. After a flurry of last-minute lobbying by Cosenza, the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies, Marcantonio, and numerous East Harlem organizations, the Board of Superintendents passed a resolution recommending the establishment of the East Harlem high school for boys on May 10. 215 Shortly thereafter, the Board of Education formally approved the establishment of the high school. 216

Two weeks later, Covello led Tildsley on several informational tours of East Harlem. Tildsley wanted to hear everything Covello had in mind about Benjamin Franklin, and to "see the neighborhood through your eyes and the eyes of the people who live there." 217 After several nights of walks, they then sat down together to frame the "first statement as to the aims and the scope of the school for release to the press," in which Tildsley would urge only those teachers "imbued with the pioneer spirit in experimental education" to apply. 218

Owing to his leadership in coordinating the high school campaign and his extensive school experience, Covello appeared the logical choice to most observers, though six or seven other candidates did apply. Recommendations for his appointment came in from De Witt Clinton, Casa Italiana, the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies, Professor Frederic Thrasher of New York University, the Boys' Club in East Harlem, Hamilton House, the Conference on

212Gerald Meyer, "Leonard Covello and Vito Marcantonio," 56; according to Miriam Sanders, Marcantonio's wife: "He [Marc] was singularly fortunate in becoming associated with Covello. This friendship is continuing today. They live in adjacent houses on 116th Street and still see life as one. In the words of Tennyson they are 'twinned as horse's ear and eye.' . . . Marc was the chief instrument in establishing this school, vigorously promotion (sic) it after La Guardia, then mayor, had given it up." Personal Papers--Biographical Notes (apparently interview notes with Mrs. Marcantonio), Vito Marcantonio Papers, New York Public Library, Box 74, p. 2.

213Cohen, Progressives and Urban School Reform, 159.

214School and Society 39 (30 January 1934), 80-81; Cohen, Progressives and Urban School Reform, 160.


216Ibid. The school was formally named Benjamin Franklin High School the following month; Minutes of 27 June meeting of the Board of Education, Journal of the Board of Education of the City of New York, Vol. 1 (New York: Hall of the Board of Education, 1934), 1065-66.

217Covello, Heart is the Teacher, 183.

218Ibid.; interview with Covello, cited in Peebles, Leonard Covello, p. 191; last quote of press release from The New York Sun, 7 June 1934.
Immigration Policy, the Division on the immigrant of the National Conference of Social Work, and numerous other East Harlemites and local agencies. Though Covello had been notified during the summer, the Board of Education officially appointed him to be the first Italian-American high school principal in the United States on 12 September 1934.

Leonard Covello had his own reasons for wishing to head up the new East Harlem high school. In addition to working with the large Italian community of East Harlem, the school would have to work with the shifting variety of ethnic and racial groups in the area, to "test in a living situation, the oft discussed idea that it was possible for people of different origins, coming from many countries with differences in language and customs, to work together to improve community living." By "creating a united front," the school could now apply what had been learned through research such as the Boys' Club Study. But a matter of the heart also compelled Covello. After some 22 years as a teacher, he would finally be coming home to the neighborhood in which he had grown up, "for home is and always will be where you start." Reflecting later on his visit to what would be the first main building of Benjamin Franklin High School, Covello recalled:

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219CP 32/1, correspondence file.


221Reminiscences and autobiographical notes by Covello, BFHS years (typewritten), CP 20/16, p. 2.

222Ibid.

223Reminiscences and autobiographical notes; "background for tackling job of Princ & intercultural Program he wanted to do," CP 20/16, pp. 1-2.
Chapter II
COMMUNITY-CENTERED SCHOOLING: THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL ISSUES, IDEAS AND TRENDS

Introduction

On the first morning of the school year in September 1934, Benjamin Franklin High School formally welcomed nearly 2,300 boys at its two locations. Principal Covello and Administrative Assistant Abraham Kroll, who, along with others, had followed Covello from De Witt Clinton High School, had worked through the administrative details of the new school's programs over the summer. Following the "cosmopolitan" model of the time, Benjamin Franklin sought to be "all things to all boys" by offering three main courses for students—one general, one commercial, and one set of "various craft, art and music courses, not vocational but cultural in character." After a core of morning courses in General Education, Day High School students would then concentrate in either pre-professional studies (advanced science, classics, and so on), vocational preparation (automotive shop, ceramics, and the like), or trade subjects (business machines and commercial law, among others) in the afternoon. The staff also designed a series of programs meant to meet the diverse educational needs of the East Harlem community. After regular dismissal at 3:30 p.m., a recreational and educational program began for the younger children in the neighborhood, aided by the cooperation of the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies and the Civil Works Administration. At 7:30 p.m., an evening program for adults began, and included basketball, folk-dancing, painting and music; later, it would emphasize coursework in stenography, language study, and shorthand. The buildings would finally close at 10:00 P.M. Both after-hours programs eventually featured coursework for those unable to attend the Day School, day school makeup courses, and a variety of adult education classes. Finally, The Adult Institute, open four


226Community Education in Metropolitan" in Edward G. Olsen, ed., The Modern Community School (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953), 32-35. It appears that courses were tracked, a combination of testing and guidance counseling. While Covello resented the use of IQ tests owing to concluding inferior innate Italian intelligence, IQ tests were carried out on Franklin students. The entering class appears, in fact, to be above the city norm in this measurement. See "Terman Test Results, June 1934," a memo from Abraham Kroll.


228Ibid.; also see "Benjamin Franklin Community School" in Community Education folder, CP 38/2.
afternoons each week, offered "fourteen courses planned for those who wish
to utilize their leisure time for further study."  

The school-community activities of Benjamin Franklin's early years
ranged from English classes for adult immigrants to converted storefront social
clubs for the neighborhood to detailed social surveys of the community. They
are well worth our further review, even though they have been described by
historian Robert Peebles and others. These programs were more than a
series of innovative projects carried out by talented and committed individuals
reacting to harried and challenging settings. The staff responsible for the
various school-community efforts at Benjamin Franklin intended, at least in the
early years of the school, to put into systematic practice a dramatic and
evolving vision of the public school's role in the educational development of a
democratic community.

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230 An extensive description can be found in Peebles, Leonard Covello;
Covello, Heart is the Teacher; Leonard Covello, The Italians in America: A Brief
Survey of a Sociological Research Program of Italo-American Communities, Bulletin
Number 6 (New York: Casa Italiana Bureau, Columbia University, 1934), and see pp. xxi-xxx for a list of Covello's published articles; David Tyack and Elisabeth
Hansot, Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership, 1820-1980 (New York Basic
1938), 125-163; Edward G. Olsen, ed., The Modern Community School (New York:
Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953), 26-46. See also Thomas John Frontera,
"Leonard Covello's Community Centered School: Italian-American Students at the
Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem, New York, 1934-44" (Ed.D. diss.
Harvard University, 1993); Michael Berkowitz, "Americanization and Ethnicity in an
Italian Community: Immigrants, Education, and Politics in East Harlem, 1920-1941"
(B.A. thesis, Princeton University, 1987). I also wish to acknowledge the
considerable assistance of John Puckett, University of Pennsylvania, for sharing his
extensive familiarity with the Covello Papers, and for the benefit of several of his
unpublished manuscripts on Covello and Benjamin Franklin High School.

Covello, the staff, and local community activists drew upon a heady
mix of issues, trends, and ideas drawn variously from local and translocal
sources, and rooted alternately in civic and pedagogical purposes. In
particular, Franklin staff absorbed the social reconstructionist thought that
emerged during the profound social crisis of the Great Depression, including
its severe "youth problem." Both social demands and fiscal restraint had
contributed to an increased use of schools for broader community activities, a
trend in which Benjamin Franklin would participate. As communities and
schools across the United States increasingly pursued various versions of
"community schooling," Franklin's program distinguished itself as a particularly
activist approach. The community schooling that the staff pursued drew
heavily upon the community coordination movement, "progressive"
pedagogical and curricular trends, and multiple traditions of social research,
including especially the emerging discipline of educational sociology.

Both Chapters II and III will focus on the general, national, and local
trends that informed the broad-ranging discussion of community schooling
Franklin staff engaged in during the early 1930s. Chapter III will focus on
Leonard Covello, first principal and architect of Benjamin Franklin. Together
the two chapters will demonstrate the complexity of the process involved in the
evolution of a distinctive conception of public schooling.

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High School Growth amidst Social Crisis

"The world is on fire, and the youth of the world must be equipped to
combat the conflagration," Teachers College's Harold Rugg argued to the
World Conference of the New Education Fellowship in 1932. The same year his colleague George Counts stunned an annual Progressive Education Association convention with his clarion call for social reconstruction through the schools. Charles Beard, a frequent speaker to educational groups, warned school leaders of the "crisis in American thought" that lay behind the distress of the depression. Embedded within an increasingly strained, disturbed, and often displaced Depression Era populace, "the range of permissible socioeconomic dissent probably widened in the schools," cracking open the door to what historian Herbert Kliebard has called the brief "heyday of social meliorism." The "brute fact of the depression," claimed an Ohio superintendent, had shocked Americans into reconsidering their "free-for-all race for special privilege" and "lip service to democracy." The economic crisis, Superintendent Bair insisted, forced Americans to re-think the foundations of their world, for "in the matter of arousing the public mind, the end of our national joyride was the beginning of our national schooling." At the same time, more and more students passed through high school doors. They came from increasingly diverse backgrounds. Between World War I and World War II, the number of high school students tripled. Between just 1930 and 1932, over 700,000 more students entered secondary education, a nearly 50% increase over the prior two-year period. By the end of the 1930s, some two-thirds of 14-16 year olds were attending high school, up from less than half at the start of the Depression. More and more of those students came from Italian, Jewish, Slavic, and other immigrant backgrounds. High school educators struggled to "Americanize" or assimilate these "new" students and address the challenges of what many referred to as "the second generation problem." Confident in the science of education's capacity to identify and address distinct mental abilities, educators also sought

234The notion of "embeddedness" is from Tyack et al., Public Schools in Hard Times, 56; quotes from Herbert M. Kliebard, The Struggle for the American Curriculum (New York: Routledge, 1987), 180.
236Ibid., 422.
to adjust the high school curriculum to the perceived talents and destinies of children with different backgrounds. In what Paula Fass refers to as "a new common-school era," the arrival in high schools of so many immigrant children changed the face of secondary education in the large cities, and "replaced the pious air of Protestant respectability with a complex cosmopolitanism."242

As more youth entered high school and stayed longer (see Table 2 and Figure 8), the schools were called upon to play a greater role in what Teachers College Professor Paul Hanna called "our youth problem."243 With severe unemployment and more employers demanding more years of schooling, high schools also took on a custodial function, holding youth out of job markets and off the streets.244 The concern grew that adults in already fragmenting urban communities, under the extreme strain of the Depression, would be unable to nurture or even to control their youth properly. Many perceived a rising juvenile delinquency, especially among urban boys, and sought the high school's help in combating this threat.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1892</th>
<th>1894-1896</th>
<th>1897-1898</th>
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<td><strong>City population</strong></td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of junior high schools</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Senior high schools</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>5,383</td>
<td>47,948</td>
<td>100,559</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Junior high schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,003</td>
<td>41,556</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Accredited night high schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Total secondary enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23,575</td>
<td>165,909</td>
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<td>339%</td>
<td>1.97%</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
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<td><strong>Percentage (a) and (b) are of city population</strong></td>
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<td>2.13%</td>
<td>4.75%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage (a), (b), and (c) are of city population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
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<td>a. Senior high schools</td>
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<td>3,208</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Junior high schools</td>
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<td>c. Accredited night high schools</td>
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<td>990</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Total secondary teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,387</td>
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* Compiled from data furnished by central office.
† No data.
‡ Most of the night high school teachers are regular teachers in day high schools.


242 Fass, Outside In, 74-5.


The specter of troubled youth loomed large. The Depression seemed to target youth selectively, pushing their unemployment to approximately 50%; some three million youth of high school age neither worked nor attended school. Hanna, therefore, worried that youthful energy would have no "socially useful outlet" and that

with no sense of belonging to a great enterprise which demands their loyalties and their labors, with no responsibility for making a contribution to the larger group, the young develop few of those character traits which are so essential and basic in a highly interdependent modern society.

Harvard criminologist Eleanor Glueck spoke more specifically of a disintegrating society's disastrous impact on the young, increasing "the restlessness of 'modern youth' in this age of 'jazz' and 'petting parties.'" In a time of Fascist and Communist youth movements abroad, the possible radicalization of youth worried more than a few. As youth left schools only to find no jobs, lamented New York University sociologist Warren Zorbaugh, more and more ended up in prisons or "flop" houses. Hundreds of thousands of others had decided to take to the road.

245See, for example, James Alfred Dickinson, "The Community-School Concept in Education" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1942), 60-86.

246Harvey W. Zorbaugh, "Which Way America's Youth?" The Journal of Educational Sociology 2, no. 6 (February 1938): 322-34; Francis J. Brown, "How Fare American Youth?" The Journal of Educational Sociology 2, no. 6 (February 1938): 335-41; Edwin S. Fultsner, Secondary Schools as Community Centers (New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1940), 15; appears to draw this from John Chamberlain, "Our Jobless Youth: A Warning," Survey Graphic 25, no. 10 (October 1939).

247Hanna et al., Youth Serves the Community, 33.

"thumbing" their way or "riding the rods," "bumming" their living, sleeping in transient camps or in "jungles," keeping alive, but many of them trying to forget there was a tomorrow. Others sat at home, idle and brooding— insecurity and despair eating at their hearts like a rust. 249 Many educators felt the problems of youth reflected a deeper social deterioration, one requiring a fundamental shift away from the "rugged individualism" and atomistic, anarchic greed associated with the failed economic policies of the 1920s. The Depression made "planning" a "magic word," claims historian David Tyack, "though its meaning was obscure and differed among those who invoked the concept." 250 Even a President of the United States Chamber of Commerce declared that "we have left the period of extreme individualism." 251 While confessing that most educators were usually too "immersed ... in the kaleidoscopic demands of everyday activities" to ponder the role of schools in society, a National Education Association researcher felt that the economic crisis had persuaded many educators that they needed to participate in social change. 252 "No longer content to be mere followers" nor the "errand boy hopping about to pick up the pieces and to repair the damage as society muddles along," more educators had begun to "insist that public education ... be an agency for social leadership." 253 While perhaps few teachers and administrators were willing to take up the social reconstructionism of Counts, Rugg, Beard and others most probably agreed with Dewey that the Depression required, of both schools and society, "the cooperative use of intelligence on a social scale in behalf of social values." 254

The Wider Uses of Schools

Owing in part to the concerns expressed by social reconstructionists, and in part to the call for the wider and more efficient use of expensive school facilities, an increasingly broad range of activities occurred within public schools by the early 1930s. Many "progressive" educators sought greater school-community ties, especially in terms of integrating community resources into the curriculum, in order to implement their notions of the social nature of education. 255 Charles Eliot and others had long called for the more efficient use of the huge public investment in school facilities by opening them up more for community use. 256 Further, as demand for better recreation and social

249Zorbaugh, "Which Way America's Youth?" 325-6.
250Tyack et al., Public Schools in Hard Times, 17; Kliebard, The Struggle for the American Curriculum, chap. 7.
253Ibid., 413.
254John Dewey and John L. Childs, The Educational Frontier (New York: The Century Company), chap. 2; cited in Elsie Ripley Clapp, "Schools Socially Functioning," Progressive Education 15, no. 2 (February 1938): 89; see also Evenden, Teacher Education in a Democracy at War, 54: "The schools in many of the more favored and progressive communities toward the close of this period were becoming focal points for larger programs of community education."
255Kliebard, The Struggle for the American Curriculum, especially chap. 6.
256Emphasis on community programs in schools as a way of taking full advantage of public investment have of course been a staple in the history of schools. In 1932, in the shadow of the Great Depression, one school principal urged greater school service to the community as a way of preventing the collapse of the
activities, for increased adult and parent education and for better health
education and services grew, schools were often called upon to extend their
facilities and support to these community needs, especially in the period from
1896 to 1915. By 1930, Benjamin Franklin staff could draw on well-
established, if widely varying, traditions of school-community activities in
designing their version of community-centered schooling.

In an effort to gauge the prevalence of "conscious school-extension
efforts," the Russell Sage Foundation's Clarence Perry conducted a national
survey of schools and found a movement by World War I that "in its superficial
aspects at least . . . seems to have spread evenly over the whole country." He estimated that in the winter of 1913-14 some 3,276,189 people in 82 cities
attended various systematic extension activities, primarily for athletics, clubs,
and lectures. In New York City, the growing social center movement,
inspired by Edward J. Ward's success in Rochester and popularized by Perry,
spurred educators to open schools for greater community use. The popular
People's Institute initially adopted the idea in 1912, establishing community
centers in two grade schools, one in Hell's Kitchen and the other on the Lower
East Side. By 1918, the Board of Education, which had taken over the
program, operated some 80 community centers around the city.

A few years later, Harvard's Eleanor Glueck found a 128% increase in
the number of large cities reporting systematic community use of
schoolhouses between 1919 and 1924, and a 55% jump in the total number of
school centers in those cities. Some 722 cities and towns reported such
regular usage in 1599 centers. Even with such increases, the fact

257Some evidence to this dating: H.E. Scudder, "The Schoolhouse as a Center," Atlantic Monthly (January 1896); John Dewey, "The School as a Center of Social Life," in Social Aspects of Education, ed. S.C. Parker, The Tenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I, The City School as a Community Center (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1911); Clarence Arthur Perry, The Community-Used School (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1911); Joseph Hart, Educational Resources of Village and Rural Communities (New York: Macmillan, 1913). In 1916, the National Community Center Association was established. The increased demand for the wider use of schools was also reflected in the substantial literature concerning how to incorporate adult and community needs when designing the large number of new school buildings needed in the early years of this century. See, e.g., Fulcomer, Secondary Schools as Community Centers.


259Clarence Arthur Perry, "The Extension of Public Education," 29-50; 603 cities reported results in the survey; Perry defined "systematic" usage as follows: "All schools which are regularly open evenings as often as once a week for two or more of the classes of activity enumerated, other than night schools; or for one activity other than night school as often as twice a week." Clarence Arthur Perry, Social Center Gazette, 1919-1920 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1920?), 3.


262Glueck, The Community Use of Schools, 36-40; Eleanor T. Glueck, "The Extended Use of School Buildings," United States Bureau of Education Bulletin no. 5 (1927); "large" city had over 5,000 inhabitants; Glueck used Perry's definition of regular usage (see footnote 38).

263Glueck, The Community Use of Schools, 38.
remained that only 5% of U.S. schoolhouses were being regularly used by the community, and only 12.5% of school centers were open throughout the year. Most school authorities, claimed Glueck, still considered the community use of schools "an 'outside' movement." 

Yet, by the time East Harlem activists began their campaign for a community school in their neighborhood, some educators viewed the new emphasis on the school's community to be the next great movement in public education. Prof. Edward Evenden of Teachers College, Columbia University, argued that U.S. education had gone through a series of re-orientations, moving from what he characterized as church-centered schooling to teacher-centered to child-centered and most recently to curriculum-centered schooling. The social and economic changes of the era, according to Evenden, now called for another re-orientation, a shift to community-centered schools, of which he felt Benjamin Franklin was an outstanding example. Edward Olsen considered the community school to be the second stage of "progressive education," and the "third major professional orientation held by educational leaders since the turn of the present century." The "subject-centered traditional school" had given way to the "child-centered activity school" which was now yielding the "life-centered community school." New York University sociologist Julius Yourman described the three-stages through which he felt American schooling had passed: from subject-centered schools last century to child-centered schools since the early 20th century, to community-centered schooling for the 1930s and 1940s. Covello later used this same three-stage framework to support his call for community-centered schooling. Having advanced from the subject-centered to the child-centered school, Covello argued, we must now "step forward" to the community-centered school concept, in which we have "the ultimate objective of all education because it deals with the child in connection with his social background and in relation to all forces, disruptive as well as constructive, that contribute to his education."

But the activities that educators identified as part of community schooling or of a school's community program covered a wide variety of projects, ranging from community clubs using the school building after hours to local social action drives organized through the school. An equally wide variety of ends were served, from improving individual teacher pedagogy to solving broad community problems. In St. Louis, for example, when "a little group of intrepid mothers," led by a former Pratt Institute student, Mrs. Tyrrell


265Julius Yourman, "Community Coordination: The Next 'Movement' in Education," Journal of Educational Sociology 9, no. 6 (February 1936); Julius Yourman, "Research: The Basis for Community School Planning," Understanding the Child 9, no. 3 (October 1942): 14-21.


267Ibid.
Williams, created the Community School, they intended the school to be the ideal community for each student. 271 "Community school," in this case, meant a good "progressive education," one seeking "a well-balanced relationship between subject matter and activity" and "fostering a spirit of intelligent cooperation between parents, children and teachers." 272 For Hessian Hills, the "community-centered school" referred to the tremendous cooperative effort neighbors put into replacing a burned-out school. 273 The Oakland Public Schools sought "closer contact with life outside the classroom" through system-wide visits to industrial plants. 274 In Fresno, California, as in many cities, serving the community meant initiating and/or expanding adult education; in Grand Island, Nebraska, it meant the PTA and Board of Education teaming up to inoculate children against diphtheria. 275 Michigan's "community schools in action" served the educational aims set by local community councils' long-term cooperative planning efforts. 276


272 Goldstein, "The Community School of St. Louis," 495; for a more urban example of a similar interpretation, see Persis K. Miller, "A Community School in a Large City System," Progressive Education, 15, no. 2 (February 1938), 97-109.


276 G.P. Deyoe, "Community Schools in Action: A Michigan Account," Progressive Education 16, no. 7 (November 1939): 511-13. Also see Bernice Elliott, "Where School and Community Work Hand in Hand," The Nation's Schools 10, no. 2 (August 1932): 57-62; the Lincoln Consolidated Training School was guided by a local adult citizenship league which included three student leagues as participatory members.

277 Miloš Muntyan, "Community School Concepts," Journal of Educational Research 41, no. 8 (April 1948): 597-809; see also Miloš Muntyan, "Community School Concepts in Relation to Societal Determinants" (Ed.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1947); Muntyan defined "community school" as "a school that attempts to serve its community in a direct sense even while it uses the community, also in a direct sense, in its educational program," "Community School Concepts," 597.

278 Miloš, "Community School Concepts," 802; Hanna et al., Youth Serves the Community. Some of the programs may arguably belong within or approach Muntyan's final category, such as youth surveys of juvenile delinquency being sent to officials and organizations; yet the projects do not reveal that they involved any changes in the process of community planning or organization.
poor. Ideally, though, and rarely according to Muntyan, schools might become "school-community centered ... making a service agency of the school and its population even while the community is used as the 'subject matter' of the school's program." Muntyan felt that Elsie Ripley Clapp's schools in rural Kentucky and West Virginia—inspirations to Covello—seemed to fall into this final category, going beyond immediate problems to "serve as the vehicles through which community, and community process, are developed." Edward Olsen, Director of Russell Sage College's School of Education, offered another framework. Noting the growing consensus that a successful school "projected itself into the living community, the child's primary scene of present and future life concern," he described in progression the major conceptions of community education held by leading educators in the 1920s and 1930s. Responding to life-long learning needs, schools began to open up for evening and afternoon sessions for adults. Schools also realized the vitality that community resources could add to the curriculum, and that the community itself made for fascinating study. However, in order fully to become a community school, argued Olsen, the school needed to work toward community improvement by participating in community activities, and ultimately take the lead in coordinating the educative efforts taking place in the neighborhood. Teachers College Professor N.L. Engelhardt agreed; the community school at its best advances "American democratic living." Such a school "may be expected not only to exercise an influence but also to play an important part in economic and social rehabilitation, in actual community planning, and in the improvement of community government." In a similar vein a decade later, Robert Naslund, a student of Paul Hanna at Teachers College, suggested a third framework, identifying four major "strands" among the variety of community schooling efforts during the 1930s and 1940s. Depending upon their emphasis, community schools fell

279 Hanna et al., *Youth Serves the Community*, 69-70, 48-9, 107-8.
281 Ibid., 602, 608.

283 Olsen defined the "Community School" in the following way: "Such a school operates as a full-time educational center for the entire community population, utilizes all appropriate community resources for instructional purposes, centers its curriculum in the community itself, actively serves the locality through direct attack upon some of its pressing problems, and leads in coordinating democratically all possible community agencies toward the common goal of more effective education in that locality." He also identified ten basic principles according to which "the most successful community-centered educational programs" operated. See Olsen, "Community and School," 172. Ohio State University's H. Gordon Hullfish noted that the tendency to make social studies the exclusive domain of community-related curriculum work had to be overcome: "We need, therefore, to turn the work of the school upon the creation of an intelligent sharing of values within the community of which the school is a part and within the total life of the school, and not a subject-matter segment of that life." H. Gordon Hullfish, "The Community Concept in Education," *The Clearing House* 9, no. 7 (March 1935), 395.

285 Ibid.
286 Robert Alfred Naslund, "The Origin and Development of the Community School Concept" (Ed.D. diss., Stanford University, 1951); Naslund warned that often "the term [community school] is so vague that it is meaningless except as it is used in a particular setting by a particular writer or speaker," p. 5.
into one of these types, the last of which "most significantly [exemplified] the
total concept":287

* The "community-centered-curriculum" school: The school
uses the community as a source of instructional material to
broader and enrich the curriculum.

* The "vocations-centered-curriculum" school: The school and
the community plan to provide work experience for youth and
training for vocational competence as the needs of youth and
the community require.

* The "community-center" school: The community uses the
school as a center for the various activities of all groups in the
community.

* The "community-service-center" school: The community uses
the school as an instrument for continuous study and analysis
of community problems and for formulating and exploring
possible solutions in order to improve the quality of living for
all in the community.288

Naslund insisted that many schools, through the programs and
activities they implemented, appeared to be community schools. However,
one had to go beyond these "symptoms" and determine the reasons behind
these activities in order to correctly apply the term "community school." Unlike
the first three types, the emphasis of the "community-service-center" school
revealed "a basic, underlying belief" that the school was "a positive,
deliberately used instrument of the community for its improvement."289 Based
upon this belief, the community school, properly conceived, wove all four
strands together. In a manual on school-community planning, John Whitelaw

sounded a similar conclusion.290 Convinced that schools were "far behind the
harshly realistic demands of this era of social confusion," he advocated a
school-community approach that frankly acknowledged that "the function of
the school is to raise appreciably the standard of living in its community."291

Education in such an approach, he stated approvingly, "is the most
comprehensive form of social work"292 (see Figure 9).

By the early 1950s, then, when representatives from 25 school
systems and various colleges met in a northern Michigan lodge to define
the state's community school concept, the participants concluded that such a
school must serve and enrich society.293 A community school must also,
according the participants, reflect and involve community resources in the
school's instructional program. Based on surveyed needs, the school must be
willing to provide "initial leadership to constructive community improvement
projects," help all "develop a sense of community," build local leadership and
coordinate all community development efforts.294 However, the educators

287Ibid., 18.
288Ibid., 17.
289Ibid., 88.
290John Bertram Whitelaw, The School and Its Community: An Introduction to
School-Community Planning for Administrators, Supervisors and Teachers, 1st ed.
(New York: Brockport, 1940). The pamphlet is based largely upon Whitelaw's 1935
Yale Ph.D. dissertation.
291Ibid., 7-8.
292Ibid., 9.
293Alvin DeMar Loving, "Crystallizing and Making Concrete the Community
School Concept in Michigan through Study of On-Going Community School
Practices" (Ed.D. diss., Wayne University, 1954). Called by the Committee on the
Instructional Program of the Community School, a sub-committee of the Curriculum
Planning Committee of the Michigan Department of Public Instruction, the Birch
Lodge Conference met Oct. 28-29, 1952, at Birch Lodge, Higgins Lake. The
Community School Conference met 3-4 November 1953, at St. Mary's Lake Camp.
294Loving, "Crystallizing and Making Concrete the Community School
Concept," 3.
When most educators spoke of community schooling during the 1920s and 1930s, they usually referred to a passive community role for the school, such as using school facilities for community recreation, adult education, and local club meetings. At best, they generally envisioned an active role in which the school responded creatively to community requests, providing special training or contributing its academic expertise to local projects. Though the rhetoric might trumpet dramatic social change, most local educators apparently did not view their role as one of coordinating such change.

Benjamin Franklin High School's programs included such community-responsive projects, but they also joined the smaller subset of schools that consciously coordinated community development efforts. The community schooling approach taken up at Benjamin Franklin High School placed it within the relatively small group of schools that included community organizing as central to their mission, and that often carried out local social research to inform this coordination of community development.
Benjamin Franklin, for example, clearly fell into Muntyan's school-community centered category, Olsen's true community school, and Naslund's "community-school-center school" model. While Franklin staff, students, and community members certainly carried out programs falling into other categories—a neighborhood trash clean-up, a community social, nightly open gyms—these participants also organized themselves in order to better study and address local social and economic concerns through Franklin's elaborate committee system. The first public housing in East Harlem, for example, came about in large part owing to an elaborate campaign coordinated through the high school. Naslund specifically cited Benjamin Franklin High School in describing each of his final two "strands." In its role as a more typical "community-center" school, Franklin hosted community entertainment and parties for local residents and students. But as a rare example of a "community-service-center" school, Benjamin Franklin demonstrated how community schools "consciously aimed their efforts at improving living," in particular improving group relationships within East Harlem. As Covello indicated early in Franklin's efforts, "the Benjamin Franklin High School is dedicated to the task of building a finer citizenship and a better community life for all." H. Gordon Hullfish of Ohio State's Department of Education noted that Franklin's efforts—in opening its facilities to the community, in bringing students into the community to participate, and in cooperating with other local agencies toward community improvement—stood out as an urban community schooling effort. Franklin's approach challenged the tendency to "retreat to the rural sections [when considering] the problem of making the schools community conscious."

Yet, Benjamin Franklin staff, students, and community members, if exceptional in many ways, were not lone urban pioneers in their community schooling approach, nor in the school's active participation in community planning and local social research. In and around New York City, not to speak of other regions across the country, various school-community programs involved collaborative efforts to investigate and resolve community problems, with a central coordinating role for the public school. Harry Wann, as principal of the high school in Madison, New Jersey, sought to move beyond narrow "institutional-mindedness" toward a community-wide coordination of educative factors. Based upon the belief that "every waking hour is a part of education," the local Social Planning Council conducted surveys of local educational influences and developed programs in order to "so integrate the various educative factors in the environment that the community will become

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299Ibid., 48.


an educative unity." The Community Service Council of Hastings-on-Hudson, New York teamed up with the public schools to integrate efforts for community growth and organization. Starting with a social survey of the community, the Council addressed local concerns from "worth-while forms of leisure-time activities" to housing and public relief, all in an effort to promote "a greater community consciousness and an effective program of community planning and improvement."

Across town from Benjamin Franklin, in the blocks just north of Teachers College, Columbia University, the Community Association for Cooperative Education (CACE), with the assistance of students and faculty of Teachers College's New College, sought to "promote such group activities as will teach its members how to work and live effectively together and to provide educational, recreational and material services on a non-profit basis." Though CACE did not operate through a regular public school, it did seek to construct, rooted in community members lives and based in their environment, a "community curriculum." CACE carried out extensive studies of the educational, housing and social needs of the Manhattanville neighborhood, provided a weekly "Open Night" forum for discussing residents' concerns, and operated both a local nursery school and a community farm in upstate New York.

Another kindred spirit to Benjamin Franklin's approach operated through P.S. 181 in Brooklyn. Principal Dr. Nathan Peyser doubled as the Executive Director of the Flatbush Community League, a community supervisory and coordinating body composed of the Teachers' League, Mothers' League, Men's League, and Junior Service League. With a membership of some 1,200 adults, the League supported 23 adult classes, a local symphony orchestra, the Community Little Theatre, the Civic Forum, and innovations within the day school program. Concerned fundamentally with the prevention of juvenile delinquency since his school-community efforts twenty years earlier in East Harlem, Peyser viewed the school as the most appropriate "integrating agency" of the community, "whereby the family and community can be led to assume their responsibilities cooperatively."

Similar efforts were also underway in neighboring South Jamaica, New York.

303 cited, iii-iv.
305 ibid., 348, 353.
306 Ibid., 488-95.
307 Mary Daugherty Mix, "New College of Teachers College: A History, 1932-1939" (Ph.D. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1968). The organization seems to have had its origin in the W.P.A. Federal Nursery School, developing with the help of community members, New College students and faculty after the W.P.A. discontinued its program in December 1936.

308 Wenda Sweida, "Cooperative Education through a Community Association: How It Functioned in a Metropolitan Area," Progressive Education 16, no. 7 (November 1939): 489.
309 Nathan Peyser, "The School as the Center of the Community," The Journal of Educational Sociology 9, no. 6 (February 1936): 354.
310 Ibid., 358. Covello included material on Peyser's plan in the manuscript he was preparing on community-centered schooling; see "Peyser Plan of Character Building and Delinquency Prevention," CCS ms., chap. 18-Delinquency, CP 20/1.
Coordinating Away Community Problems

The decision to involve Benjamin Franklin in community organizing and local social research, at the heart of the school's design, reflected a convergence of influences from developments in community coordination councils. East Harlem's efforts mirrored those of the numerous local towns and neighborhoods that had developed coordinated approaches to community improvement during the Depression, often arising from specific local concerns regarding lack of recreation programs, the need for adult education, or the demand for health services.

In an effort to address such community concerns, such as juvenile delinquency, which some saw as threatening to overwhelm individual agencies and schools, many communities formed "coordinating councils," efforts to coordinate all the youth-serving agencies in a community.312 For some locales, the council's establishment reflected reactions to specific lurid events. For example, only after a 12-year-old girl killed her playmate, fearful she would reveal the "sex play" into which they had been inducted by a local man, did the community of Hastings-on-Hudson decide to establish its coordinating council.313 Most often focused on preventing juvenile delinquency, these councils generally conducted local social research, increased recreation programs, tried to control or remove destructive community influences, gave special attention to youth not in school nor work, and improved home environments through parental education.

While many communities had formed community councils back in World War I, these tended to fall into disuse or to limit their attention to organizing athletic programs.314 The Depression spurred many more socially-concerned coordinating councils under various names (on the East Coast, they were frequently known as Councils of Social Agencies) designed to plan community-wide approaches to the crisis.315 In 1929, the growth of Los Angeles Coordinating Councils for the Prevention of Delinquency, led by "professional" social workers, inspired imitations under lay leadership across


312Kenneth S. Beam, "Coordinating Councils," The Journal of Educational Sociology 2, no. 2 (October 1937), 67-72.


315Beam, "Coordinating Councils"; the West Coast tended to use juvenile courts and probation departments, and other states varied; e.g., in Illinois the Department of Public Welfare authorized its State Sociologists to organize groups of citizens and social workers into Big Brother and Big Sister Associations; in Pennsylvania, California and Utah, the Department of Public Instruction encouraged the formation of these councils, especially for recreation; in Washington, the Department of Social Security established a Division on Community Organization to encourage such councils. Beam reported that a survey by the National Probation Association had found some 300 councils in over 20 states. Kenneth S. Beam, "Community Coordination: Report of a National Survey of Coordinating and Neighborhood Councils," Coping with Crime: Yearbook of the National Probation Association, 1937, ed. Marjorie Bell (New York: National Probation Association, 1937), 47-76.
the nation. If schools were not often the central bodies of such coordinated community planning, they were often called upon to coordinate community efforts in areas such as guidance, juvenile delinquency prevention, adult education, or recreation.

The coordinating council movement directly influenced Covello's approach at Benjamin Franklin. Covello tapped materials of the National Probation Association, a key organization in the movement, for his 1937-38 course in community coordination at New York University, a course that preceded his course on the community-centered school the following year. When a key panel of a national conference addressed problems of community coordination, Covello joined nationally-prominent figures in sharing their experiences. At least some of his staff were apparently familiar with such trends as well. In addition, Covello drew from the work of his dissertation advisor, New York University sociologist Frederic Thrasher, who advocated community approaches to preventing juvenile delinquency and played a prominent role in several initiatives in the New York/New Jersey area.

According to Thrasher, "sociologically speaking . . . the individual delinquent is far less important than the community influences which create him." Covello, in turn, urged schools to focus on the community's fundamental educational problems, broadly understood, in order to "correct the causes of maladjustment." Thrasher cited Harvard criminologist Eleanor Glueck, who concurred and argued that, in general, the public school was best poised to effect the "purposeful organization of social forces" and to "create an adjustment of relationships between the people." Unlike private agencies of sometimes precarious funding, the public school would prove "the most suitable center" because it was "non-sectarian, non-partisan, non-exclusive in character, and widespread in its influence upon the life of the people through their children."

Yet, not all agreed, as became evident at a 1937 New York University Conference on Current Problems in Community Coordination. While eager CP 25/18; this three-page chapter summary included chapters on various local and national coordination efforts.

316 Mayo, "Town and Village Councils," 82-83.

317 The CP folder containing material for the course included, for example, a National Probation Association flyer entitled "Selected Reading: From Probation Officers and Others Interested in Delinquency, 1937," and a copy of the April 1936 issue of Coordinating Council Bulletin, CP 25/1.

318 "Social Problems of Community Will Be Conference Theme," The Education Sun, School of Education, New York University, 31 March 1937: 1; CP 12/12.

319 Memo from Mr. Emilio L. Guerra to Mr. Covello, 13 February 1940; Subject: "Books Dealing With Community Coordination," including two by the National Probation Association; CP 25/10.

320 For a convenient listing, see Frederic M. Thrasher and Julius Yourman, Recent Experiments in Community Coordination (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1937).
to bring about a greater coordination of services for youth, many felt that the schools were too often too aloof, and only grudgingly allowed the community to use school buildings. Others wondered why there was such a sudden interest in coordination and planning; had not the Community Chests, Councils of Social Agencies, Parents Associations and settlement houses actually been practicing such coordination for at least three decades?

In any case, no one model for community planning existed, though a number included schools in central roles. Most relied on and often developed out of "fact-finding" surveys of local social conditions. The Yonkers Coordinated Council, in an industrialized town just north of New York City, developed out of two citizen groups, one of which, dominated by elementary school principals and directors, carried out a detailed sociological survey of the city that spurred wide community reaction. Initially led by principals from underprivileged areas, neighborhood councils formed even before the Council established itself. Bringing together several hundred local organizations and representatives, the Council included an "enthusiastic following from educational circles," leading the Assistant Superintendent to declare that "the traditional school isolation is permanently broken."326

326Bertha Smith, "The Yonkers Coordinating Council in the Yonkers Plan," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 2, no. 5 (January 1938): 296-302; the Council membership included the four superintendents, the 26 elementary principals, the vice-principals, the 9 directors, 5 high school principals, the principal of the continuation school, one teacher representative from each school and many special teachers, two Board of Education members, representatives from the Yonkers Teachers' Association, the Yonkers Principals' Association, the Primary Teachers' Council, the special Class Teachers Council, and the PTAs. See also Smith, 261-264; Julius Youman, "The Coordination of Education and the Community" *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 2, no. 5 (January 1938): 304. This issue of the Journal includes participant accounts of various neighborhood councils, as well as junior (youth) councils.

in Elizabeth, New Jersey, the Council of Social Agencies began work in 1924, expanding until it required a full-time coordinator and National Youth Administration support by 1936. The Council launched "the Elizabeth Plan for a Community-Wide Attack on Social Ills," supported by a Central Planning Board and local neighborhood Coordinating Round Tables. The Board of Education assisted in educational programs and surveys, especially in areas of juvenile delinquency, and participated in the Planning Board's Education Section along with local churches, libraries, the PTA, the NAACP, the AAUW and others.327

327Emest L Chase, "The Elizabeth Plan for a Community-Wide Attack on Social Ills," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 2, no. 2 (October 1937), 77-96. The Plan later included five contiguous cities and became "The Six Town Plan." Prior to the full-time coordinator, a Social Service Exchange was established in 1928 and the Community Chest was incorporated in 1932.

Two other New Jersey districts developed coordinating councils out of surveys of local social conditions, a pattern similar to that which developed in East Harlem. In Madison, New Jersey, a youth survey by the local Rotary Club led to the formation of a Social Planning Council. Under the leadership of the school superintendent, a broad group of community leaders met four times a year to discuss social concerns, carry out studies of local conditions, and coordinate solutions. A Religious Education Committee sought to bridge the gap in character-building efforts of schools, churches, and agencies. A Guidance Committee, headed by the high school principal, developed lists of "citizen counselors," community adults willing to give advice to students about businesses and professions. Reflecting a growing trend in social work, the council formed a Community Case Study Conference, bringing together a wide variety of local social agency representatives to assist specific "maladjusted"
youth. All of the Council's efforts were enhanced by a detailed Sociological Base Map of Madison, directed by the Superintendent of Schools with the assistance of New York University's Department of Educational Sociology. Nearby Summit, New Jersey, developed a coordinated community approach over an eight-year period following a survey of local social conditions carried out by an external agency. The resulting Council of Social Agencies, formally established in 1934, conducted studies and coordinated local agencies in addressing problems uncovered. The school played a central role in the Mayor's Youth Welfare Council, formed two years after the Council. As in Madison, a Case Conference Committee was established to handle individual cases (see organizational charts, Figures 10-11).

And in East Harlem, Benjamin Franklin High School, a product of lobbying support by the many local social agencies, quickly became a member of the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies, a community coordinating council that had helped to organize and manage the high school campaign. The Council joined with the Civil Works Administration to support the school's afternoon program the first year of its existence. Within a year, East Harlem began an extensive neighborhood study, the first to receive the support of the Mayor's Committee on City Planning, in cooperation with the Works Progress Administration. The study, one of a dozen or more in the city intended to "lead

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to more active, intelligent and continuing efforts for the betterment of the community by the residents themselves. Helen Harris, headworker at Union Settlement, served as chair until succeeded by Miriam Sanders of Haarlem House; Covello served on the sponsoring committee along with representatives from other local agencies. East Harlem's community coordinated approach, housed in the Union Settlement buildings, became a model for other New York City neighborhoods' social planning efforts. For Covello, "It established conclusively the idea that a continuing community survey is an essential part of the program of any community-centered school." Covello quickly institutionalized a means for coordinating and acting upon such research, organizing the Community Advisory Council in the Fall of 1935. Implemented primarily through faculty outreach, the Council provided a framework through which "every constructive agency in the community" could coordinate their efforts to address such local concerns as guidance, housing, inter-ethnic relations, citizenship and adult education.

330 New York Mayor's Committee on City Planning, East Harlem Community Study, partial report on Project No. 165-97-6037 conducted under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration.

331 Materials in CP 18/3.

332 Covello, "Neighborhood Growth through the School," 133.

Plural Worlds and Project Methods
In addition to reflecting the growth of coordinating councils, Franklin's involvement in local social research and planning also reflected the fluid state of social research at the time, particularly the variety of organizing efforts through which educators were formally and informally trained, and school curriculum trends. Given the "plural worlds" of social research and activism, educators often drew upon a wide variety of research traditions and organizing efforts to assist their community-centered approaches to schooling. Teachers, activists, and social agency directors often appear to have shared similar vocabulary and notions regarding the "organic" nature of community, behavior as an adaptation to the environment, or an "ecological" approach to urban problems—reflecting a rich milieu that drew from various emerging professions and established practitioners. The tradition of settlement house investigators and survey-wielding community activists, for example, informed early developments in the emerging subfields of educational sociology and rural sociology, areas which had significant impact on community schooling. Covello and others had performed local surveys for years while working in settlement houses and social agencies prior to establishing the school. Among Benjamin Franklin staff, several key members had been trained in educational sociology. Covello, Italian teacher Marie Concistre, and science teacher and community coordinator Salvatore Cimilluca completed their dissertations at New York University in studies growing out of the Boys' Club Study, a massive three-year study of East Harlem by New York University. Activist Rita Morgan, Speech Teacher and Community Coordinator, completed her degree in educational sociology at Teachers College, analyzing the educational effects of industrial arbitration and how schools might better prepare workers for the new industrial democracy. Social Studies teacher Layle Lane garnered organizing experience from her extensive work with the American Federation of Teachers and in her efforts to organize Southern rural schools for blacks. Rachel DuBois appears to have been influenced by the work of rural sociologists, especially Mabel Carney of Teachers College, with whom she worked. Covello frequently cited the work of Elsie Ripley Clapp and rural educators and made her Community Schools in Action required reading for his in-service teacher training courses, in addition to standard sociological texts such as Lloyd Cook's Community Backgrounds in

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335 In addition to his work through the Home Garden, Covello worked at La Casa del Pueblo and served on the Board of Hamilton House.
Some early community school notions in the United States, in fact, may even have been inspired from Danish Folk Schools, through rural sociologists such as Joseph Hart. In all, a wealth of sources shaped Franklin staff's strong focus upon the civic purposes of schooling and provided experience in pursuing them in local communities.

New York University played a critical role for Benjamin Franklin staff in this regard. The Department of Educational Sociology spearheaded local community-based social research efforts to affect social change, becoming a national center for the promotion of sociological methods in school administration and teaching. The Department was especially influential in the New York City area. Principal Harry Wann had NYU's assistance in preparing the social base maps of Madison, New Jersey; NYU's Prof. Julius Yourman advised Yonkers' Coordinating Council surveys and organization of neighborhood councils; NYU's Frederic Thrasher lent essential support to Covello and Benjamin Franklin High, directing the earlier Boys' Club Study from which so much local data was drawn; and the NYU-sponsored and edited *Journal of Educational Sociology* promoted similar efforts from around the country. The *Journal* so dominated its young field that, with slight exception, it could be conjectured that most articles on this subject probably appeared in the *Journal of Educational Sociology* and few other magazines.

In addition to varied research and organizing traditions in which many educators participated, trends in curriculum design from the early 1920s reinforced these efforts to increase school participation in community planning, curricular trends of which Covello and his staff were certainly familiar. Thus, the civic ends of Franklin's efforts also reflected the social orientation increasingly prescribed for pedagogical purposes. Few school systems escaped curriculum revision in the 1920s, including New York City. According to Kliebard, "by the 1930's, curriculum reform had become a national preoccupation."

Though the changes affected were often hybrids of the various reform currents, Teachers College Professor William H. Kilpatrick's influential "project method," aggrandized into the "activity curriculum" or "experience curriculum" by the end of the 1920s, highlighted the need for greater linkage between classroom work and the "purposeful activity" of the community. In his Introduction to Hanna's *Youth Serves the Community*, Kilpatrick reiterated that the truly educative situation brought youth and adults in a community together in a shared enterprise, one in which "each can have his own responsible part." Here was the education in which democracy can most rejoice, particularly in these times when we must learn to put the


341Irene Josephine Lawrence, "A History of Educational Sociology in the United States" (Ph.D. diss, Stanford University, 1951).

342Ibid., 104.


344Kilpatrick, "Introduction," in Hanna et al., *Youth Serves the Community*, 20.
public welfare first in point of time and importance. In solemn fact, cooperative activities for community improvement form the vision of the best education yet conceived.\textsuperscript{349}

Though perhaps few took the inspiration of Kilpatrick as seriously as Oklahoma Education Professor Ellsworth Collings, his widely-cited implementation of the project method in three rural Missouri schools directly addressed and assessed how school work ought to affect the community's daily habits, attitudes, and practices.\textsuperscript{346} Kilpatrick's active discipleship, along with a variety of similar curricular reform approaches, insured wide exposure for his ideas, though not always in the form anticipated.\textsuperscript{347}

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In the 1930s, expanded school-community activities arose in an era of intense social distress and dramatically rising prominence for the high school. They took on a variety of profiles and purposes, ranging from isolated curriculum projects aimed at pedagogical innovation to full school integration with coordinated community problem-solving initiatives aimed at changing local social conditions and training local leadership. Benjamin Franklin clearly ranked within the latter end of the spectrum. Drawing chiefly upon both local and non-local influences—the coordinating council movement, the diverse traditions of social research, and the "progressive" curriculum trends—Benjamin Franklin staff joined a core of like-minded contemporaries in placing the school at the heart of local community development efforts.

\textsuperscript{345}bid. (original emphasis).

\textsuperscript{346}Ellsworth Collings, \textit{An Experiment with a Project Curriculum} (New York: Macmillan Company, 1923).

The evolution of community-centered schooling at Benjamin Franklin drew upon a wide variety of influences. The shifting composition and cultures of East Harlem, the broader development of community schooling during the Great Depression, the activities of "progressive" New York City teachers, administrators, and local community activists, and the possibilities opened through considerable federal funding—each affected in their own way the conception of community schooling developed at Franklin. Yet, Benjamin Franklin's approach to community schooling also reflected in a very integral way the biography of its chief architect Leonard Covello. His understanding of community-centered schooling was shaped by his strong Protestant beliefs, his early and enduring involvement with local social settlements and community agencies, his own assimilation experience as a poor immigrant, his involvement in the emerging field of educational sociology, and the currents he captured of a broad "progressive" emphasis in schooling. Each of these influences carried implications for both the nature of the school's public purposes and the people who would determine them. Through the life experiences of Covello, one can begin to trace the actual, personal route by which various factors converged to shape the community-centered schooling that developed at East Harlem's first high school.

Early Life of Leonard Covello

"With no particular plan in my mind—in what appeared or seemed a haphazard way of living—I had prepared myself for the new job," claimed Covello, viewing with hindsight the training his life had offered him for the principalship of Benjamin Franklin. Covello's belief that schools must directly address those community problems that affect the education of its youth had grown out of his own experience as an immigrant in an insular and poverty-plagued community, as well as his abiding faith in the ideals of Christian service, the lessons he had learned from various teaching positions, and his training in educational sociology.

From his arrival in 1896 as a poor southern Italian immigrant boy, Leonardo "Narduccio" Covello was forced to reconcile competing and conflicting cultural influences in his own life, while often suffering the indignities of poverty and exclusion. He knew poverty well and experienced how it could affect a child's schooling. His father had emigrated 6 years earlier from the desperate hopelessness of Avigliano in southern Italy. When he could finally bring his wife and children to the United States, his father had to welcome them to a humble tenement on 112th Street, within range of the river's smell at ebb tide, part of "the endless, monotonous rows of tenement

Leonard and the other sons quickly had to find work to support the family, and soon Leonard was waking at 4:30 A.M. to deliver bread for a bakery six blocks over on Fifth Avenue before hurrying off to school. He was 12 years old and would work from then on to support the family. He left Morris High School temporarily after his junior year to work for $5 a week on a loading dock on Murray Street downtown, frustrated by the seeming irrelevance of school and desperate to help the family buy medicines for his ailing mother. He helplessly watched his mother waste away in their dimly-lit tenement shortly after graduating from Morris in 1907.

His mother's death that summer made support of the six children overwhelming; one sister was sent to live with a family in Long Island, one brother moved in with neighbors, and another brother went to live with family friends in the Catskills. Leonard, with the help of a Pulitzer scholarship and part-time work, stayed with the remaining family and fulfilled a promise made to an ailing mother by beginning studies at Columbia College that fall.

Covello would later recall his father's reaction upon hearing that his wife's condition was hopeless. Sitting silently in the summer heat of their fourth floor walk-up, Covello heard his father ask, "For what? Leave home. Come to a strange land. All the suffering. To what purpose? For an end like this?"353

The poverty only aggravated the feelings of exclusion in a strange land. Covello often felt as if living in two worlds at once, and at times in neither. He mouthed words he never understood in grade school classrooms. He hid the heaping sandwich of sausage and cheese on Italian bread his mother would send him off with in the morning. His Italian upbringing had not prepared him for the shock of attending school with girls at Morris High School; he also discovered that most classmates were "well dressed and had spending money" and "a social life" with "little gatherings to which we were not invited."354 Covello also recalled that "in fact, we did not want to be invited for fear that in some way we might have to reciprocate. We did not want them to see our homes and our parents and how we lived."355 He had acquiesced to the dropping of "i" in Covello as a necessary adjustment to America, and fought with his parents when they did not understand. He knew the impossibility of explaining certain American practices to his mother and father, and began to feel as if he were living what seemed like fragmentary existences in different worlds. There was my life with my family and Aviglianese neighbors. My life on the streets of East Harlem... Life at the local public school. Life at whatever job I happened to have. Life in the wonder-world of books. There seemed to be no connection, one with the other; it was like turning different faucets on and off.356

While Covello found his days at Columbia College featured good discussions and a "world broadening" influence, he recalled that his classmates generally

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350 I bid., 38.
351 Reminiscences, CP 20/15.
352 Reminiscences, CP 20/15.
353 Covello, The Heart is the Teacher, 64.
"lived within the walls, invisible walls of campus life. I, too, lived that life, and went back to my other life in the East Harlem community."357

Exclusion, though, also had another face. Covello also knew the solidarity that the immigration experience could offer, the sense of belonging born of shared hardships with lifelong friends and family, experienced within a small and familiar community in an often hostile large city. Covello, like many other immigrant neighbors, spent most of his early life within the heart of Italian East Harlem. The constancy of a single neighborhood during much of his life assuredly influenced his focus upon the community as an educator. From the Home Garden to P.S. 83 to his local church to his first job, he was rarely ten blocks away from where his family's original tenement apartment once stood. Years later, the new Benjamin Franklin High School building would overlook the park that replaced the Covello's first residence, situated in the midst of an Aviglianese ghetto within East Harlem. His father would fondly say, "With the Aviglianese you are always safe. They are your countrymen, paesani. They will always stay by you."358 Covello experienced this in countless ways throughout his life, and indeed stayed in close touch with fellow East Harlemites long after he moved out of the city.359 Memory could also make this solidarity seem even sweeter. Robert Orsi, in his insightful work on Italian East Harlem, has described the importance of understanding this "love of place in poor urban neighborhoods."

It could be quite a sensuous love, an intense sensitivity to the sounds, smells, and tastes of the neighborhood. Italian Harlem had a taste for its residents, the taste of good bread and sausage sold in the local stores; and it had a smell of grapes and tomatoes and peppers and Italian cooking which survives in memory longer than the polluted air of the place.360

One of Covello's first Aviglianese friends in East Harlem, Vito Scallatore brought him into contact with a woman who would exercise a profound influence on his life and provided the foundation upon which he would construct community centered schooling. Vito dragged Leonard along to a brownstone at East 114th Street and First Avenue one Sunday, where he met Miss Anna C. Ruddy, a Canadian missionary who came to East Harlem in 1890 and had founded the Home Garden mission in 1901.361 Covello recalled being fascinated upon first seeing this "tall, imposing looking woman . . . her voice, low, strong and compelling," with "eyes which seemed to take in all of us,"362 Miss Ruddy had gained the affection of many Italians in East Harlem, and became known as the "Mother of the Italians." The mission sought to serve the physical and spiritual needs of the Italian community, saving souls, especially young souls, for Christ. The fact that she was Protestant in Italian Catholic East Harlem did not appear to make much difference to her admirers. As Covello's father declared, "A woman in a million. Protestant! Catholic! Egyptian! In the end, what difference does it make? Religion is a matter of

357Reminiscences, CP 20/15.
358Covello, The Heart is the Teacher, 21-2.
359Correspondence files, CP.
361Reminiscences, CP 20/13; Covello, The Heart is the Teacher, 32-5.
the spirit and the heart. I take my hat off to Signorina Ruddy.”363 Leonard Covello attended Bible lessons, social events and athletic activities at the Home Garden and eventually became a Sunday School teacher himself.

Ruddy’s influence on Covello was profound. Her story of her missionary work in East Harlem, written in 1908, was entitled *The Heart is the Stranger*; when one of those strangers, Covello, wrote of his life as a teacher fifty years later, he titled it *The Heart is the Teacher*.364 One can hear an echo of Covello’s own youth in her tales of the young “River Gang” members or in the conversion stories she relates in “How the Gang Came to Sunday-School.” When Covello married the girl next door, Mary Accurso, they decided to take their honeymoon in Toronto to visit Miss Ruddy, who had returned to Canada to care for her ailing father. Ruddy felt that with Leonard and Mary “God had given me children of my own to remember and to perpetuate the life I passed here on this earth.”365

Covello remained a deeply religious man throughout his life. When the Home Garden became the Haarlem House settlement in 1919 and abandoned religious instruction, Covello and his wife Mary moved over to teach Sunday School in the Jefferson Park Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church of Norman Thomas. Even after moving out of New York to New Jersey, the Covellos maintained contact with these East Harlem churches.366 Ruddy’s enduring influence on Covello can also be seen in his role in helping to establish a memorial award in her name years later, a product of the Home Garden Alumni Association, over half a century after the Garden had ceased to exist as such. The Anna C. Ruddy Memorial Award was given annually to a graduate of Benjamin Franklin High School who had “served his school and community.”367 Longtime friend and executor of Covello’s papers, sociologist Francesco Cordasco, concluded “that Covello, as an immigrant boy in East Harlem, was more influenced by the work of the evangelist Anna C. Ruddy, who had devoted years to social work in the East Harlem Italian Community, than by the public schools” in which he had studied and worked.368 Covello himself declared Ruddy’s enduring influence from the days of the two-room Methodist mission. “I can still remember walking in there and meeting Miss Anna C. Ruddy,” Covello recalled.369 “Although we were nominally Catholics, she made Methodists out of us. I can truthfully say that her influence has been the strongest and most important ever to enter my life. She put Christ into everyday living for me!”370

While a junior at Columbia College, Covello joined a group from the Home Garden in an effort that foreshadowed later organizing efforts in his life. The group petitioned, lobbied, cajoled, and struggled to establish an East

363Covello, *The Heart is the Teacher*, 32; Peebles, 85-88.


365Covello, *The Heart is the Teacher*, 102-3.


367CP 1/15, flyer announcing award.


370Ibid.
Harlem branch of the YMCA. Led by Michael Scilipoti, the drive succeeded in 1910, and the group dedicated the branch to recreational and educational programs for the neighborhood. In addition to dramatic, music, and athletic clubs, the East Harlem YMCA sponsored lectures, language courses, and "intellectual discussions." The traveling branch of the New York Public Library’s provided book loans, particularly books on Italian history and culture. Covello had begun to realize the importance of learning more about his Italian heritage and Italians' place in American history. "We needed to know as much as possible about ourselves before we could feel that our people and their culture were not inferior—only different."

The East Harlem YMCA only survived three years, but two friendships Covello made there greatly stimulated his thinking on education and cultural difference in the United States and provided each one of them with an eager audience for their intellectual musings. Covello met Leone Piatelli, a young Italian immigrant poet working as a bookkeeper, in an English language course Covello gave at the YMCA. Piatelli, "a turbulent soul . . . searching for the purpose of his existence," excited Covello with his enthusiasm for discussing Italian culture, and his vision of a historical parallel between the development of liberty in Italy and America. "In his *Divina Commedia*, Dante lit the torch of civil liberty and national consciousness in Italy," exclaimed Piatelli. "The universality of his dream asserted itself in Italy through such men as Giuseppe Mazzini—and in America through Abraham Lincoln." Covello recalled leaving Piatelli, "my mind tingling" and "with the desire to know more about the world of poetry and art and literature and to bring it all into relation to my own life," to address "il mistero della vita." Piatelli’s ability to blend Italian and U.S. cultural icons apparently impressed Covello deeply. "Dante, Mazzini, Lincoln! I never thought about them together before," he confided to Mary Accurso. "And now a casual meeting with a man who is almost a perfect stranger has given me a new feeling of direction."

Shortly after meeting Piatelli, Covello met the New Englander John Shedd, a secretary to an American millionaire, who had been teaching Sunday school at an Italian Protestant mission downtown. His interest in working among Italians drew him to the East Harlem YMCA’s programs, and he quickly involved himself in the branch, including service on the board of directors. Middle-aged, "heavily built, and in appearance much like G.K. Chesterton, with a massive head, flowing gray hair, straggly mustache, and bushy

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371Covello, *The Heart is the Teacher*, 81. While at Columbia, Covello was part of the group of students who organized the Italian Club in 1914, the "first step that led to the founding of the Casa Italiana." Roger Howson, "Historical Survey of the Casa Italiana." William F. Russell Papers, Folder "Casa Italiana," Box 10, p. 1 (Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University).

372Covello, *The Heart is the Teacher*, 80-84; Peebles, 97-103; Reminiscences, "Background for tackling job of Principal and intercultural program he wanted to do," CP 20/16, pp. 13-14.

373Ibid., 84.

374Ibid., 81.

375Ibid.

376Ibid., 82.

377Ibid., 80-84; Peebles, 97-103; Reminiscences, "Background for tackling job of Principal and intercultural program he wanted to do," CP 20/16, pp. 13-14.
eyebrows curling out over the edges of the thick lenses of his pince-nez.”
Shedd brought a well-cultivated enthusiasm for Lincoln, Jefferson, U.S. history
and pithy aphorisms to the evenings of discussion with Piatelli and Covello.378
This large old-stock American so taken with Italian culture stirred Covello's
interest in the American past, providing a larger context in which contemporary
problems might be set. Shedd also provided an important personal link
between two immigrants and a wider U.S. culture in which Covello had only
recently begun to feel comfortable. Emblematic of the cultural exchange
among these three men was Covello’s direction of De Witt Clinton students in
a production of Shedd’s play “Up at Abe Lincoln’s” at the Harlem YMCA in
1921, and in the eventual bequeath of Shedd’s considerable library to
Benjamin Franklin High School.379 Decades later, Covello, still in touch with
the Shedd family, described his continuing distribution of John Shedd’s book
of aphorisms, “Salt From My Attic,” a product of what Covello described as a
man “overflowing with life and an ungovernable will to live and help others.”380

From both Shedd and Piatelli, Covello began to think more broadly about the
context in which his school teaching fit, about the rich cultural heritage of both
the U.S. and Italy, and of the wider concerns that any teacher of immigrants
must address. Shedd and Piatelli’s influence also assured that schooling’s
purposes for Covello would include a prominent place for concerns shared by

378Covello, The Heart is the Teacher, 82.

379From materials in CP 7/1: Correspondence with John Shedd, several
letters 1914-18, legal documents following death and will of Annie K. Shedd, mother
of John A. Shedd; CP 7/2.

380Covello, The Heart is the Teacher; 84; correspondence file “Shedd” in
CP 7/1, letter 12 March 1951 to William Shedd (“Bill”) from Covello.

the likes of Lincoln, Jefferson, and Mazzini—in short, the struggle for
democratic development.

Learning From Teaching

Covello had been teaching in one form or another since high school,
giving English language courses to neighbors and helping out with programs
at the East Harlem YMCA, the Casa del Popolo, and the Home Garden.
Shortly after graduation from Columbia, he began a 17-year association with
De Witt Clinton, starting as a substitute language teacher and rising to First
Assistant of Modern Languages and Chair of the Italian Department before
taking on the principalship of the new Benjamin Franklin. Throughout his
career, he taught a wide variety of students different subjects in varying
circumstances. He knew the rewards and difficulties of teaching English to
exhausted immigrant workers. He experienced the challenges of tutoring a
wealthy prep student in an apartment he had never imagined existed in the
same city as the streetcart vendors’ tenements where he gave English
classes. He became progressively more conscious of how the social context
affected his students, especially those from minority and immigrant
backgrounds. Building upon strong ideals of Christian service, an intense
personal experience of immigration, and an avid intellectual interest in cultural
differences, Covello began to broaden his view of teaching, addressing
directly the social context of his students.

While teaching at De Witt Clinton High School, Covello became more
aware of the treatment of immigrant and minority students as “problems.” He
began advising the Italian Club at Clinton, and eventually headed up the largest Italian program in the country.\textsuperscript{381} At the same time, he became involved in a number of groups that broadened his own notions of education beyond the narrowly construed academic drilling prevalent at the time.\textsuperscript{382}

Increasingly, he encountered individuals and organizations working systematically to address issues of student background, public schooling's role in the United States, and the wider social currents affecting the education of youth. Through a fellow teacher at Clinton, for example, Covello joined the Young Men's Italian Educational League, a group of East Coast college men that met occasionally at the Government House at New York University. Several of the group members would figure prominently in education and public service in later years. The group seems to have been founded in 1916, and sponsored discussions, courses, citizenship training, and athletic and social events. They sought "to unite all intelligent young Italians in the promotion of a greater educational interest and a finer social and civic loyalty among the Italians of America."\textsuperscript{383} The Advisory Board included Alberto Bonaschi (later Commissioner of Education of the City of New York), Fiorello La Guardia, Angelo Patri (author of numerous books on the education of young children, and first Italian NYC grade school principal), Leone Piatelli (see above), Antonio Stella (writer; \textit{Some Aspects of Italian Immigration}).\textsuperscript{384}

One of the group, John Mariano, was completing his doctorate in sociology at Columbia concerning the achievements of second generation Italians in the United States. Mariano sought to determine how Americans of Italian descent contributed to "the problem peculiar to America, namely, the synthetization of her composite population groups and the evolving of a stable American type."\textsuperscript{385} His sociological analysis sought to make apparent the root cause of "social maladjustments" that affected these Americans' capacities for democratic leadership and community organization.\textsuperscript{386} The sessions in which his work was discussed apparently left a lasting impression on Covello, and he would recall them years later as significant to his developing consciousness of social factors in education.\textsuperscript{387} Covello also helped to organize the Italian Teachers Association, which sought to increase the number of public school students taking Italian and to gain for Italian the same degree of curricular standing of other modern languages.\textsuperscript{388}

\textsuperscript{381}Mario Emilio Cosenza, \textit{The Study of Italian in the United States} (New York: Italy American Society of New York, 1924).

\textsuperscript{382}Larry Cuban, \textit{How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms}, 1890-1990, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993); regarding the educational approaches at De Witt Clinton during Covello's time there, see "Survey of DeWitt Clinton High School, New York City, November 1, 1924," Francis H.J. Paul, Principal (Teachers College Special Collections). Covello was Chairman of the Italian Department at the time.


\textsuperscript{384}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{385}Mariano's study was later published as John Horace Mariano, \textit{Italian Contributions to American Democracy} (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1921), 2.

\textsuperscript{386}Ibid., 9; Mariano is listed as member of the Department of Economics, School of Business and Civic Administration, the College of the City of New York. See pp. 205-310 for Part V, "What the American of Italian Extraction Contributes to American Democracy."


\textsuperscript{388}See Chapter I above; see also "Benjamin Franklin High School," CP 20/16, where Covello cites the role of his work with the Italian Teachers Association, especially "the sociological aspects of our job."
As the number of students taking Italian grew dramatically in the 1920s, Covello's work brought him into contact with the numerous Italian communities across the city. Covello became more and more involved in the wider concerns of immigrant students in the public schools, both in the design of curriculum and through participation in such groups as the Circoli Italiani, the Italian Parents Association, the United Parents Association, the Teachers Union (and later the Teachers Guild), the Italian Educational League, and the Italy-America Society. Yet, while he daily addressed concerns ranging from the lack of respect for foreign cultures to the lack of modern medical care for immigrant students, Covello himself lacked the authority and means for more completely integrating his work with the mission of the school.

His approach to the resolution of the broader problems affecting students became more systematic in the late 1920s, in large part due to his growing involvement with the Department of Educational Sociology at New York University's School of Education. There he learned how to translate his rich experience with Italian students into a model for a revitalized relationship between public schooling and its community. Covello's studies at New York University resonated deeply with his personal experiences and provided a practical and systematic approach for the community development he viewed as so critical to the educational success of Benjamin Franklin. His doctoral work would pull together both the lessons of his personal odyssey and the main currents of East Harlem's community organizational life. Particularly through the Boys' Club Study under Professor Frederic M. Thrasher, Covello developed the methods by which he would extend the work he had been doing with Italian students into the school-community programs he would pioneer for the diverse student population at Benjamin Franklin High School.

Covello's studies at New York University provided him with a theoretical basis and a manifold method for local community research, upon which Benjamin Franklin's school-community programs would rest. His vigorous adoption of local social research as the foundation of community-centered education distinguished Benjamin Franklin among community schools. His application of urban sociological methods to the school's mission and administration extended to public school practice a mixture of social research traditions, some dating to the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology in the 1920s, and others back to at least the mid-nineteenth century.

Educational Sociology at New York University

"I can state here what I have stated publicly," wrote Covello to New York University's Dean E. George Payne, "that it was my contact with New York University that gave me the idea and impetus to establish our work in East Harlem on a community basis." Covello took his first course at New York University in the summer of 1925 with Dean Payne, in educational sociology. Through New York University, Covello participated in an

389Covello to Payne, 27 October 1944.
390Covello to Payne, 27 October 1944.
391CP 7/16.

386Covello also contributed to the curricular materials for Italian: (with Annita E. Giacobbe) First Book in Italian (New York: Macmillan, 1928); (with Annita E. Giacobbe) First Reader in Italian (New York: Macmillan, 1933); also see Peebles, 97-121.
innovative collaborative approach to urban social research with its main roots at the University of Chicago a decade earlier.

Covello, who had been teaching Italian in New York University's School of Commerce since 1922, began taking courses at the School of Education in the summer of 1925 with a class in educational sociology from Professor Payne, who had taught the first course at New York University in the subject only three years earlier. That fall he met and studied with Professor Radosavljevich, a "hulking, articulate" Serbian immigrant who spoke three languages beyond his native Serbian. Covello, an immigrant who spoke three languages beyond his native Italian, took three of Prof. "Rado's" courses in Experimental Education among his earliest studies in education. Covello credited Radosavljevich with convincing him to pursue his doctorate at New York University. The two frequently would stop off at Italian restaurants in Greenwich Village after class and discuss issues of education and immigration. "Study for your doctorate, Leonard," Covello recalls Prof. Radosavljevich advising. "Concentrate on the ethnic factor in education. That is your field—the cultural factor in education—a subject a great many educators talk about, but very few actually understand." Covello later began his unpublished treatise on the community-centered school, advocating the value of experimental educational programs. Such programs, claimed Covello, promoted "closer contacts with the community," an "intimate understanding of students," and "greater participation by students and community in social, civic, and educational planning." The person who would most shape Covello's work at New York University arrived the same year Covello took his last course with Prof. Radosavljevich. Frederic M. Thrasher, formerly a Professor of Sociology at Illinois Wesleyan University and one-time journalist, arrived at New York University in 1927 after completing his doctorate in sociology at the University of Chicago. Covello first studied with Thrasher in the Spring of 1929, in a sociology seminar team-taught with Payne and Harvey W. Zorbaugh, as well as in a Thrasher course entitled "The Social Background of the School Child." Covello took all his next year's courses with Thrasher. Thrasher eventually became Covello's dissertation advisor, with Covello's thesis entitled "The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child." Covello later taught a course at New York University entitled "The Social Background and Education of the Italian Family in America." Thrasher would later call Covello "a man of unusual social vision." Thrasher came to New York University's rapidly growing School of Education as an urban sociologist specializing in juvenile delinquency. While at Chicago, Thrasher completed a study of some 1,313 gangs in Chicago

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392All references to Covello's coursework are based on author's analysis of Covello's NYU transcript, CP 7/16; Irene Joseph Lawrence, "A History of Educational Sociology in the United States" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1951), 37.

393See Covello, The Heart is the Hunter, 165-67.


395Published as Italo.

396Covello taught the course with Edward Corsi, Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island under President Hoover, and later a candidate for mayor of New York City.

397Frederic M. Thrasher to Board of Superintendents, Board of Education, New York City, 22 May 1934, CP 32/1, p. 2.
under the direction of Ernest W. Burgess. The University of Chicago
published the study as part of its Sociological Series edited by Ellsworth Faris,
Robert E. Park and Burgess, and it quickly became a minor classic in the
study of juvenile delinquency.\footnote{Frederic M. Thrasher, The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927; 2nd rev. ed., 1936); unless otherwise
noted, references in the text will be to the 2nd revised edition.} Thrasher concluded that gangs were a
symptom of community disorganization, "the general disorganization incident
to rapid economic development and the ingestion of vast numbers of alien
workers."\footnote{Ibid., 487.} The instability in many urban areas contributed to the lack of
effective social controls on youth, leading to a "blind groping for order, without
much understanding of the nature of the problems involved or their
difficulties."\footnote{Ibid., 488.} Foreshadowing a similar emphasis in Covello's work, Thrasher
attributed much to the adjustment problems in immigrant families. The
language difficulties, the inability to understand a new world, and the grinding
poverty created a gap between children and parents, lessening parental
control, and thus making more attractive "the free life of the gang."\footnote{Ibid.}
Citing the work of Sophonisba Breckenridge and Edith Abbott, Thrasher found the
instability of immigrant communities contributing to the lack of "any consistent
tradition with reference to family control. In this sense, then, the gang
becomes a problem of community organization." As the youth quickly learned
not only English but the sordid side of American life, the problem was also
seen as "one of too quick and too superficial Americanization of the children of
the immigrant."\footnote{Ibid., 491-93.} The variety of ethnic groups clustered together further
contributed to a "cultural lag," as "there has not yet been time for adjustment
among these diverse [cultural] elements and for the development of a
consistent and self-controlled social order."\footnote{Ibid.}

It is important to note that while biological and environmental factors
played a significant role, Thrasher found [delinquents'] inner promptings, their
aspirations, and the 'pictures in their heads' to be "of far greater
significance."\footnote{Ibid., 6; Thrasher is quoting A Problem Boy by Clifford R. Shaw, who also
studied at Chicago under Burgess before moving on to the Institute of Juvenile
Research. Listed as a sociologist with the Chicago Behavior Research Fund, Shaw
was a research assistant with the LCRC, which listed his study of juvenile
delinquency as completed but not published; T.V. Smith and Leonard D. White eds.,
Chicago: An Experiment in Social Science Research (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1929), 259. Shaw also worked with Zorbaugh (and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr.) in
the late 1920s on an ecological study, "Delinquency Areas" (1929).} Inadequate family life, poor and deteriorating neighborhoods,
ineffective religion, dull schooling, and the "lack of proper guidance for
leisure-time activities" did, though, form the underlying "matrix of gang
development."\footnote{Ibid.} Programs for addressing youth gangs, therefore, required
thorough local sociological analysis in order to be effective.\footnote{See also Frederic Thrasher, "Social Background and Informal Education,"
The Journal of Educational Sociology 7, no. 8 (April 1934), 470-84.}  

While in Chicago, Thrasher participated in a ground-breaking
collaborative research effort, an interdisciplinary project generously funded by
the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial which became a key training ground
for a number of prominent sociologists. This loosely-organized group
research program, developed two years prior to Covello's first course in
sociology, would significantly shape the design of community-centered
schooling in East Harlem. Beardsley Ruml, the 26-year-old director of the
$74 million Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, had begun to persuade the
Memorial to shift its emphasis from social welfare to social research in social
welfare's behalf. The young social sciences presented the Memorial with an
opportunity to shift its support to "the development of the social sciences and
the production of a body of fact and principle that will be utilized in the solution
of social problems." Universities would need support in creating the
interdisciplinary centers out of which social research could be produced that
would help address society's ills. Tapping close relations with the Memorial,
the University of Chicago eventually received basic and matching grants from
the Memorial of over $600,000 between 1923 and 1932 for the pursuit of an
interdisciplinary social research program, a systematic and scientific
investigation of the Chicago community. An executive committee which
became known as the Local Community Research Committee (LCRC) was
formed, composed of representatives from the departments of philosophy,
political economy, political science, history, and sociology. Completed at the
premier seat of modern urban studies under the guidance

This account relies on Martin Bulmer, "The Early Institutional Establishment
of Social Science Research: The Local Community Research Committee at the
University of Chicago, 1923-30," Minerva 18, no. 1 (Spring 1980); Martin Bulmer, The
Chicago School of Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Smith
and White, Chicago.

Chicago sociologists during the 1920s developed a hallmark "mosaic"
methodology in their efforts to place urban social research on a more scientific
basis, a more comprehensive method for grappling with the "human ecology"
of the urban community, especially within the "zones of transition." The
Memorial's grants supported a wide variety of urban research towards this
end, including detailed maps of local communities, studies of family
disorganization and divorce, research on juvenile delinquency, and
investigations of homeless men and rooming-house keepers. The resulting
studies made extensive use of social base maps, local surveys, case studies,
life histories, ecological analysis, interviews, statistical profiles and participant
observation. Frederic Thrasher's study of Chicago's delinquent youth in The
Gang, for example, tapped a wide range of documentary sources, public
records, photographs, personal interviews, direct observations, consultations
with local agencies, and various local studies.

Park and Burgess encouraged their students to engage in a close,
inimate relationship with the world they studied. The first monograph, Nels

Bulmer, The Chicago School of Sociology, 89.

Term is Bulmer's, The Chicago School of Sociology, 108. See Robert E.
Park, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban
and Burgess, eds., The City (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 1-46;
E.W. Burgess, "The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project," in
Park and Burgess, The City, 47-62.

See sources, mostly in footnote references and bibliography in The Gang;
see Bulmer, The Chicago School of Sociology, 100-101.
Anderson's 'The Hobo,' relied heavily on informal interviews and 'participant observation' with transients. Anderson, living near Chicago's 'Hobohemia,' confessed that he himself "was in the process of moving out of the hobo world" and that "preparing the book was a way of 'getting by.'"412 Harvey Zorbaugh studied the sharp contrasts of two neighboring districts, the "Gold Coast" along Lake Shore Drive and the "Little Hell" along its borders.413 In addition to extensive use of documents and records, Zorbaugh maintained informal contacts with local newspapermen, "free ward" nurses of the local hospital, and the night court personnel. The intimate involvement of these young sociologists with Chicago's flophouses, Gold Coast settees, and taxi-dance halls reflected Park's imperative to his students: "Gentlemen, go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research."414

From Chicago to New York--The Boys' Club Study

Within a few years, a number of the research assistants of the Local Community Research Committee found their way to the Department of Educational Sociology at New York University's rapidly expanding School of Education. Harvey Zorbaugh arrived in 1926 after his three-year fellowship at Chicago, and quickly advanced to full professor in educational sociology. Nels Anderson came to New York University by the late 1920s, completing his doctorate there under Thrasher. Paul G. Cressey became a teaching fellow at New York University by 1928, assisted with Thrasher's work on East Harlem, became Associate Director of the Motion Picture Study, and eventually completed his doctorate at New York University.415

Within a year after Thrasher's arrival at New York University, he was selected to head up a major sociological research effort for the Boys' Club Federation of America. While many supporters of the Boys' Clubs, including the Federation, had promoted the utility of the Boys' Clubs in the fight against juvenile delinquency, no definitive sociological study of the claim had ever been made. In 1927, the Boys' Club sought such a study through New York University, under the direction of Thrasher, whose extensive work in juvenile delinquency among boys had brought him into close contact with Boys' Clubs in Chicago. With a gift of $37,500 from the Bureau of Social Hygiene of New York City and substantial scholarship support by New York University, the School of Education launched the Boys' Club Study in the spring of 1928. The study planned to examine six boys' club units, three within New York City, and three in outlying areas. One district in which a club was located, East Harlem, became the focus of an intensive local community study.416


414Recalled by Howard Becker, quoted in John C. McGinley, Constructive Typology and Social Theory (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), 71; cited in Bulmer, The Chicago School of Sociology, 97.


416Accounts provided in The Survey 64, no. 6 (15 December 1930); 306; The Survey 64, no. 6 (15 June 1930); Frederic M. Thrasher, "The Boys' Club Study," Journal of Educational Sociology 6, no. 1 (September 1932): 10-15.
The parallels to the Local Community Research Committee in terms of funding, personnel, topics, and methods were striking. Outside funding, sustained over a period of years, brought together a large number of sociologists and graduate students in an intensive collaborative investigation of a local community. The Boys' Club Study produced some 26 subsidiary studies, ranging from morbidity studies to a study of "big muscle" activities to a study of the problems of a girls' club in the area. Nels Anderson wrote a history of East Harlem from colonial times to 1880. Paul G. Cressey headed a study of the influence of motion pictures in the informal education of the Boys' Club area. Salvatore Cimilluca, later a teacher at Benjamin Franklin, took East Harlem's history from where Anderson had left off and continued it to the 1920s. And in "a very important phase of the Boys' Club Study," graduate student Leonard Covello developed his interest in social factors through the study, "Italian Heritage in a Boys' Club Area," an analysis of "the way in which cultural backgrounds condition the success of boys' club and other educational programs."417

Researchers employed a wide range of methods and built frequently upon constructs derived from the work of Park and Burgess. One such method, "ecological analysis" or "a study of society in its distributive aspects," called for the development of extensive "social base maps." Some 170 blocks of the East Harlem area were illustrated on large wall maps, locating graphically over 80 different kinds of institutions from candy stores to junkyards, as well as ethnic group concentrations, housing conditions, and

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Figure 12
Section of East Harlem Social Base Map

Figure 13
Key for East Harlem Social Base Map

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The school was "an integral part of local social organization and, to be successful, must be responsive to local community needs." This required "more careful educational planning, guided by sociological findings based on research." Covello concurred, arguing that to function successfully, [the school] must know not only the social and educational background of its boys and girls, but it must also ... strive to understand the individual child in his social relationships outside of school. As Benjamin Franklin's programs developed, Covello became increasingly convinced that in order to educate the youth of such a diverse urban area, a community-centered school would require a substantial amount of information about the local neighborhood on a continuing basis. Local variations and idiosyncrasies, while perhaps not significant at aggregate levels of social research, could have tremendous impact on a school's educational programs. Neighborhoods constantly change, local norms may differ from the wider society's, and community needs vary across different segments of the community. Understanding a student's background involved detailed investigation of the world in which he lived. The school, according to Covello, must therefore develop a means of carrying out community research so that the knowledge gained would directly serve the needs of the educational programs. To do otherwise would be to give lip service to the public school's mission to develop the local citizenry while leaving the school no systematic means of accomplishing this role.

Within the first year of Benjamin Franklin's opening, a continuing collaborative group study of East Harlem was initiated, guided by a Sponsoring Committee composed of representatives from such community agencies as Union Settlement and Haarlem House. Reflecting the general approach if not the rigor of the earlier Boys' Club Study, Covello and his staff wished to determine basic population data for East Harlem, investigate special problems relating to education, relate home conditions to school work, identify any special needs of the foreign-born, describe the typical leisure time activities of students and the community's elderly, and study the social backgrounds of the various ethnic minorities of the neighborhood. School staff, including WPA workers assigned to Benjamin Franklin, neighborhood volunteers, and students carried out surveys on local delinquency, motion pictures viewing, graduates and drop-outs, student racial attitudes, and student economic backgrounds.

Covello concluded that the school must not satisfy itself with data produced by external sources, largely because of the school's need for more timely and detailed information. In addition, the school, as a "diagnostician," must also "penetrate . . . into the 'sphere of intimacy' of community life and to


424 CP 18/9, "Research as the Foundation for Community-Centered Education", draft of chap. 2 of Covello's unpublished CCS manuscript.
follow, as far as may be possible, changes in the emotional life, as well as changes of a more material nature. For this reason, "success in gathering the kind of data that is valuable to the school," warned Covello, "depends upon sincere friendliness in the approach, rather than upon sheer technical skill in making a physical or sociological survey." The school's status as a member of the local community had implications for which research methods were most appropriate, and revealed a common tension between local and non-local purposes of such research. While his dissertation indicated his technical ability in sociology, Covello sought primarily to advance East Harlem's development with sociological tools, and only secondarily to advance sociology's development through an East Harlem case study.

One technical approach Covello did use, particularly in the initial years of Benjamin Franklin, was that of social mapping, the use of local area street maps for the display of social data. The use of social mapping was developed furthest in the work of Park, Burgess, and their students at the University of Chicago during the 1920s. Covello and his staff produced large wall maps, for example, placing a dot where every Benjamin Franklin student lived, in a color corresponding to race or ethnicity and generation. Combined with other social mapping of East Harlem that had been done for previous studies, the high school staff could locate any student not only in terms of geography, but in terms of the nature of the area in which he lived. Block-to-block distinctions could inform the school's approach to community problems that might affect students' schooling, whether the problem concerned youth gangs, ethnic group border disputes, or first generation-second generation immigrant tensions within families. Small local details could have large educational implications and could determine the success of school-community efforts. Covello insisted that "the school ... assume the role demanded by its very nature," namely to serve as "the leader and the coordinating agency in all educational enterprises affecting the life of the community." This demanded intimate familiarity with the community, because the surging life of the community as a whole, its motion-picture houses, its dance halls, its streets, its gangs, its churches, its community houses, its community codes of behavior and morals--these will either promote or destroy the work of the school.

Earlier Traditions of Social Research

While the influence of the "Chicago school" of urban sociology on the practice of community-centered schooling in East Harlem seems clear, Covello's approach also grew out of older practices, absorbed both through his formal sociological studies and his participation in less formal community reform efforts. Covello's local social research reflected its inheritance from

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traditions pre-dating Park and Burgess at Chicago: the use of social surveys as a conduit for local social change. Over 2,000 social surveys were conducted in the United States prior to 1930, a movement with considerable foundation support and its own journal, The Survey, prior to its rapid decline in the early 1930s. Often an avowed mixture of social research and social reform, these efforts dated back at least to Charles Booth’s Life and Labour of the People of London; in the U.S., it can be traced through such key works as Florence Kelley’s efforts in Hull-House Maps and Papers, Robert Woods’s The City Wilderness, Robert Hunter’s Poverty, and W.E.B. DuBois’ The Philadelphia Negro. While it is impossible to separate completely the influences of the overlapping social survey and sociological survey traditions, Covello’s design of Benjamin Franklin clearly reflected a number of characteristics more typical of the former than the latter. Covello intentionally sought to affect local reform in East Harlem, from housing to community consciousness, and not simply pursue the more abstract investigation of social laws increasingly emphasized by often non-local “professional” sociologists.

Other agencies with which Franklin worked closely, such as the East Harlem Health Center, Heckscher Foundation, and Union Settlement, had been involved with reform-minded local social research for more than a decade prior to the development of the school-community committee system. Kenneth Widdemer, for example, Director of the East Harlem Health Center, had most likely used local social research in his earlier work as a neighborhood organizer in Bowling Green, and as a trainer of community organizers at the People’s Institute, years before he pioneered community research and organizing around health issues in East Harlem. Thrasher referred to the work of the Health Center as an exemplar of social service based on sound social research. The Center “has based its program on facts established by research and it has tested its results by the same method—a truly scientific procedure and one too often absent from educational and recreational programs.” Consistent with the wider historical pattern, this health agency apparently initiated the use of social surveys in East Harlem, a practice Benjamin Franklin employed regularly. Recall further that these agencies played an important role in obtaining Benjamin Franklin for East Harlem.

Covello’s methods, particularly the use of social base maps, while developed further at Chicago, had their origins well before in the use of social surveys. Even the symbols used on the Boys’ Club Study’s social base maps of East Harlem, a key source of information to Covello, were those of the Russell Sage Foundation, whose Department of Surveys and Exhibits had supported social surveys for years. Indeed, Burgess had been involved in a Kansas survey just prior to his arrival at Chicago; he and Park taught about

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431 "The Training School for Community Workers of the People’s Institute of New York. Announcement, 1917/18," 22; Widdemer instructed in a course entitled "Modern Forerunners of the Complete Community Center." Selected annual reports and other documents are available in Special Collections, Teachers College, Columbia University.


433 Thrasher, "Ecological Aspects of the Boys’ Club Study," 54.
social surveys to their students, citing the works of Abbott, Breckenridge, Booth, and Kelley. Though Park and Burgess later distanced themselves from what they perceived as a lack of scientific rigor in many surveys, Burgess found it a useful means of increasing community consciousness. Community self-study under expert direction is democracy being at school to the social scientist. The social survey is to the community what the demonstration station is to the farmer... To the advanced student the social survey affords severe and stimulating training in the technique of investigation and in the art of social action. The influential role of settlement house workers in Benjamin Franklin's community research work also reflected a pattern more typical of the earlier social surveys than the emerging sociology profession. Social research provided the means to advance East Harlem, not vice versa. Many of the key figures in the East Harlem study, such as Helen Harris from Union Settlement or Miriam Sanders from Haarlem House, were women long active in neighborhood reform through the settlement houses. Miriam Sanders' long tenure at Haarlem House, in fact, came after her work and study at Hull House in Chicago.

434 Bulmer, The Chicago School of Sociology, 68-74.

Conclusion

An impoverished immigrant who had lived the traumas of assimilation, Covello knew the challenges of living in several distinct and separate worlds. Straddling very different worlds led him to view cultural differences as "something normal and wholesome, something to be respected, cherished and worthy of dignity." As he increasingly entered non-Italian worlds, he sought to learn more of his own heritage and to share that with other Americans. An early and enduring relationship with an imposing Canadian missionary and various Protestant institutions provided support at critical moments of his life and combined with his deep East Harlem roots to inculcate in him a strong commitment to serving that community. Friendships with the likes of an immigrant poet named Piatelli and a New Englander named Shedd ensured that democratic development would remain a wellspring of his service. Long experience teaching and counseling his Italian students at De Witt Clinton forged a clear appreciation how students' social backgrounds influenced the work of schools.

But it was the Chicago school of urban sociology, absorbed through New York University's educational sociology, that provided Covello with the "recipe," the tools with which he could put his commitment, his vision of community-centered schooling, into practice. The multimethod approach he learned through the Boys' Club Study and through Thrasher, Zorbaugh, and Payne, yielded a systematic means of continually gathering and analyzing the

437 "Background for tackling job of Principal and intercultural Program he wanted to do," in "Reminiscences and Autobiographical Notes by Covello--BFHS years"; CP 20/16, p. 13.
very local social data upon which the school’s educational success would depend. Covello, as director of local research as well as principal, could implement programs for "living democracy as a way of teaching democracy." Public education, thus able practically to coordinate efforts within its "sphere of influence," might effectively marshal forces for the development of that basic unit of democracy, the local community.

Chapter IV

COMMUNITY SCHOOLING FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY:
PREMISES AND FIRST STEPS

Introduction

Respected public servant Edward Corsi, Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island under President Hoover, described the East Harlem he knew in the decade prior to the founding of Benjamin Franklin as a profoundly international corner of a great cosmopolitan metropolis:

Perhaps in few other spots throughout the world are so many races to be found in so small an area. The life in many parts of the Old World is re-enacted here. Were it not for the "flappers" and the "cake eaters" of the younger generation, "Americans" to the core, the illusion would be complete.

East Harlem’s shifting mix of ethnic and racial groups provided a rich context and constant challenge for community-centered schooling. At Benjamin Franklin High School," noted Covello, "we have known for some time that some of the major problems of the school are connected with the need for establishing tolerance and friendly relationships among the differing groups of

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438CP 18/2, "The Community-Centered School—Foreword," outline notes, p. 3.
Spurred and stymied by forces from inside and outside the neighborhood, Benjamin Franklin's efforts in the area of intercultural relations illustrated the variety of factors that influenced how the school understood its role as a center of the community's educational sphere. Intolerance between groups tested the school's reliance on a locally-directed, research-informed effort to coordinate community educational forces. A complex interplay among the goals of community-centered schooling ensued, informed by the broader national discussions on intercultural relations and social reconstruction. An evolving vision of cultural democracy resulted. That vision sought to address community problems as educational challenges, broadly understood.

Covello would later explain that he had no set plan, no clear formula for action when he began his experiment at Benjamin Franklin. Perhaps this was true, though as the last chapter illustrated, prior to his arrival he certainly had developed a number of supporting concepts and personal beliefs that he sought to implement at Benjamin Franklin. Benjamin Franklin offered the opportunity to "test in a living situation, the oft discussed idea that it was possible for people of different origins . . . to work together to improve community living." The tensions and opportunities presented by the ethnic mosaic of East Harlem provided an anvil upon which Covello's notions of community schooling would be forged, strengthened at times and weakened at others.

This chapter will describe Benjamin Franklin's struggles to develop effective school-community approaches to intercultural relations and will illuminate the complex construct of community schooling that ultimately evolved. After sketching a broad national context, the chapter will address the Franklin staff's efforts to establish the initial premises of their community programs. Confident in community-centered schooling, the staff were informed by the national discussions of social change and cultural democracy, and by the issues that arose from the daily challenges of implementation. Franklin's intercultural programs built upon extensive social research and were projected into the community through a web of service agencies, storefront units, and curricula. Building on lessons derived from local experimentation, they represented a broad mix of inter-generational, cross-group, and cross-institutional approaches.

Forging Cultural Democracy

We have less to fear from frontal attacks than from ambuscades. When we see our foes before us we can arm ourselves and fight back. It is the subtle and hidden thrusts which menace our liberties most. ... the insidious sowers of anti-social seeds which are planted in the wind and in the air around us; whose stench pervades the atmosphere.
The first issue of The Social Frontier appeared one month after Benjamin Franklin High School opened in 1934. The founders of the journal shared with the founders of the school a belief "that education would inevitably play a vital role in the social and economic reconstruction that was needed" in the "age of transition" in which the U.S. found itself.444 "The larger task of the teacher," Covello explained, "is the building of a better society; the importance of this should draw the teacher into more active service to the community."445 Many Franklin faculty, as well as many who were active in the school's work, were familiar with the writings and thought of Harold Rugg, John Dewey, George Counts, Goodwin Watson, and others. The school, through a staff committee of Harold Fields, Austin Works, and Walter Wolff, invited Professor Rugg to speak about "The Making of a Good Teacher" at a faculty conference in 1936.446 Democracy and Education was required reading for the in-service course Covello gave for teachers.447 "To the extent that they are permitted to fashion the curriculum and procedures of the school [teachers] will definitely and positively influence the social attitudes, ideals, and behavior of the coming generation," urged Counts.448 Through curricular and other means, schools should serve a prophetic role, calling the nation to be faithful to its democratic ideals.449 In this larger sense, Covello and his staff sought to reconstruct East Harlem's civic life, building the processes and even the places where a broad public spirit could support the finest qualities of a pluralistic democracy. In the early 1930s, developing the local community's democracy in East Harlem meant, among other things, facing the diverse and at times volatile ethnic and racial diversity in the neighborhood. Given the shifting ethnic and racial profile of East Harlem, within a tense and troubled era, interethnic relations presented a pervasive challenge to Franklin's efforts at community-centered schooling.

443Louis Retin, "We Hold These Truths." Report on intercultural education experience in English course during Fall 1938, CP 51/13, p. 1.
445Leonard Covello, "Teacher Responsibility to the Community." Notes for Round Table Discussion, Kindergarten 6-8, Teachers Association, Hotel Astor, 19 February 1938, p. 2.
446Leonard Covello, "Making Education Real" (Guest Editorial), Yorkville Advance, 4 December 1936, CP 122/12. "Franklin's Faculty To Meet Welfare Worker," New York Sun, 23 October 1936, CP 122/12. Other speakers invited for faculty conferences that year included Helen Harris, head worker of Union Settlement to speak on "The Settlement's Approach to Education"; Miss Fannie Hurst, author, on "Literature in the American Scene"; and Mr. Stuart Chase, economist, on "Economics in the Present Era."
447Leonard Covello, "In-service Course—East Harlem: The Teacher in Relation to His Community," CP 25/10.
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438 CP 18/2, "The Community-Centered School—Foreword," outline notes, p. 3.
Discussions and controversies concerning ethnicity and race flourished among U.S. educators in the 1930s. A survey of educational magazines and journals found some 220 articles concerning intergroup relations published between 1934 and 1944, not including technical scientific works and more narrowly political or economic essays. The survey, performed under the auspices of the American Council on Education, found that most articles were “chiefly from the magazines published in the professional field of sociology and concentrate for the most part on intergroup relations . . . and characteristics and problems of special groups.” In general, the number of articles rose until 1940, declined in the early war years, and then began to rise again in the last year of the survey. Most essays treated ethnicity and race in fairly general terms for educators; only nine percent of the articles treated intergroup factors specifically within schools.

The general discussion of race and ethnicity among educators, if fluctuating in intensity, frequently focused upon the need to “Americanize” large numbers of immigrants and their children. By the early 1930s, the termination of mass immigration seems to have allowed for greater attention to immigrant group contributions, if only in general as a more effective means of assimilating immigrants and their children. Louis Adamic, a Yugoslavian-American journalist widely cited by those in intercultural education, extolled the achievements of recent immigrants in the U.S. through books and popular magazines. Many educators also cited anthropologists like Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, as well as social researcher Bruno Lasker to modify what they saw as narrowly ethnocentric approaches to Americanization. Among the “social reconstructionists,” claimed historian Ronald Goodenow, the “dangers of racial conflict and forced ‘melting pot’ assimilation processes” had forged a

450 For a recent related piece, see Robert Shaffer, “Multicultural Education during World War II: A Look at the New York City Public Schools” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the History of Education Society, Chicago, 23 October 1993).


452 Ibid., 130. Sociology and Social Research were the largest single contributors; background articles occurred frequently between 1934 and 1936, with a sharp decline in 1941; exhortatory articles began to appear late, increased rapidly until 1941 and then dropped off until 1944; 1935, while lowest number per year overall, was the highest year in terms of articles on methods and materials; the highest overall year was 1940.

453 Ibid., 130.

454 John Bodnar claimed that “Americanization . . . never elicited the constant attention of educational reformers as did the concern for vocationalism,” and that immigrants often effectively resisted the Americanization/secularization efforts of the public schools, in part through the Catholic school system. See John Bodnar, The Transplanted (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 189-97. John Higham found a contradictory tendency in the schools; in the Midwest and “in other parts of the country assimilation through education was vigorously supported as a national goal but severely qualified in local practice.” John Higham, Send These to Me (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 181.


consensus on race and ethnicity. This consensus rested on the belief that a cultural pluralism rooted in shared democratic ideals and a faith in progress required a "welfare state which practices social planning" in order to eliminate "cultural lags," as well as intercultural education and techniques encouraging tolerance. The cultural pluralism of social philosopher Horace Kallen could receive considerable support, though events in Europe by the end of the 1930s brought upon a renewed emphasis on "unum" over "pluribus." Covello himself supported a "cultural democracy" which recognized the contributions of immigrant cultures. In this way, immigrants and their children were most likely to assimilate in their new land, and the U.S. culture would most likely benefit from the positive aspects of foreign cultures.

Of perhaps more immediate use for educators were the descriptions of actual school programs attempting to encourage greater tolerance of ethnic and racial diversity. Prior to World War II, community-wide educational approaches that promoted cultural democracy could be found in Hastings-on-Hudson, the Lower West Side, Queens, Hempstead, and Yonkers in New York. In New Jersey, efforts were underway in Madison, Jersey City, and Bloomfield. Interested educators could hardly avoid reading about the programs in Springfield, Massachusetts, for example, where a community-wide effort began in 1939. The Springfield Plan for "living, learning, working and thinking together" was featured in Newsweek, March of Time, We the People, Woman's Home Companion, and the Harvard Educational Review; shown on RCA television; described in at least two books; and even made into a Warner Brothers' film "It Happened in Springfield." What happened, according to one of its directors, was that "education for democratic citizenship" became "accepted as a first objective" and was "on its way to becoming the core of the curriculum." Organized from the elementary grades through to adult education and public fora, Springfield's "total war against prejudice" sought to counter intolerance by a thorough adoption of "the democratic process of group thinking about the needs of the community and the best ways to meet


462 Chatto, "Springfield's Experience with Intergroup Education." The National Conference of Christians and Jews suggested initiating the Springfield experiment, with Clyde Miller to test the thesis that kids could learn to accept differences.
A new wing for a local hospital became a special study of community cooperation for a neighboring grade school. The Labor Relations Forum brought nearly two hundred representatives of labor and management together in discussion once a week. Pittsburgh, along with other districts, sought to implement programs modeled on Springfield's.

**Local Research Guides Local Action**

If Franklin were to address intergroup relations in the complex ethnic mosaic that was East Harlem, it could not simply adopt another community's program. Instead, a thorough and continuous research into local conditions would need to be developed. Speaking to the N.E.A. in 1938, Covello emphasized the need for schools to know their communities "intimately," especially in heavily immigrant neighborhoods. East Harlem's foreign-born community, a community which understood internal boundaries, included many ethnic elements, many scarred from the immigrant experience, stymied by language barriers, and frustrated by past encounters with public schools that did not realize nor meet their needs. Many Southern Italians, raised in a "domus-centered" culture fiercely loyal to kinship groups, profoundly distrusted the authority of public institutions and feared their corrupting influence upon the young. Adding to this complexity was the fact that the local population constantly shifted, its second generation presented increasingly new challenges, and its economic conditions changed month to month.

As indicated above, Franklin could not rely on general studies or surveys and expect to be effective in so complex a neighborhood. Most surveys, cautioned Covello, "deal with large areas of space or thought," which meant that

Local differentiation peculiar to the small communities are overlooked.... Special community problems are omitted in the larger scope of the work.... The people of the community are disregarded, to a large extent, in their individual human relationships and in their civic and community importance as factors of progress or retardation and ... no intimate, friendly, enduring contacts are established within the community by outside research workers whose interest is limited to the particular objectives of a current survey.

In addition to standard census data and municipal reports on East Harlem, intensive local research done via the Boys' Club Study—a major project to evaluate the Boys' Club's impact on juvenile delinquency, done by

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464 Ibid., 100, 102.


466 It should be noted that a fair amount of research on the school's internal aspects—grading, student progress, intelligence scores, student evaluations of the school, etc.—also took place.


468 Research and Development of the Community School," Notes for speech presented to the "Parker Program," Atlantic City, February 1938; CP, Box 10, Folder 36.

469 Research and Development of the Community School," 2.
New York University—provided a wealth of relevant information to the early staff of Benjamin Franklin.\textsuperscript{470} Some 55 researchers produced nearly 50 reports, articles, theses, or dissertations concerning the Boys' Club in East Harlem, as well as intensive research into the area's youth, families, history, and institutions. Nearly every report provided the kind of detail useful to understanding the wider life of Franklin's boys. One study, for example, while analyzing the Boys' Club membership, detailed the activities and status levels within the local and influential Federal Athletic Club, "no more than a highly organized criminal gang," according to the report. The study described the Athletic Club's efforts at "boring-from-within" in order to take over the Boys' Club facility.\textsuperscript{471} Another investigator explored 34 East Harlem churches and synagogues, describing their respective membership, activities, and rituals in over 600 pages of elaborate detail. Her notes on services included dress, ethnicity, gender, and generational breakdown, complete with explanations of where second generation youth of various ethnic groups preferred to marry and why.\textsuperscript{472} The extensive social base maps completed for the Boys' Club study yielded a vast wealth of social geographic detail, from which ethnic groups dominated what blocks to which areas had what recreational facilities and dangerous lures for youth.\textsuperscript{473}

\textsuperscript{470}See Chapter III above.\textsuperscript{471}Irving V. Sollins, "A Socio-Statistical Analysis of Boys' Club Membership" (Ph.D. diss., New York University School of Education, 1936), 48-49.\textsuperscript{472}May Case Marsh, "The Life and Work of the Churches of an Interstitial Area" (Ph.D. diss., School of Education, New York University, 1932).\textsuperscript{473}CP, OS folder 1.

The Educational Bureau of the Casa Italiana, where Covello was directing some 50 researchers in 1932, produced a number of studies of some general use to Franklin's community work.\textsuperscript{474} One of the "pioneering" efforts in Italian-American studies, the Bureau produced reports on Italian contributions to the U.S., health conditions of Italian New Yorkers, language usage in Italian families, and Italian occupational trends, along with pertinent demographic data. The research added specific details to the many general impressions of New York Italian life, and thus aided Franklin staff in their work with a heavily Italian community. Unfortunately, the research assistance did not make it past World War II. Money quickly ran out for the Bureau once the WPA terminated, and though the Bureau and its research briefly became the Italian-American Educational Bureau on East 108th Street, and then the East Harlem Educational and Research Bureau on East 116th Street, its 54 transfer files of work ultimately found their way into a Sanitation Department drive for old paper by 1945.\textsuperscript{475}

While the data gathered through these investigations provided important information to Covello and his staff, they were not "sufficient to meet the actual needs of the school in its effort to create a school-community

\textsuperscript{474}Covello is given credit for contributing to what was probably the first step in the founding of Casa Italiana, the organization of the Italian Club at Columbia University in 1914. See Roger Howson, "Historical Survey of the Casa Italiana" (New York: Casa Italiana, Columbia University, n.d.), Folder "Casa Italiana," William F. Russell Papers, RG5, Box 10, Special Collections, Teachers College, Columbia University.

program." Feeling that "the school is too vital a force to permit a lag in its knowledge of the neighborhood," Covello and others, with the support of the Mayor's Committee on City Planning, launched a community survey of East Harlem soon after the school was founded, seeking both "thoroughness" and "informality" in their effort at "getting acquainted" with the community they wished to serve. At the top of the list of research concerns was the pattern of ethnic distribution throughout East Harlem. With the critical support of volunteers, City Planning staff, and WPA workers, detailed demographic data were gathered through block-to-block studies, house-to-house surveys, interviews with community elders and prominent residents, and reports by participant observers.

...with Anthony Lombardi in charge of the local office; this study is described further in Chapter II above. Covello, Remnant of CCS manuscript, section of Chapter II. CP 18/9, p. 14; also Norman Studer, "The Community School," The New York Teacher, no. 3 (December 1938): 25. (Studer, inspired by Covello's ideas, later modeled the Downtown Community School after Benjamin Franklin's design and became the school's Director. A Covello lecture series was founded at the school in honor of retired Principal.)

...to recognize as of educational importance" had to be carried out and applied by the school. In a special English class for boys viewed with leadership potential, students performed field work as a part of their analysis of local problems, especially those "difficulties presented in the adjustment of racial differences and animosities." Franklin students assisted Covello in constructing a large wall map of the streets of East Harlem and then placed each student on the map according to his place of residence. One dot represented each student, with different colors designating ethnicity and different dot designs indicating generation. In one glance, Franklin staff could see the tremendous variety of ethnicities among the students and how...
these tied into the ethnic and generational distribution across East Harlem blocks.482

Student participation could not be overstressed, claimed Franklin star senior Albert Hemsing in a NBC radio speech in 1937. "We are educated for a democracy only insofar as we have learned to work in cooperation with others," and on the school-community committees, "there is always student participation."483 Student Donald Merit, President of the Club Crusaders, gathered some 1,000 signatures for a petition urging racial equality in the armed forces. The student research appeared to help a diverse student body unite behind common causes, at least at times. Student Frankie Tartaro, after surveying housing conditions firsthand, was "surprised there were not more delinquent young people." Robert Alleyne concluded from his housing survey efforts that "delinquency knows no race or color, it is present wherever conditions encourage it—poverty, bad housing, poor opportunities for work or play, broken or unhappy homes."484

Such detailed local research allowed both Franklin staff and students to begin to understand the richness and idiosyncrasies of the community it wished to serve, and began to facilitate the school's efforts to improve intercultural relations among its students and within East Harlem.485 Yet, with so much research activity taking place in the neighborhood, Covello felt it necessary to caution researchers regarding their tone and reminded them of the wider relationship within which local research must exist. Social research could not afford to treat the community as crude data, nor damage the larger relationship the school wished to build with East Harlem. In an effort to distinguish the school's work from other research approaches, Covello emphasized that the school must attain a certain degree of sociological data with scientific accuracy without making the community feel that it is merely a "social laboratory" for the school and its faculty. It must preserve the warmth and courtesy that mark all true social contacts between neighbors and friends.486

Local Networks

Benjamin Franklin's various research efforts were linked to the wider relationship with the community, and to local social action, in a number of formal and informal ways. Many of those active in community agencies such as Haarlem House, Union Settlement, East Harlem Health Center, Heckscher

482CP, OS folder #1.

483Albert Hemsing, "Does the School Provide Adequate Contact with Community Organizations?" CP 35/17.

484Students Merit, Tartaro, and Alleyne were featured in PM, Wednesday, 14 June 1944; title of article is unclear from document. CP; Michael Lombardo, Joseph Bayza, and Leonard Kramm, "Franklin High is Community Centered," Junior Red Cross Journal, October 1939.

485Rita Morgan commented regarding student participation that "only as these and similar plans are developed through the pupils themselves and in relation to their own lives and background, will citizenship be raised to the level of an integral part of students' lives, as real as their interest in a job, as personal as economic conditions at home, and as vital as the social and political forces that affect the life about them," Folder 5, Morgan Papers, Teachers College, Columbia University. Concerning a 1943 summer session, Morgan added a further purpose: "To continue the constant study of the school in the interests of racial unity," p. 3, Folder 1, Rita Morgan papers.

Foundation, local churches, and others worked together closely over a number of years. A fluid interplay and exchange of ideas and activities appears to have existed particularly during the 1930s. Several local activists had worked with more than one East Harlem institution over the years and even simultaneously, and agency boards reflected these interlocking ties. Covello, for example, had worked at the Jefferson Park Methodist Church, Haarlem House, Casa del Popolo, and the short-lived local YMCA well before Benjamin Franklin existed. The school quickly joined the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies, which held its annual meeting at the school in 1935, and of which Covello served as Vice-President for a time. Faculty served on committees of the East Harlem Council as well as the Yorkville Civic Council. Meetings of school committees met at various local agencies, broadening faculty knowledge of the community and developing personal contacts valuable to community schooling's success. But Franklin staff, and particularly Covello, did not want to leave the school’s relationship to the community solely to such informal, though often quite effective, ties. Thus, in order for the school visibly to assume leadership in developing the democratic community life of East Harlem, and in order to put together a coordinated approach to meeting local needs, Covello sought a more formal mechanism. The school could not hope to face the challenges posed by interethnic tensions, for example, if it did not have the organizational infrastructure through which to both gather research and coordinate action.487

During the summer following Franklin’s first year, Covello, Assistant Principal Abraham Kroll, and Social Science chair Harold Fields sketched the outlines of such an infrastructure, the Community Advisory Council (CAC), a central mediating body through which local needs could be presented, and where research and programs to meet those needed would be coordinated. The CAC was seen as central to carrying out the fundamental mission of the school, namely “to develop a sense of practical and personal citizenship among the boys ... through the co-operation of civic and welfare organizations.”488 The Council allowed the school “to touch and build up citizenship through precept and aid rather than through instruction.”489 Fields took the lead in gaining the support and participation of the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies.490 Agencies were to be represented on the Council’s committees and would provide assistance to the school in meeting individual and policy problems at the school. The school would open its facilities to local agencies and provide the framework for a community-wide coordination of educational efforts, not unlike community coordination council structures across the country.491 Local agency representatives urged

490See, e.g., “Minutes of the Meeting of Mr. Covello and Mr. Fields with Members of the East Side Council of Social Agencies,” 15 September 1935, CP 39/1.
491Though the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies served as the larger umbrella council of the community, the CAC’s growth and activity during its first few years put the school at the center of many community reform efforts. Such a profile appears higher than most community coordination councils maintained.
selected Franklin faculty to serve in return on committees of the East Harlem Council, which Covello, Fields, and others eventually did. By mid-October, the CAC had gained the support of most East Harlem social and political leaders, and even the endorsement of Mayor La Guardia.492

Several hundred local activists attended the CAC’s first meeting, presided upon by its Executive Board chair Harold Fields. Nearly three dozen groups, including professional associations, local universities, hospitals, churches, government agencies, foundations, and settlement houses, were represented.493 Board of Education President Dr. George Ryan and Congressman Vito Marcantonio led an impressive series of speakers in applauding the council’s formation, and in emphasizing the great need for “projecting the citizenship work of the school into activities of outside organizations” as well as “bringing welfare and civic groups into the curriculum of the school.”494 Initially formed by five major committees—the Health, Citizenship, Parent Education, Correction and Guidance, and Racial Committees—the Council grew to some 22 faculty-chaired committees of teachers, students, and community members by 1937, consolidating to fewer committees in subsequent years.495 Eventually, the Council sponsored monthly meetings known as Community Night Programs, attended by faculty and community members.496

The various Council committees formed essential bridges between the school faculty and the community, between students and parents, and between agencies and the school, facilitating the coordination of in-school activities with community-wide efforts. Dr. Herman Dlugatz, for example, chair of the Science Department, teamed up with Dr. Rabinoff of the East Harlem Health Center on the Health Committee. A campaign for public housing featured school exhibits, curriculum units on housing, committee research into local housing conditions in cooperation with local agencies, assistance in public demonstrations, and lobbying campaigns coordinated through the CAC.497 Students described the school’s community programs to various East Harlem parents associations, joined elementary and junior high

"Communities Are Improved," Christian Science Monitor, 8 June 1937; see flyers advertising CAC Community Nights, such as for 22 May 1941 (CP 48/1), or 27 November 1941 (CP 6/8).

John Puckett, in shared materials with the author and with references to CP boxes 39 and 40, concurs that a review of the committee structure ensured early on; it was seen as too great a demand on faculty and excessive in number. This apparently resulted in a special sub-committee survey of the problem in 1937, whereupon the number of committees was reduced to 18. By 1941, Puckett reports the number was down to 9, though I only have seen evidence of a reduction to 15.


school students in pushing multilingual naturalization campaigns, and helped build Franklin’s adult school’s enrollment. Teachers spoke in area churches, settlement houses, and other agencies. The American Legion, the East Harlem Council of Social Agencies, Union Settlement, the East Harlem Health Center, the WPA, and others teamed up in a wide variety or ways through the school’s CAC, weaving an intricate web of social and professional relations across groups in East Harlem.498

The sensitive area of juvenile delinquency, so often linked to interethnic tensions, posed a particular challenge to Franklin and tested the school’s ability to work cooperatively with other agencies. Since Franklin and the local Juvenile Aid Bureau shared a concern about juvenile delinquency in East Harlem, for example; they decided to cooperate through the CAC in investigating the problem, classifying offenses, and gathering third party research.499 A set of 748 cases reported to the Bureau were plotted on an area wall map according to residence and nationality, allowing the school to trace the relationship between ethnicity and delinquency, as well as to anticipate and address likely trouble spots in East Harlem. The school’s reclassification of delinquency found only 2% of the cases qualified as “real delinquency” (one stage beyond “malicious mischief”) and that delinquency was a relative term. Covello noted what many already suspected, namely an apparent link between ethnicity and chance of arrest; “An Irish boy in an Irish community has less chance of being dragged into court than an Italian boy in an Italian community.”500 The school then channeled its findings into the committee system headed by the CAC, through the Juvenile Aid and Big Brother Committee, Guidance Committee, and Social Welfare Committee. Concluding that “the street is the true generator of anti-social behavior,” the CAC re-directed the in-school guidance programs as well as their various community outreach efforts in light of the study’s findings.501

Experimenting with Intercultural Education

From the start, the Racial Committee was one of the most active in the school-community committee system coordinated by Franklin’s CAC. The Committee investigated how the school might play a role in resolving interethnic tensions in East Harlem, starting first with the student body. Addressing interethnic and interracial relations required an investigation into both the attitudes of the students and the possible remedies these attitudes indicated. In particular, Franklin staff felt a need to determine:

1. The age at which intercultural reactions begin to occur and the causes by which unfavorable reactions are set up on a purely racial basis.

2. Particular attitudes by which the reactions of the high school student are conditioned, and suitable types of education programs whereby young people, on the eve of mature participation in community and


499Juvenile Aid Bureau was formerly known as the Crime Prevention Bureau.


501Ibid. This included the establishment over time of a series of “street units,” discussed below.
national life, may be prepared to assume civic and social responsibilities in a manner that will contribute to intercultural harmony and civic and social development, among individuals and in the community.

(3) The method by which the community can be drawn into full participation in the movement for intercultural harmony and cooperation, with the school itself as a center through which both school and community can function effectively. The challenge of improving intercultural relations, then, could provide "practical experience in working out the problems of democratic living in a democratic manner."

In an initial effort to understand how intergroup relations at Franklin and in East Harlem might be improved through community schooling, Covello invited the Service Bureau for Education in Human Relations, with Rachel Davis DuBois as Executive Secretary, to carry out an experimental program in intercultural education in the Spring of 1935. Covello had previously met DuBois at a conference sponsored by the YWCA's International Institute in Philadelphia, at which they shared the same platform addressing the question

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502Untitled, apparently a report to faculty and staff of BFHS; CP 56/8, n.d., though probably 1939-40.
503Ibid.
504The Service Bureau became the Commission on Intercultural Education of the Progressive Education Association in January 1937; in September 1938, the association with the PEA ended, after which the original organization was revived and, in 1941, renamed the Service Bureau for Intercultural Education; the organization remained in existence until 1954.
505Rachel Davis DuBois with Corann Okorodudu, All This and Something More: Pioneering in Intercultural Education (Bryn Mawr, Penn.: Dorrance & Co., 1984), 54. Their meeting apparently took place sometime between 1925 and 1928.
506Mabel Carney to Prof. Leonard Covello, Casa Italiana, 18 October 1933, CP 50/9; Leonard Covello to Miss Mabel Carney, 22 October 1933, CP 50/9. After DuBois left the Bureau and set up the Workshop for Cultural Democracy, Covello joined the Board of the Workshop.
507DuBois was forced out of the first apartment she had chosen as an office for the Bureau by the landlord who declared that she had "never had any damn
only New York City high school involved was Benjamin Franklin, which became one of the Bureau's seven "demonstration centers" during the 1934-35 school year.508

The Bureau's program at Benjamin Franklin allowed the school to begin to gather information regarding student attitudes and start experimenting with methods of addressing these attitudes. Covello knew he needed to "grow into" any program that would confront such a difficult area as ethnic tensions, and the Bureau's track record provided credibility and a measured start.509 After a preliminary meeting in February 1935, the Bureau staff and selected Franklin faculty decided to focus on those ethnic groups dominant in the school—Latin American (especially Mexican and Puerto Rican), Slavic (especially Polish and Czech), and Italian. The Japanese were added as a final group owing to commonly held misconceptions of them, and also because by choosing a group so far removed from East Harlem "it would not seem as though any particular group was being singled out in the


509Reminiscences by Covello, CP 51/21, p. 3.


513DuBois, "Intercultural Education at Benjamin Franklin High School." Some staff involved did note that they could never be sure if the students' attitudes had really changed or if they simply understood what "right" answers were supposed to be. In either case, claimed the same staff, at least the students now realize more
pleased by the overall results for both students and faculty, felt that the school
"had broken out in a difficult and vital area—fears had been allayed and
difficulties overcome."514 He had seen the data and was now convinced that
"the job could be done—if we willed it strongly enough."515

Applying Lessons: Entering the "Sphere of Intimacy"

Franklin's brief experiment with intercultural education helped to
convince Covello and many of his staff to move forward in several new
directions in order to improve intergroup relations in East Harlem. They came
to believe that interethnic tolerance had to suffuse all the school's efforts and
affect all sectors of the community. The value of indirect efforts at changing
attitudes was now clear to them. Efforts designed to combine the goals of
intercultural education with the broader school-community aims of East
Harlem's democratic development were most likely to succeed. A report of the
Committee for Racial Cooperation several years later explained this lesson:

The program must not be overstressed (a criticism which
might, with some truth, have been leveled against the
Franklin experiment). A subtle approach is necessary.
Ours is a fight more difficult than an open battle. We must
not conquer and subdue those with undesirable
intercultural attitudes; we must rather persuade and win
them over as ardent converts to the idea of intercultural
democracy.516

In the terms of Rachel DuBois, the experiment encouraged the greater use of
the situational approach, ideally through occasions aimed at the community's
democratic development. Neighborhood folk festivals sponsored by the
school provided social events while also promoting the celebration of ethnic
heritages. Community bulletins in English, Italian, and Spanish discussed
local news, while emphasizing that every group was involved in the
community. By sponsoring naturalization drives through multilingual mailings
and evening citizenship classes, Franklin established closer relations with
various community ethnic organizations. By working to bring the first public
housing to East Harlem, Benjamin Franklin placed itself at the center of myriad
community groups, transcending ethnic boundaries in pursuit of a goal held in
common.

Emblematic of Franklin's indirect approach to intercultural education,
and indicative of the staff's desire for intensive local research, was the series
of "street units" established from 1937 forward. It was not enough for the staff
to know about the cultural or social backgrounds of students, Covello claimed.
The school must also understand "the individual child in his social
relationships outside of school... and must play an active and aggressive
part in the affairs of the community."517 The street units—clubs housed in area
storefronts and managed in part by community representatives—helped

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514 Reminiscences by Covello, CP 51/21, p. 5.
515 Ibid.
516 Committee for Racial Cooperation, Benjamin Franklin High School, New
Intercultural Education (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Supervisors and Directors of
Instruction of the N.E.A., 1942), 69.
517 Covello, "A High School and Its Immigrant Community."
Franklin comprehend those relationships, to embed itself further within East Harlem life, and to enter in yet another way the community's "sphere of intimacy." 518

Housed in converted storefronts, these novel off-site social and educational centers extended the school's presence closer to the corner hangout and illustrated the linkage between local research and social action that the entire school-committee system sought to facilitate. The Association of Parents, Teachers, and Friends encouraged the opening of the first such unit, the Friends and Neighbors Club, in 1937. 519 Overcoming language obstacles and cultural restraints against women participating in activities outside the home, Franklin staff organized a relatively small but active Association. The group soon developed the club idea, "a little family club . . . where the older people, the children, and the young people of the neighborhood can meet and plan various kinds of activities." 520 Students and community residents renovated an adjacent store in exchange for the first year's rent. Located at 315 West 108th Street, next door to Franklin's main building, the club was generally open to student and faculty use during the day. The club held an open house every Sunday evening. "Anyone passing by may enter, read a magazine, play the piano, listen to the radio or even dance an old-fashioned jig. Tea and cake are served by volunteer teachers or mothers of the neighborhood," reported the New York Times. 521 During the week, children attended daily story hours, and teenagers learned classical music or played in a fife and drum corps. 522 Local boys' clubs, as long as they maintained order and a democratic procedure, could use the facilities. Every Monday, the Housing Committee would meet at the club to plan its next move in securing the East River Drive Low Rent Housing Project (later, East River Houses). All money for light, rent, and other necessities came entirely from donations. 523

In addition to serving as a local social and organizational center, bringing different neighborhood groups together and pulling youth away from the lures of the street, the street unit served the CAC's need for local research concerning intergroup relations. Once Benjamin Franklin became an active part of the community and entered its "sphere of intimacy," it had to constantly engage in experimentation and consistently test the effects of different approaches. The street units allowed for that experimentation to take place off school grounds, if often near them. For example, the Friends and Neighbors Club experimented with community-gardening. Not only did the club seek to understand the finer agricultural points of collective urban gardening; "the work was at the same time an exploration of specific attitudes and behaviour of the people." 524 This provided new knowledge to the school about its varied

518 Leonard Covello, "Research and Its Aims," part of outline of Chapter II of CCS manuscript, CP 18/9.
519 Covello, "Neighborhood Growth through the School," 135.
520 Ibid.
522 Ibid.
523 Lombardo et al., "Franklin High is Community Centered," 54.
524 Covello, "Research and Its Aims."
community and people, part of an intentional drive by the school to constantly push its understanding of this diverse community further. "Begun for the purpose to gather information, the work was in the nature of research; the garden project itself was an experimental program."

The street units also allowed the school to play an active role in the community, coordinating the educational forces affecting interethnic relations on relatively neutral ground. While not physically a part of the public school building many residents might see as foreign, the units were also not private local facilities in which some faculty might feel uncomfortable and which might fail to convey the clubs' non-private status. In the storefront clubs, an undefined common "turf" was created, part of the school enterprise but not actually the school, a social club in a neighborhood fond of such institutions.

In this spirit, on 17 February 1939, representatives from all of East Harlem's ethnic groups met at the Friends and Neighbors Club for a program sponsored by the school-community Committee for Racial Cooperation. Welcoming everyone to the club, Covello indicated that the club's very existence showed the promise for interethnic cooperation. Recalling the street conflict of the prior October, Covello urged the local leaders that "our great

...At least five street units formed in the early years of Benjamin Franklin High—the Friends and Neighbors Club, the Italo-American Educational Bureau, the Hispano-American Educational Bureau, the Community Friendship Club (or "Old Friendship Club"), and the Association of Parents, Teachers, and Friends. Each club provided a vehicle for intellectual, emotional, and situational approaches of intercultural education. While the specific goals of the five clubs differed as did their success in reaching these, each helped Franklin reach out into East Harlem, gather "intimate" data,

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525Covello considered the street units as outposts of experimentation for the school-community program.

526According to a social base map of East Harlem 1930 created for the Boys' Club Study, there are some 22 private social clubs, secret societies, lodges, or social facilities within one block of where the Friends and Neighbors Club would locate seven years later. This does not include saloons, billiard rooms, political or union clubs. Social Base Map, Department of Educational Sociology, New York University, created under the direction of Frederic M. Thrasher, copyright 1932.

527Leonard Covello, Outline notes for Intercultural Education Committee Meeting, Friends and Neighbors Club, 17 February 1939, CP 51/19, p. 1.

528Ibid.; also, letter from Covello to community leaders, 10 February 1939, CP 52/20.

529Notes. "Program for the Meeting Sponsored by the Committee for Racial Cooperation, 17 February 1939," CP 52/20. The only non-Franklin-faculty listed for the Continuance Committee is Mr. Concepcion, with margin notes indicating he is "leader of Independence Party in P.R.," he apparently also wrote for the Spanish paper La Voz.
Curriculum Provides a Tool

Another lesson learned from Franklin's 1935 experiment with the Service Bureau and from the early years of experience teaching in East Harlem was the need to revise systematically its formal curriculum in light of the aims of intercultural education.530 Some "progressive" schools had transformed the organization of their studies in dramatic ways, following the Winnetka Plan of Parkhurst and Jackman, the Denver project of Newton and Threlkeld, the Dalton Plan of Washburne, or some other such innovation. By the early 1930s, notes Herbert Kliebard, "change had definitely permeated the curriculum atmosphere."531 In California's Santa Barbara County, teachers organized their problem-solving curriculum around a set of common social activities and competencies. Grade Ten, for example, revolved around one central theme: "Learning to live in a changing world through investigating problems arising from a shift from an agrarian way of life to a highly industrialized way of life."532

For Covello, furthering the aims of intercultural education did not imply any such radical reconstruction of the traditional curriculum, but rather its adaptation to the aims of community schooling. "There was no attempt to change completely the traditional curriculum," recalled Covello. "After all Franklin was an integral part of the New York City public school system as well as the N.Y. State Dept. of Education."533 From all the evidence, Franklin's formal curriculum framework did not differ dramatically from the standard for cosmopolitan high schools in the city.

Nevertheless, Franklin staff showed considerable effort and innovation in reconstructing the course content areas during the school's first decade, as well as in linking the curriculum to the broader school-community relationship. Perhaps the most ambitious effort took place during the 1938-1939 school year. This was later referred to as the "Second Intercultural Experiment," modeled in part on the earlier effort led by the Service Bureau for Intercultural Education.534 Not insignificantly for a community school, the school-community Committee for Racial Cooperation headed up the school-wide initiative.535 The Committee--composed of Franklin faculty, student representatives, and a variety of community representatives--decided...
first to carry out an experimental program at the 117th Street Annex, taking
advantage of its smaller size before considering whether or not to expand it to
the main building on 79th Street as well as the other Annex on 108th Street. 536
Faculty at the Annex, with the assistance of a National Youth Administration
researcher, carried out pre- and post-testing of freshman and sophomore
student attitudes, using selected students from the main building as a control
group. 537 Implementing the three-pronged factual-emotional-situational
approach that the Service Bureau had advocated, faculty modified their
courses in English, Civics, Biology, Art, Italian, and French, and then
 correlated these changes with several assembly programs, radio programs,
and films. 538 During the Fall, the Racial Committee decided to extend the

536 Representatives were included from the Board of Education, Columbia
University, Brooklyn College, Jewish Education Association, The Salvation Army
Welfare Department, P.S. 101, The Jewish Day newspaper, Il Progresso newspaper,
The New York Public Library, The Federation Settlement, physicians of East Harlem,
the real estate group of East Harlem, The Italian Welfare League, the City
Department of Public Welfare, and the Puerto Rican Service Center of New York.
 Report of the faculty concerning intercultural education at Benjamin Franklin H.S.
during 1938-39, CP 52/12, p. 7. Mr. Lee Lombard, chair of the English Department,
headed up the Committee.

537 The results of the pre/post-testing had limited interpretive value. The
meager sampling number, some poorly worded questions, second language
difficulties, and some evident "hesitation" and "instantaneous rectification" with
responses led those coordinating the survey to claim "no authoritative
pronouncements... about the 117th Street Annex. We can claim only that
something appears to be' or 'is likely to exist there." Faculty report of 1938-39,
CP 52/12, p. 29.

538 Minutes of the 17 January 1939 meeting of the Committee for Racial
Cooperation, CP 52/10, p. 1. The Christmas assemblies that year featured "The
Spirit of Good-Will in Many Lands," and included an introduction by student Joseph
Monsement, later a member of the New York City Board of Education. The radio
 programs included the award-winning and highly acclaimed "Americans All" CBS
 radio series, to which Rachel DuBois served as special consultant; a series of
 pamphlets based on the series were also produced. See the debates involved in this
 production in Montalto, A History of the Intercultural Educational Movement,
Chapter VI.

539 The faculty report that chronicled and analyzed the 1938-1939 curriculum work ran several hundred pages, and
 included intercultural syllabi from Fine Arts, Italian, French, Mathematics,
 Science, Social Studies, and English. While all the curricula noted the
 contributions of diverse peoples and sought to broaden student appreciation
 for different ethnic and racial groups, the Social Studies and English curricula
 most embodied a more activist approach to intercultural education, oriented
 more explicitly toward social change. 540

The outbreak of street clashes between Puerto Rican and Italian
youth, described in Chapter I, took place in the midst of this experiment, in late
September to mid-October. Although no students from Benjamin Franklin
were among those arrested, Franklin students apparently took part; students
bore the evidence of evenings in the streets the next morning. English
teacher Louis Relin, who recalled his own injuries from the Jewish-Irish battles
during his youth in East Harlem, noted the daily "quota of lacerations and
bruises," as well as his own hesitation as to how to deal with the interethnic
violence in the midst of a curriculum experiment on racial tolerance. "In that
hectic week," Relin noted, "a number of lads came to school with bandaged
heads, black eyes and other battle scars which they displayed with the proper

540 In a current taxonomy, most of the formal curriculum material illustrated the
"contributions" or "additive" approaches to "multicultural" curriculum development,
whereas clearly elements of the English and Social Studies curricula were
"transformation" and "social action" approaches. See James Banks, An Introduction
to Multicultural Education (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994), 24-27.
pride of valiant warriors." Nervous as to how the street battles might affect a curriculum through which he was "still feeling [his] way along in the dark," Relin cautiously proceeded.

At first, while feelings were at fever pitch, I sought to evade a head-on collision with the problem in the classroom, but the boys pressed for discussion. Hoping our classroom might serve as an outlet for some of their emotion, I did at length consent to this discussion, with the understanding that we try to meet the situation as mature, thinking people—not as "bull-headed kids." I must hand it to the boys. They displayed a remarkable restraint and self-control which, I wish, could have been present in the electric atmosphere of their streets.

The fact that many Puerto Rican students stayed away from school that week may also have helped calm Relin's classroom. In any case, consistent with the goals of its curricular efforts, the Committee for Racial Cooperation worked in organizing and co-sponsoring the mass meeting at Odd Fellows Temple that helped calm neighborhood tensions for good that Fall of 1938.

For the rest of Franklin's first decade, curricular reform efforts are less evident; the record is simply incomplete, if suggestive. Faculty coordinated a series of intercultural assemblies the following year, though whether these were a part of Board-mandated "tolerance" assemblies is unclear. The

English Department appears to have adopted a continual curriculum revision process. An English Revision Committee formed in 1939, though a revised English syllabus does not appear until 1945, and is first used in the 1945-46 school year. Just a year after the 1938-39 school-wide intercultural curriculum revisions, some of those involved in curriculum reconstruction at Franklin did consider following the Progressive Education Association's experiment with graduation requirements, in order to gain exemption from the Regents syllabi or exams. While it is unclear as to whatever became of this effort at Franklin, the school did not apparently join the PEA experiment formally. The destiny of a joint curriculum reconstruction effort between Teachers College, Columbia University, and Benjamin Franklin, discussed in 1942, remains unclear as well, though the city Board of Education did grant Franklin permission for a "reconstruction" of its curriculum in 1943. The strain of World War II, the turnover of some key Franklin faculty, and the challenge of continuing to refine a newly revised curriculum may have led to less dramatic curricular efforts during the early and mid-1940s.

by events like Kristallnacht in Germany, the New York City Board of Education mandated in 1938 that schools carry out at least two "tolerance assemblies" every month, beginning in January of 1939. General Circular No. 19, 1938-1939, Office of the Superintendent of Schools, Board of Education of the City of New York, CP 51/18.


To whatever degree their curriculum innovations succeeded, Franklin faculty viewed curriculum as a component of a broader community-schooling effort to promote intercultural harmony. To that end, they felt that intercultural curriculum had to respond to the demands of the era—at the time, the rise of anti-democratic forces, the widespread economic insecurity, and the negative racial stereotyping in propaganda. The more local context demanded close attention to the challenges of a heavily immigrant and migrant population. Given this large foreign element, the faculty sought to accomplish locally what the country needed to do nationally and in a more balanced manner, namely:

- to interpret to newcomers the ideals upon which the country was founded...to use most effectively the cultural contributions of the racial and national groups represented here...to develop harmonious and fruitful relations among all elements in the population.

In terms of curriculum, these needs translated into a set of operating guidelines evident at least in the best of Franklin’s efforts. A student-focused pedagogy should train young leaders through their participation in community problem-solving. Across the curriculum and beyond it, the school must

548 These guidelines are drawn principally from curriculum descriptions throughout this period, as well as the following: Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee for Racial Cooperation, 17 February 1939, CP 52/20; Copy of section of CCS manuscript, Sections noted XI, XII, XV, CP 18/15; Agenda for the General Faculty Conference, 27 March 1939, CP 51/19; Leonard Covello, “An Experiment in a New York City High School” (address given at PEA Meeting, 1934), CP 9/9; Reminiscences, CP 20/16.

549 Report of the faculty concerning intercultural education at Benjamin Franklin H.S. during 1938-39, CP 52/12, Introduction “Racial Appreciation through the School,” by Rita Morgan. According to the report, “Only in so far as these purposes are realized, can there continue to emerge a nation united in the deepest sense. Throughout our history stress has been now upon one, now upon another of these objectives.”

trumpet the community’s development and impress the community that the school plays an integral role in that development. The “project method” should be used to stimulate community action; the school-community committee system provided the means for informing students and faculty of projects authentically needed by the community. To aid in studying the community’s needs, students should be trained as “participant observers”; they could often reveal aspects of community life that no external or adult observer would likely capture. Following these guidelines, the curriculum could then begin to meet its role in helping to change the dispositions of the students toward their civic responsibilities. This then was the job of Franklin’s curriculum:

- to find ways and means of educating our boys in understanding and in concerning themselves about improving community life—developing their responsibility to help in solving community problems. We realized that actual accomplishments would be slight—but I was interested in the process, in the changes that would take place in the students’ thinking and attitudes.

Franklin faculty often found innovative methods by which to pursue these goals in the curriculum, to engage their students’ interest in intercultural affairs. Some, such as Fine Arts teacher Bernard Saxon, preferred to maintain an indirect approach, incorporating art from diverse origins, but never focusing per se on racial or ethnic tolerance as a topic. Others, like English teachers Louis Relin and Austin Works, developed special units and curricula on racial and ethnic tolerance. English teacher William Hayett, for example, held Town Hall Meetings one period a week as an exercise in Oral English; students

550 Reminiscences, CP 20/16.
came prepared with "elementary research" to debate such topics as "Should Negro Ball-Players be Allowed in the Big Leagues?" or "Changes that Should be Made in the Curriculum." As a part of his research class in social studies, Morris Cohen invited a school counselor from all-African-American PS 184 in central Harlem to discuss the effects of school and job discrimination on the education of young Blacks. Teacher Maurice Bleifeld, later to succeed Covello as principal, helped to develop a Biology unit treating intercultural and racial relations. Designed to follow the regular units on Evolution and Eugenics, the unit developed the concept of race scientifically and then analyzed "current conceptions of race supremacy"; The American Biology Teacher featured the curriculum unit in one of its issues. The English Department incorporated one immigrant student's autobiographical essay into their curriculum, a course of study noted in The English Journal.

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Memo from W. Hayett to Mr. Covello and Mr. Gallant, CP 5/14, 7 July 1941.

Memo from Morris Cohen to Mr. Covello, 4 June 1941, CP 5/15. PS 184, J. Fenimore Cooper JHS was located at 31 West 116th Street, east of Lenox Avenue, with Abraham Cohen as Principal.

Maurice Bleifeld, "A Biology Unit Dealing with Racial Attitudes," The American Biology Teacher 2, no. 1 (October 1939): 7. Bleifeld also worked on a unit for the New York Association of Biology Teachers; see Anthropology Study Group, "Outline of a Teaching Unit on Mankind," The Teaching Biologist 8, no. 2 (November 1939): 27-45. Bleifeld was active in biology associations, and published considerably; see Maurice Bleifeld, "Plant Hormones," The Teaching Biologist 6, no. 1 (October 1936); "Plant Tissues Cultures," The Teaching Biologist 8, no. 1 (October 1938); "Biological Effects of Flight," The Teaching Biologist 12, no. 3 (December 1942); "Food Dehydration Joins the Colors," The Teaching Biologist 13, no. 3 (December 1943).

The autobiography was done by Irving Danowitz; see Memo from Lee Lombard to Dr. Covello, 7 March 1940, CP 5/10. The 4-year intercultural English curriculum elements were outlined in Joseph Gallant, "An Intercultural Curriculum," Lower level English classes constructed scrap books of essays, photos, and memorabilia from parents' experiences of coming to the United States, from the contributions various ethnic groups made to East Harlem life, and from interviews with leading East Harlem citizens. Older students read Galsworthy's play Justice and studied delinquency and recreation problems in the neighborhood, reporting their findings on the city's public radio station, WNYC. Other students presented their research on the need for social facilities at a local public housing complex to the New York City Housing Authority. During World War II, a student drama group took to the streets of East Harlem in order to raise local morale.

Of course, outcomes among students could be expected to vary. For example, in the hopes of engaging students in creative solutions to interracial tensions, one English teacher assigned essays on the question, "How I think..."
discrimination can be stopped." One student's response, a straightforward answer the teacher might welcome, also revealed an immediate and personal motive for eliminating discrimination, one the assignment itself created:

Discrimination can be stopped only if every race participates in helping. . . . I feel that there are too many race conscious things in the United States to stop and think that the fellow opposite him has flesh covering his bones too. If people were to stop and use common sense, there would be no need for me to be writing this composition.557

Though Franklin faculty and staff drew curriculum ideas from the varied and vibrant discussions concerning intercultural education in the 1930s, the early role of the Service Bureau for Intercultural Education caused those linked to it to have an especially prominent influence on the school's approach. Rachel DuBois, who guided the Bureau's initial work at Franklin, also helped out in the Fall 1938 experiment, while she was working briefly with the Progressive Education Association.558 One of the DuBois' strong allies, if an uneasy one at times, was the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ). Dr. Everett Ross Clinchy, Chairman of NCCJ during the early 1930s, had long lent DuBois critical support in her work, as he strongly believed that "cultural pluralism [was] an essential characteristic of genuine democracy."559 Franklin faculty invited Clinchy to speak at a school conference, open to all Yorkville and Harlem teachers, and to the Special English class, "especially as a preparation and an inspiration for [the Fall 1938] program in interracial relations."560 One of the school assemblies held at the 117th Street Annex in the Fall of 1938 reflected the "trialogue" approach to intergroup harmony that Clinchy had helped to pioneer through NCCJ; Rabbi Neuman, Reverend Del Campo, and Father Osterman discussed tolerance and pluralism, as did so many "tolerance trios" sponsored by NCCJ in the mid-1930s.561 A letter that Covello wrote about interethnic relations to the Franklin faculty that Fall included a summary of Dr. Carlton Hayes' radio remarks regarding the NCCJ; Hayes, a Columbia University historian, was the first Catholic Co-chairman of the NCCJ.562 Covello's work with the Bureau included collaboration with Bruno Lasker, who headed a committee that looked into producing manuals on intercultural education for teachers. Author of the influential Race Attitudes in Children, Lasker at the time had recently assumed responsibility for the preparation and distribution of the Bureau's publications.563

The 1940 Children's Crusade for Children recognized Benjamin Franklin High School's "integrated program on intercultural education" in its list of "What Some Schools Are Doing" to promote interethnic understanding.564 Paul Robeson described his participation in a Negro relations.560 Press release for 21, 22, or 23 May 1938, "Clinchy to Speak," CP 52/20.
History Week Assembly as "one of the most inspiring afternoons of my career." Franklin faculty were invited to share their work with other teachers through conferences, in-service workshops, and publications. Yet, Benjamin Franklin's curricular efforts in intercultural education never sought to reformulate the prescribed course of studies in any drastic way. Nor is it clear how many teachers at Franklin would have welcomed a significant reorganization of the curriculum. When Board of Education representatives indicated to Franklin teachers and staff in 1942 that they could gain wide latitude from official regulations, the kind of leeway the Lincoln School enjoyed, Franklin faculty representatives were lukewarm. Wild enthusiasm was certainly lacking for the additional work that would be required, as was confidence that many faculty would welcome the effort. One wonders whether the spirit of curriculum experimentation even spread far beyond a small if substantial core group of teachers.

On the other hand, a substantial core of faculty and students did not flinch in the face of volatile and at time violent issues of intercultural relations in East Harlem, not a small accomplishment. They faced seemingly intractable local tensions, creatively carried out research into sensitive local issues, adapted the curriculum in imaginative and inspiring ways, and built the premises and structures for sustained community-centered schooling. Above all, they struggled to stay the course of a school-coordinated community development effort, despite a community often profoundly uneasy with itself.

565 Signed onto program flyer for Negro History Week Assembly of Tuesday, 17 February 1948, CP 42/19. Franklin had good fortune with celebrity singers; Frank Sinatra sang at an assembly meant to promote interethic harmony three years earlier. CP 51/18.

566 It is also unclear, though, whether the reaction was to curricular innovation, or undertaking the collaborative project with Teachers College and the Board of Education that was being proposed. Rita Morgan, "Second Meeting: Group to Plan Cooperation T.C. and B.F. in an Educational Project," CP 36/26, 1942, pp. 2-3. It should be noted that Franklin did obtain Board permission for curriculum "reconstruction" in the following year, and did pursue revisions, at least in English.
Chapter V
COMMUNITY SCHOOLING FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY:
EDUCATION BEYOND THE WALLS

As Franklin staff struggled to implement intercultural education, via the establishment of committees, street units, and curriculum, they realized that educational influences originating largely from outside of the school had to be addressed. Schooling premised on beliefs in the social and civic nature of education recognized the educational role played by influences outside the school's formal jurisdiction. This chapter describes how some of the approaches taken to improve local intercultural relations addressed such factors, and in particular how these approaches sought to affect adults, teachers, and the media.

Educating the Other Teachers of Students—Adult Education

Franklin staff knew that they were not the only, nor even perhaps the most significant, teachers of their charges; the formal curriculum was only one of many competing influences. Clearly, many of their students' attitudes and behaviors towards members of different ethnic groups reflected those of their parents and adult neighbors, for good and for ill. If the teachers hoped to

inculcate tolerance among their students, here was an educational force that had to be marshaled toward intercultural harmony. "We feel that we can do something in the school situation," declared Covello,

[and] we also feel that the home, too far removed, is often the point where prejudice starts. Therefore it seems what we must do is to see to it that the school is opened to the people in the community where they and the teachers can work together on common problems.567

"This means," Covello declared, "that we as educators must extend our program in intercultural education beyond the walls of the classroom and the school."568

Extend they did. Information about school programs went out to parents in English, Italian, Spanish, and German. WPA workers of various ethnicities visited the homes of students from the same background.569 Adult Summer School staff wrote articles about their program in English, Italian, Russian, Hungarian, Spanish, and German and sent them off to foreign-language papers. A movie trailer plugged Franklin's Adult Summer School in the local cinema.570 Students and staff regularly placed posters around East Harlem, spoke to area groups and schools, sent mailings to local

567 "Report of a Discussion which Took Place at Benjamin Franklin High School, Wednesday, June 3, Under the Auspices of the Council Against Intolerance in America and Mr. Leonard Covello, Principal of the School," CP 50/1, 1943, p. 2.
570 Daniel F. Fitzpatrick, Report on Summer Session of the Adult School at the Benjamin Franklin High School, Summer 1940, 1 July-6 August, W.P.A.—Adult Education Program, Board of Education, City of New York, 1940; Mary S. Winter, Summer Session, Adult School, Benjamin Franklin High School, 1937.
residents, and visited local establishments—all in order to promote awareness of adult program activities. Mr. S. Alexander Shear, a leader in adult education in New York City, established Benjamin Franklin's Institute for Adult Education, a program offering area residents 15-week courses in subjects from Art Appreciation to Typewriting. W.P.A. staff ran a series of Adult Education clubs as yet another extension to adult residents; within a few years, adult community members sang, danced, wrote, acted, and celebrated in their native languages through nearly a dozen active clubs. Ranging in age from 17 to 80, neighbors met neighbors in a variety of courses, clubs, and social events, extending Franklin's message of intercultural cooperation to the broader East Harlem community.

Though the classes and clubs brought many adults to Franklin and convinced many others that the school seriously wanted to serve the community, Covello, Adult School Director Mary Winter, Social Studies chair Harold Fields, and others felt it was not sufficient to help build bridges among adults of different backgrounds. Intercultural tensions and youth delinquency reflected the lack of control many adults, especially recent immigrants, exercised over their children. As described earlier, many observers saw adult immigrants' maladjustment to life in the U.S. as a major cause of juvenile delinquency and youth gangs, which only fanned interethnic tensions. If Franklin wanted to counter those tensions, it would have to help parents control their kids, and that meant bridging the generational and cultural divide between adults and youth.

Both parents and their children needed first to appreciate the strengths of the immigrant and U.S. cultures. Immigrant parents often felt lost or hostile toward an irreverent, individualistic, and materialistic culture; their children often felt caught between two worlds. The old country culture had the pull of parental affections, the smell of familiar foods, tales told and re-told. But the new American world was exciting, new, and immediately known; it beckoned forward in the brash clamor of the Third Avenue elevated. The old world was often a remote and seemingly backward land they only knew through well-worn tales and sparse photos. Covello had grown up within this turbulent tension. From his own life and from his experience with Italian youth at DeWitt Clinton, Covello had concluded that schools could play a critical role in bridging the cultural gap between adult immigrants and their children, though they often contributed to the problem. "It is pathetic," confessed Covello to a PEA audience in 1934, "to see how sometimes the school itself creates in the child the disrespect which later breaks up the immigrant home." Unlike contemporaries, Covello emphasized more than "melting" immigrants into a dominant U.S. culture. Not only was the U.S. culture constantly changing, absorbing

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571Flyers describing the Institute may be found in CP 42/4.
elements of immigrant cultures, but the school's effectiveness depended upon both affirming the parental culture and easing a family's assimilation to the U.S.

Franklin affirmed immigrant culture by the school's insistence on multilingual presentations and materials, by frequent use of foreign-language press and associations, by offering adult courses in immigrant languages and cultures, and by treating parents as resources in their children's education. As an example of this last type of affirmation, Social Studies teacher Fields cited some of his department's homework assignments as part of an effort to improve family relations. Students, for example, were asked to learn what their parents had known about Abraham Lincoln and George Washington before arriving to the U.S.; over 1,500 reports were turned in. Russian boys heard parents tell of references to Lincoln in correspondence emigrants to the U.S. sent back to Russia; Irish students heard praise for Washington as the daring rebel who broke away from England. A German grandmother had read the special edition of a Berlin newspaper proclaiming Lincoln's assassination. A Hungarian mother's doctor had pictures of Washington, Lincoln, and Kossuth proudly hanging in his office, telling his patients of their historic deeds. Southern Italian parents recalled streets and squares named after Lincoln, and many had studied Washington and Lincoln alongside Garibaldi in fourth grade classes. Fields claimed that the students' discovery brought a new respect for their parents; "an assignment in history became the common denominator for a reciprocal lesson for parent and child." The assignment also provoked linkages with other community efforts at Franklin. As one student asked, "Where can my parents learn English? They ought to be able to tell others what they told me in Italian."

As they sought to bolster parental pride and authority, Franklin's staff also highlighted the second generation's facility in U.S. culture and language, tapping this facility in order to help assimilate and even naturalize their parents through the school's citizenship program. Students helped translate for parents, spoke to local elementary and junior high school assemblies, made class presentations on the positive and negative reasons for citizenship, and assisted parents during naturalization. Children of adult evening class students were invited to attend the graduation exercises held for their parents. In these ways Franklin staff hoped to embed the school's programs within family relations, encouraging students to assist their parents' assimilation to a foreign and often forbidding world, while simultaneously training students as local community leaders.

Yet, the heart of Franklin's program of adult education resided in its very structure, in the school's role as a coordinating institution for the resolution of local problems. The CAC, as was the case with many coordinating councils at the time, was understood to be adult education in citizenship, a cross-generational, cross-sector, collaborative leadership

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577 Ibid.

578 CP files on citizenship campaigns provide ample evidence of student participation in naturalization campaigns, as well as in less focused social activities aimed at tapping student abilities in assimilating the local foreign-born. See also Fields, "Co-operating in Citizenship," 11-15.

579 "Report of a Discussion which Took Place at Benjamin Franklin High School, Wednesday, 3 June, Under the Auspices of the Council Against Intolerance in America and Mr. Leonard Covello, Principal of the School," CP 50/1, 1943, p. 1.
training ground. In this sense, adult education went far beyond those programs explicitly labeled as such. The school-community committee system, like community councils generally, were seen by many as "a significant type of adult education" according to Herbert Hunsaker, Field Representative for the American Association of Adult Education. In grappling with community problems, adults were forced to "approach [real problems] from the point of view of the community as a whole," and "instead of confining themselves to discussion of these problems, . . . [forced to] reach decisions as to what is to be done and then carry out their decisions through cooperative action." This cooperative action, beyond the mere discussion characteristic of most classrooms, produced a rare fellowship among adults. Howard McClusky, Associate Director of the American Youth Commission, saw the opportunity in such community activism for melding verbalization and action. Community groups "provide for the fulfillment of the verbal process through action, thus rounding out the cycle of creative, constructive fellowship." For all these efforts, the difficulty of affecting adult attitudes persisted, especially given the considerable residential mobility in East Harlem. It may have been the Achilles heel of the intercultural education program; many parents likely continued to reinforce interethnic ill-will. A letter Covello received from one parent in 1945 is chilling, written on the reverse side of a school letter sent to parents after a student disturbance. Claiming to speak for "thousands of White mothers in this section of Harlem," the parent demanded that the school protect their children from "this Negro element who are beyond control in their viciousness toward the White Race." Explaining that a "large percentage" of Blacks "are still too young from savagery and cannibalism to be inserted into civilization," she insisted that she would not "tolerate [her] son to be mingled with that element much longer." Certainly aware of such sentiments in his community, Covello consistently stressed the need for the school to promote understanding and appreciation among adults in East Harlem. In explaining the need for a community-wide approach to building tolerance, Covello claimed, in typically understated fashion, that As understanding, appreciation and tolerance grew among the older people, the tone and attitude of these older people create a like attitude in the children of the household. Parents and other adults in the community do not always realize the extent to which their own attitudes and opinions are reflected in the attitudes and conduct of their children.

Yet, the comprehensive approach to intercultural education demanded that the school reach beyond the education of local adults. If community schooling meant extending the school's activities in order to address those educational forces beyond the school walls that were affecting its ability to educate area youth, then Franklin would have to encounter yet another major "outside" influence upon its program—the training and disposition of its staff.

581 Ibid.
583 Mrs. Viola Melloni (sp?) to Mr. Leonard Covello, 2 October 1945, CP 54/4.
584 Ibid.
Implications for Teacher Education

One of Covello's early concerns at Franklin was whether or not he would have the staff capable of the myriad demands of community schooling, particularly in terms of the sensitivity needed to work with such a culturally diverse student body and the ability to see the wider community context in which the child learned. Most teachers seemed only incidentally aware of problems of race and culture and were unprepared to handle much more than their subject matter specialties. Teacher preparation in general had failed miserably to address the need for teachers to know their communities, claimed Arthur Linden of Teachers College. "Many of the younger people we turn out into teaching today," complained Linden, "have no conception of the school's function in the community." Covello concluded that "teacher training was basic to initiating this program on a school wide basis. We had to grow into the program. Teacher growth in developing the necessary knowledge and skills was a considerable undertaking." In order for teachers at a community-centered school to develop a program responsive to the multiethnic realities of East Harlem, the faculty needed first to understand the expanded role the teacher would to play in such an educational enterprise. "The teacher who accepts the philosophy of the community school," explained Speech Department Chair Rita Morgan, "also accepts a position of greater responsibility and leadership in the progress of the community than have teachers generally anywhere." As a community school teacher, you must go beyond reading about your community and try "to see the world as your students see it" so as to be able to "work for and aim at some of the same things" for the betterment of the community. It must become your community. For Julius Yourman, educational sociologist at New York University, this meant "the death of the subject teacher, the five-hour school day, and the conception of time after school being punishment." Covello urged faculty to join school-community committees, attend community-wide conferences to work on local concerns, explain the school's program to meetings of local organizations, assist in community surveys, and help make home visits. While he recognized "that the teacher carries a heavy burden of school work," he also insisted that "this obligation must be met." "We do not live in a vacuum," Linden noted, "and we cannot teach in a vacuum."

586 Arthur V. Unden, "The Implications of a Community School for the Training of Teachers," Understanding the Child 11, no. 3 (October 1942): 19. Little attention seems to have paid to teacher training for intergroup education as well, with less than 3% of the articles in educational magazines between 1934 and 1944 addressing the topic (see Abraham F. Citron, Collins J. Reynolds, and Sarah W. Taylor, "Ten Years of Intercultural Education in Educational Magazines," Harvard Educational Review 15, no. 2 (March 1945), 132: "Few articles have shown evidence of recognition of any inadequacies in teacher training programs as they relate to the problems of intergroup relations." Only 6 of 220 articles dealt with teacher education, and "these give little aid to the in-service teacher.").

587 Reminiscences by Covello, CP 51/21, p. 3.


589 Ibid.


591 Leonard Covello, "Teacher Responsibility to the Community" (notes for Round Table Discussion, Kindergarten 6-8, Teachers Association, Hotel Astor, 19 February 1938), 1.

592 Linden, "The Implications of a Community School for the Training of Teachers," 21.
The expanded role of the teacher was evident in Covello’s participation in various in-service courses for teachers starting at least in the late 1930s. Covello realized that shifting social research to the school site implied a renewed role for teachers. He had been training teachers to do this through his course at New York University since 1929.593 In the spring of 1940, Covello taught an in-service course under the auspices of New York City’s Board of Superintendents. The course, “The Teacher in Relation to His Community,” was offered especially for teachers in East Harlem. The fifteen-session course sought “to deal with the current trend towards school-community co-operation in education” and to “discuss the role of the school in relation to major problems in East Harlem where the mixed population of foreign birth and foreign origin creates special problems and particular tasks for the teacher and the school.”594 In general, the course provided a method by which teachers could “discover and analyze the nature of the intercultural tensions which may be peculiar to their own communities,” and then implement any new curricular materials without departing too radically from the subject matter... they are legally required to teach.”595

Echoing the multi-method approach to social research found in the Boys’ Club Study, and emphasized in the courses Covello taught at New York University, the sessions addressed “physical aspects and ecological factors”... East Harlem. Some three dozen speakers, experts in local conditions, discussed housing, health programs, organized labor, the needs of youth, leisure time activities, and the religious, ethnic, and political distinctions in the neighborhood.596 The basic reading list included no fewer than four publications of the Boys’ Club Study, as well as more general works such as Dewey’s Democracy and Education. An expanded bibliography for the course featured a healthy dose of George Counts, Charles Beard, and Harold Laski.597 Class sessions moved around the district, meeting at Benjamin Franklin, Magyar Church, Haarlem House, East Harlem Health Center, and the Odd Fellows Temple. Appropriately, the assignment required three student case studies from each teacher in the course, complete with “one or several” home visits.598 Such “direct and... intimate contact” provided the route to a “real understanding of the community” and allowed the teacher to begin “tracing the connection between problems of some of his pupils in the classroom and their predominant environment, namely the parental home.”599

593In 1929, Covello began as a Lecturer in New York University’s School of Education.
595Leonard Covello to Council Against Intolerance in America, 27 February 1940, CP 52/20.
596At least two of the speakers, Cressy and Cimilucca, were veterans of the Boys’ Club Study.
597“Bibliography for Course in the Teacher, the School and the Community in East Harlem,” n.d., apparently prepared with assistance of Rita Morgan, CP 54/22.
598Some Benjamin Franklin faculty apparently made home visits a part of their regular practice.
599CP 25/10, “In-Service Course—East Harlem—The Teacher in Relation to His Community,” p. 3; Covello, “An Experiment in New York City High School,” CP 9/9. Interesting parallels exist between the training of Health Center personnel and Covello’s approach for teachers at Franklin; see, e.g., East Harlem Nursing and Health Service, Learning through Experience in Family Health Work: A Report of Student Participation in the East Harlem Nursing and Health Service Program, 1922-1941 (Lancaster, Penn.: The Science Press Printing Company, 1944), esp. 54-55.
Franklin staff also contributed to Board of Education in-service courses dealing with intercultural understanding. Lee Lombard, Joseph Gallant, and Louis Relin of the English Department, Morris Cohen of Social Studies, and Rita Morgan of the Speech Department participated in no fewer than six different courses between 1941 and 1948, two of which were offered at the Franklin site. Some courses were co-sponsored with community groups, such as the West Side Council of Religious and Civic Organizations and the Greater New York Conference on Racial and Cultural Relations. While most courses targeted current teachers, others included "religious leaders, social workers, parents, business men, trade union members, and professionals" as well.

In addition to training those already teaching, Franklin prepared new teachers so that they would be capable of working in a community-centered school, teaming up in a series of cooperative ventures with Teachers College and New York University, among other institutions. At least as early as the 1938-39 school year, student teachers from five local universities trained at Franklin, and joined with university and Benjamin Franklin faculty on the school's Committee on Teacher Training. In an effort to provide the broad training required of a community school teacher, student teachers were asked to split their time equally among their field of specialization, the other departments or offices in the school, and the community or extracurricular activities. Only by such a broad learning exposure could student teachers begin to appreciate the context in which the classroom pedagogy fit. In practice, it seems likely that greater than a third of student teacher time we spent with the sponsoring teacher and the department area. How much community work was clerical assistance is also unclear, though student teachers seemed impressed and satisfied at the wide exposure they received to the school-community program.

In 1943, the Summer Community Guidance Program introduced an intensive teacher training program at the school site, one that gave student teachers a rare opportunity to participate in running nearly all aspects of a community school program. Some 46 student teachers and counselors cooperated. Student teachers generally followed their guidelines, then a typical student teacher's weekly schedule would have usually included:

- 5 periods of teaching or observing in her field (preparation included)
- 3-5 periods of remedial instruction, following the same kids over a semester
- 3-5 periods of "extra-class work," such as assembly preparation, clubs, department help, gathering materials for class
- 1-3 periods observing non-sponsoring teachers
- 1-3 periods observing non-sponsoring teachers

In-service course flyers for n.d., 1941, 1943, 1944, 1947-8, 1948 in CP 54/22; two course descriptions for "Background and Techniques for Teaching Intercultural Education," Teachers College Special Collections, New York City Board of Education Archives, IV, C, 2, (f), Box 1, Folder 4.

Report on the Meeting of the Committee on Teacher Training of the Benjamin Franklin High School, 2 June 1939, CP 36/23. While evidently student teachers were already working at Benjamin Franklin in AY 1938-39, documents from that year describe a "proposed program" as well. This apparently referred to a more formalized program being developed by the Committee.
from Teachers College and New York University, along with 14 case workers from the East Harlem Youth Service, Franklin staff volunteers, and community volunteers provided counseling, instruction and recreation to hundreds of students and adults in the area. During subsequent summers, student teachers contributed to an expanding program, planned initially by Arthur Linden of Teachers College, Glenn Thompson of New York University, Associate Superintendent David Moskowitz, Covello, and Franklin staff. In 1943, some 35 student teachers helped teach over 300 students, worked with 150 younger children in the new Childhood Center, and participated in Franklin’s projects that varied from home canning groups to citizenship training to health education. Students from Teachers College and New York University organized and ran major conferences on student teaching each summer from 1942 to 1944. Relating teacher training to community schooling, racial conflicts, and juvenile delinquency, the conferences drew

adult summer sessions from 1936-39). The advent of World War II also increased the concern over juvenile delinquency in East Harlem, and thus the urgency Covello and others felt for keeping the school open during summer months; see CP 2013, part of Chap. 22 of Covello’s CCS book manuscript Personnel: Teacher Training.

607Dwane Rolland Collins, “A Plan for a Summer Community Guidance Program for the Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem, New York City for 1943” (Ed.D. diss, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1943), Appendix I.

608Students came from local junior highs, Wadleigh High, Richman High, and Benjamin Franklin, and generally were referred because of term failures; some older students also attended. Benjamin Franklin High School Report 1943 Summer Session, Rita Morgan Papers, Folder 6.


hundreds of students. In 1944, some 250 students from 27 states, Canada and Cuba attended the conference entitled “Children in Trouble.”

The design of the summer student teaching experience reflected the Franklin faculty’s overall goal that student teachers “take with them the concept of a school which is vitally concerned with the entire life of the child and is an active force in reaching the whole community.” The student teachers, in addition to their supervised teaching of six-week courses, were required at least two hours of “community work” each week. Based on their choices, teachers were assigned to weekly work at Casita Maria, Union Settlement, Harlem House, the Boy Rangers, Jolly Ramblers, and sewing circles. In addition, all student teachers were encouraged to make some contact with the Teen Canteen, Low-Cost Housing Projects, Childhood Center, CVDO, Canning Center, and East Harlem Health Center. Students visited homes, usually in groups, and held parent-teacher conferences during the summer term. Every effort was made to involve students in all facets of the school and its links with the community. A report on the 1943 summer program listed the following achievements of the student teachers:

a. personal contact with students in informal relationships, and in the student’s homes and community living.
b. first hand contact with many community agencies and individuals, and more important, a realization of the importance of this contact in teaching.

610Report sent to Supt. Ernst, Summer Session 1944, Benjamin Franklin High School, Rita Morgan Papers, Folder 6, p. 8.

611Ibid., 2.

612Program of Community Participation,” Circular #8, memo to student teachers, Benjamin Franklin High School, Summer 1943, Rita Morgan Papers, Folder 6.
c. a sense of individual responsibility for carrying on the class activity, and initiative in overcoming the average difficulties faced by a young teacher.
d. a fairly complete picture of several aspects of school life in addition to the class room situation.
e. "learning by doing" most of the routine and clerical jobs connected with teaching in a large city system.
f. considerable skill in classroom management with small groups which were within the capacities of an inexperienced teacher.
g. ability to work together as a unit on a school or community project such as the preparations for the conference on Racial Conflict.
h. appreciation of the parents of the community as real people no matter how they differed in background, race or experience.

Finally, the student teachers presented a series of reports at the end of the summer term based on their experience. These included one report on each student taught, one on the East Harlem community, one on their observation of other teachers, and one on the value they found in the non-teaching assignments given. After the 1944 summer program, one student teacher explained the value of the program:

The summer session student teaching program at Benjamin Franklin is an ideal set up. Whereas most student teachers during the year observe the teacher (and gain a great deal through that observation), we were actually teachers in charge of classes. We have the experience of teaching for six weeks. Ours was the experience of meeting the students, learning about their backgrounds through extra-curricular activities; through walking through their neighborhood; visiting their health center; housing project; boys' club; their various club meetings in school (ping-pong, paper craft, group sports, etc.); and the Teen Canteen. We met their small brothers and sisters at the Childhood Center, and in our classes from the Harlem House. We shall meet their mothers at the Canning Center. This is the idea behind the twenty-four hour school, the Community-Centered School.

Defending East Harlem

For all of the coordinated efforts at improving intercultural relations and enhancing community life through adult education and teacher preparation, Franklin staff frequently had to confront a factor with significant impact on their educational program that was often further beyond their control.

Certainly the student teaching program at Benjamin Franklin, including the summer program, had its difficulties. A local college supervisor complained that the demands of the Franklin program were excessive, especially given the course loads most students took. Some student teachers—who met periodically on their own as a group—felt frustrated with observing too much and doing too little in certain extracurriculars or community activities, or in performing too many clerical duties. Yet, most student teachers, along with their university supervisors, apparently found the training first-rate. As Professor Linden wrote, "My chief difficulty is attempting to hold the group [of student teachers] within working limits. Everyone wants to go down there."
and training: attacks by the media and outside agencies. The New York Herald-Tribune, for example, called East Harlem "New York's Sorest Spot... the most dismal, dangerous and troublesome section in the entire city" with "downright terrifying" racial antagonism. So "sunk deep in squalor... it is not safe for a well dressed man to walk there at night." Time magazine referred to the district as "a verminous, crime-ridden slum" with "hordes of Italians, Puerto Ricans, Jews and Negroes," typified by its "gunmen, madams, policy and dope peddlers." Given the school's aim of promoting local cultural democracy, those external forces affecting the image of its residents and the state of their intergroup relations dominated Franklin's concerns. If the school were truly to address intergroup relations, it would need to face the debilitating effects on community esteem of East Harlem's usual portrayal in the media.

Covello and his staff well understood the influence of popular media in East Harlem; important sections of the Boys' Club Study as well as other research had made that influence clear. They decried the tendency of the press to portray East Harlem solely in terms of its difficulties, what Covello called "the emphasis on the abnormal." The Community Advisory Council's early surveys showed that "East Harlem had acquired an unduly dark reputation as a 'spot on the map' where juvenile delinquency and crime are concerned." A "thoughtless accentuation of pathological cases and aspects" combined with "hasty conclusions based on unexamined records and statistics that had not been analyzed with sufficient thoroughness" to build East Harlem's image problem. Not only was this perception unfair to 98% of the community, claimed Covello; this image problem had real consequences for Franklin's efforts at community development. This "broadcasting of publicity about the pathological elements of community life" harmed East Harlem's youth and became self-fulfilling. It damaged their sense of community pride, made delinquency seem inevitable to "weak juveniles," and produced "resentment and recklessness among the strong."

Why study and work hard when a job might be denied to you solely based on your home address? Many students confided in Covello that they simply lied about where they lived in order to secure employment in the city.

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619 "Veto Vito?" Time, 4 November 1946.

620 A special area of concern was the motion picture. See, e.g., Paul G. Cressey's work in the Boys' Club Study, "The Social Role of the Motion Picture in an Interstitial Area" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, School of Education, 1942); and "The Motion Picture as Informal Education," Journal of Educational Sociology, 7, no. 8 (April 1934): 504-15. Cressey spoke at one of the sessions of Covello's in-service course "The Teacher in Relation to His Community" concerning leisure time activities. Another example is Louis Relin, an English teacher at Benjamin Franklin, who also spoke in later in-service courses on the role of films in intercultural understanding.

621 Leonard Covello, "Research and Development of the Community School," Notes for presentation at NEA "Parker Program" in Atlantic City, February 1938, CP 10/36, p. 9; further evidence is suggested by the name change to a project headed by Prof. Thrasher in 1944: the "Delinquency Workshop" became the "Youth Workshop" after some discussion. East Harlem Council for Community Planning, United Neighborhood Houses Archives, 82/10, p. 5.


623 Ibid.

624 Ibid.

625 See in Heart; Covello, "Research and Development of the Community School," 9.
What role should the school play? Franklin staff saw the need for the school, through its committee system and network of contacts, actively to defend East Harlem from negative press. Why? Defending the community served community schooling's purposes well in promoting cultural democracy in East Harlem. An external threat provided a relatively easy way to unite the disparate groups of the area. Defense of area residents could help convince them that the school was not simply a "foreign" old-stock American institution. Franklin staff could take advantage of such incidents to emphasize their belief in how prejudices were shaped by false images and misinformation, a point useful in addressing tensions within East Harlem as well. And finally, responding to external threats gave the school the chance actively to employ the research and social action network of its committee system, demonstrating its utility and refining its approach.

One method the school used to defend East Harlem's reputation relied on the dissemination of the detailed local social research upon which community schooling depended. The school had needed to find out its own standing in the community, the local needs to which it might respond, and the nature of informal relationships in the neighborhood. Its program of intercultural education reflected this long-term dissemination approach.

But the school also had to be willing to respond to specific attacks made against East Harlem and its residents. When the comments of Charles E. Hewitt, Jr., in Scribner's Commentator magazine were read as a slander of area Puerto Ricans, Covello argued that the school had to respond in order to convince residents that it would be a good and loyal neighbor. In addition to contacting the offending magazine, school staff supported a mass rally organized by a local Comité de Protesta, bringing some 2,000 people to the Park Palace. English teacher Lee Lombard and Covello joined prominent local politicians in rallying the crowds.

When the street clashes of the Fall of 1938 described in Chapter I made most area newspapers, Franklin staff developed a more elaborate organized response. One staff member visited the local police station and provided Covello with details of the fights, complete with the schools and streets of those arrested. Lee Lombard and biology teacher Maurice Bleifeld proposed an open meeting of students. English teacher Austin Works suggested Covello speak to those arrested boys who lived on blocks adjacent to the school's main building. Works also contacted the Bronx Home News, leading to their publication of a complimentary editorial of

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629 Memorandum, "Italian Puertorican (sic) Situation in East Harlem," dated 24 October 1938.

630 Memo from D. Di Pino to Covello, 20 October 1938, CP 52/20.

631 Note from Lee Lombard to Covello, 20 October 1938, CP 53/14.

632 Memo from MCW to Covello, dated 24 October 1938, CP 53/14.
Benjamin Franklin's programs. Covello's editorial responses to press sensationalism were printed in the Herald-Tribune, Il Popolo, and La Voz.

Students were organized to write protest letters against a stinging editorial in the Herald-Tribune. Covello contacted local political leaders, including Vito Marcantonio, sent press releases to local foreign language newspapers, urged racial tolerance via a local radio show, and directed the Juvenile Aid Committee to "take care of some of these boys," even though none of the arrested were Franklin students. Franklin staff worked with the East Harlem Legislative Conference to organize a mass meeting at Odd Fellows Temple on East 106th Street, where over 2,000 local residents heard local leaders urge interethnic cooperation in several languages. Covello described how, when a Hispanic student was killed in a car accident shortly after youth street clashes in the area, students from various ethnic groups assisted the family through its difficult time. Franklin student Jose Monserrat urged the audience not to take seriously the exaggerated press accounts.

Media attacks continued to frustrate Franklin staff in later years. In 1941, The New York Journal-American claimed, in what Congressman Marcantonio called "a typical Hearst piece of yellow journalism," that Franklin was a hotbed of left-wing teachers who praised Soviet Russia in class and whose students sold The Daily Worker in the halls. The story was picked up in other papers within the week. In 1945, newspapers reported a minor student fight at the school in page-one banner headlines as a race riot; school and community organizations worked to overcome false press accounts that terrified parents and students. In addition to an extensive faculty report, seven outside agency investigations, including one by the Mayor's Committee on Unity, found the press guilty of spreading numerous falsehoods and aggravating the incident. In 1951, the Herald-Tribune accused the chair of...
the Speech Department, Rita Morgan, of being “red,” for having spoken at a peace rally attended by Communists. The two days of page-one charges forced Covello and Board members to scramble to her defense. In these and other cases, the school spent considerable time and energy deflecting the charges—organizing mass rallies, writing editorials, coordinating student responses, issuing press releases, and pressuring political leaders. Attempting to counteract the press’s exaggerated portrayal of the pathological aspects of East Harlem, Franklin staff hoped to educate the public, and indeed all the educational influences originating beyond school walls. In so doing, they also hoped to build a widespread and diverse community’s support for the educational promise and progress of the community schooling approach.


CONCLUSION

The story of community-centered schooling’s evolution in East Harlem does not provide a ready-to-use model for the present; indeed, the school’s broad mission makes any assessment of Franklin’s efforts tentative and partial. Covello himself insisted that given the broad aims of community schooling, it would take at least ten years to measure its full effects. If it succeeded in developing “a finer type of community life,” Covello maintained, we shall be working in a community that has grown more sensitive to its own needs and more able to assist in meeting those needs, with the school to aid in planning and carrying out necessary programs through which school and community problems can be solved more readily. Yet in “Public School Reform: Policy Talk and Institutional Practice,” historian David Tyack did conclude that Covello was among those educators able to “subvert or ignore the educational hierarchy and to link schools to their immediate communities.” Many contemporaries also found much to praise. Assistant Superintendent David Moskowitz claimed that Benjamin Franklin


was the only high school in New York City with an effective community program.

McChesney concluded that Franklin's community approach:

gave evidence of the best developed plan in community and school cooperation that I have seen — a plan that is really working and functioning in a vital way, to the extent even, of greatly influencing voting and breaking down a bad political regime.

The story of community-centered schooling's evolution at Benjamin Franklin reveals a vision of public education vastly different from our own. It illustrates the fundamental tensions involved in addressing the public purposes of schooling and suggests several directions for further research. Franklin's provocative role in educational history is to expand the present imagination through an examination of the past. This dissertation demonstrates that Franklin's approach to schooling drew from a larger vision about public education's role in a democracy as well as the challenges of the immediate East Harlem community. The essay further makes evident the inherent tensions that must be faced once the public purposes of schooling are addressed. Such findings force us to reconsider the nature and direction of our current historical research and school policy.

Franklin's distinctive approach to public education developed out of its East Harlem context, its rich heritage of ideas, and its attempts to realize its ideas in practice. It drew from both local and non-local conversations about the role of schooling in a pluralistic democracy. As I argued in Chapter I, Covello sought to develop a civic education at Franklin that would respond to the challenges and constraints of the East Harlem context. Echoing broad national currents in urban centers, the ethnic and racial divisions within East Harlem were aggravated by a grinding economic depression. The combination provided an immediate challenge to the school's call for local unity, while also providing rich resources in its efforts to improve community life and to celebrate the cultural plurality of America. The neighborhood's active network of community organizations provided an infrastructure upon which the politically-empowered East Harlemites could tap changing political winds in the early 1930's, successfully initiating Franklin's community schooling once LaGuardia became mayor.

As I demonstrated in Chapters II and III, Covello's own life, and those of several key staff, served as a conduit between Franklin's activist version of community schooling and the rich traditions of settlement houses, survey movements, social Christianity, urban sociology and social reconstruction. Covello's own immigrant experience provided an additional lens through which to focus his particular effort to build the school as a deliberate instrument of

644 Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for Racial Cooperation of the Benjamin Franklin High School, February 17, 1939, CP 52/20, p.2.

social change. Yet as I argue in Chapters IV and V through the example of intercultural relations, it was only through the effort to solve local problems that broad national discussions of cultural democracy and social reconstruction began to inform the evolution of Franklin's community-centered approach. Drawing from the immediate community context as well as broader social and academic discourses, Franklin staff built up through experimentation a community-schooling approach dependent upon intensive local research and a rich web of committees, social agencies, storefront units and responsive curricula. Only after combining context, intellectual heritage and local problem solving can one begin to trace the evolution of the community schooling vision that arose in East Harlem.

The story of Benjamin Franklin's struggle with community-centered schooling further reveals two primary questions inherent in any attempt to fulfill the public purposes of schooling – who would determine those purposes, and what would be their nature. As events described in Chapters I, IV and V indicate, who comprised the community of East Harlem over time varied in fact as well as in perception. As Chapter I makes clear, the rapid demographic shifts and population changes, combined with large and varied immigrant groups, created significant difficulty in ascertaining who actually comprised the East Harlem community Franklin meant to serve. In addition, health districts, police precincts, and political boundaries each defined East Harlem differently, further complicating the coordination efforts of the CAC.

In terms of perception, one longtime resident suggested that the name "East Harlem" itself originated from an effort to separate Harlem by race and ethnicity:

When the Blacks started to come towards this area, in order for us to explain where we lived (when you said Harlem, they said black) we said we live in East Harlem, that's where the name East came into being, to separate the white and black.646

Though most could agree upon the need for interethnic harmony within East Harlem, some East Harlemites evidently defined that community in ways that excluded certain racial and ethnic groups. Was East Harlem to be defined by ethnicity and race or by other borders? Some evidently defined East Harlem as "Italian" or white. Some students, for example, complained to the basketball coach that they did not want to be represented by a team of black students "as we are not a colored school."647 An informal understanding appeared to exist that blacks should not attend school dances, and Puerto Rican students at times experienced written and physical threats.648 Yet


647Note from "Students of Franklin" to Mr. Speigle, 12/22/41, CP 52/18; the note added that the students felt this way "even though it is a championship team."

evidence also exists that many student activities at least partially integrated along racial and ethnic lines, and that many residents defined the community by area rather than ethnicity – through social events, committee work, housing drives, mass meetings, and other activities.

The question of whose purposes community-centered schooling served arose, in addition, out of the fact that the school was a state authorized institution that sought also to be of the local community. As much as the school participated as a member of the local community, it ultimately had to serve state and city authorities. Further, whether or not the local community truly believed in a broadly inclusive local democracy, the school had to promote it. Whether or not the local community truly believed in interethnic harmony and integration, the school had to promote them. Though an agent of the community, Franklin, as a public institution, had to represent democratic and societal values that most of the local community may or may not have accepted. Further, Covello and others, through their involvement in social research and several professional associations, were often pulled between local needs and national agendas. Caught between its local community focus and its commitment to translocal values, Franklin attempted, uneasily and hesitantly at times, to embody in one institution that "distinctive combination in American culture of jealous localism and universalistic beliefs."

The second major question inherent in community schooling regards the nature of its purposes. In particular, was community-centered schooling primarily a response to the demands of good pedagogy or rather to the demands of local civic life? As Chapter II illustrated, those who supported and implemented "community schooling" ranged from those who might enhance one course’s pedagogy through one local field trip to those who wanted to reform and restructure local community life. The efforts made through Benjamin Franklin, while settling toward the latter end of that range, reflected the inevitable tension between civic and pedagogic rationales. Housing exhibits in the school and the curriculum provided a topic of interest to students while bridging several subject areas; the exhibits also reinforced the school’s drive to obtain public housing for East Harlem. The school’s curricular efforts to deal with the "second generation" problems described in Chapters IV and V reflected for some simply good pedagogy; for others, it formed an integral part of the school’s attempt to construct a richer local cultural democracy and more effective assimilation of immigrant groups into civic life. The tension became most evident at the boundaries; was the defense of East Harlem’s reputation through public rallies pandering to local

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649 Such evidence can be seen in school club photos, member lists, in letters from former students, in Covello’s autobiography, and so on.

650 Higham, Send These to Me, 182.
partisan bosses or sound educational leadership? Or when State Examiner McChesney complimented the school for its influence in reforming local political life, alarms went off at the Board of Education, and Covello was forced to placate nervous administrators. Through the varied backgrounds and intentions of its teachers and staff, its degree of social activism, and the nature and range of its social research, Benjamin Franklin reflected the ambiguity of the staff's response to this essential civic-pedagogic tension.

Finally, though Franklin's struggle comprises a small chapter in the history of U.S. education, it points to a large gap in the historiography. Few histories focus upon the evolving nature of a school's relationship with its community; few even focus upon the history of local schools. Given a tendency in the literature to emphasize the history of school systems and broad interpretive questions related to those systems, there is a vacuum regarding our knowledge of local school-community developments over time, one that demands attention for several reasons. First, the particularly local nature of U.S. schooling requires greater attention to very local histories. Second, a focus upon the school-community relationship promises greater insight into the broader educational ecology or configuration of educating institutions in which schooling takes place. Finally, attention to the history of schooling's purposes, to its core ideas, offers a possible bridge across the policy-practice divide. Telling the story about the local evolution of core ideas requires addressing the details of local historical context and roots. The ideas themselves, the developing missions, though, provide a currency for discussion beyond the local site. In this way, educational history can fulfill a powerful purpose itself — schooling both present practitioners and policy makers in the stubbornly local stories of translocal ideas.

The structure of this dissertation reflects an attempt to embody a historical method appropriate to the social history of such ideas. Refusing to acknowledge the ability of ideas to float independently through human history, and rejecting interpretations rooted in various forms of social or economic determinism, the dissertation structure tries to apply a more nuanced approach. The history of an idea's evolution, here regarding school-community mission, requires a treatment of the socio-economic and political context in which it arose (Chapter I), as well as the intellectual heritage of the idea itself (Chapters II and III). In addition to combining these elements, however, a third step is essential. The idea's evolution must be traced, in light of its context and its heritage, through its interaction with a specific problem. This is what causes the idea to evolve further (Chapters IV and V). Hopefully the approach used here will provide a promising avenue for future research.

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651 Report No. 3, (to) Dr. Knox from Mildred E. McChesney, January 25, 1939, CP 38/13. The report caused Board of Education administrators some concern that the school would be criticized for political involvement, a charge Covello apparently deflected successfully. Correspondence from David H. Moskowitz to Leonard Covello, February 16, 1939 and from Leonard Covello to David H. Moskowitz, March 2, 1939, CP 38/13.
We certainly cannot pretend that schooling will resolve our social crises through better teaching, nor reshape our world through more effective pedagogy. If nothing else, by doing this, we would risk slipping into a familiar "progressive" trap — overstating what schools can do in order to gain broad support, only to blame non-school factors later when those claims fall short. Yet the purposes of public schooling demand attention because questions of purpose raise issues concerning the infrastructure of our democratic society. Here is the essential practicality of a focus on purpose. Determining the public mission of schooling requires creating the present capacity — not just the future citizenry — that will allow us to intelligently, deliberately build consensus and to experiment with solutions for a challenging world.

Covello retained his emphasis on the public purposes of education even after leaving Benjamin Franklin in the late 1950s, subsequently working on educational concerns for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico among others. In his final years, testifying to the intimate relation he saw between education and community-building, this internationally-renowned educator returned to Italy to assist a local reformer in community organizing. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he continued to see opportunities for enhancing community life through local educational reforms that focused on the public purposes of a democratic people.

Such opportunities present themselves to policy makers, educators and other citizens today. Indeed, how current public school educators respond may determine the future of the common school tradition as we have known it this century. Amidst the rise of charter schools, increased numbers of more autonomous alternative public schools, more ubiquitous and enhanced multimedia computer software, and persistent calls for voucher schemes and privatization, challenges have risen to the predominant views most Americans have of what schools are; one oft-cited critic claims that schools as we have known them should be eliminated.652 With such fundamental restructuring under consideration, the U.S. has the chance to ask anew what public purposes these institutions will serve. Beyond student test scores and college attendance rates, the public must decide to assess how new models of schools compare in their contribution to democratic development. Dare policy makers build such a component into the design requirements of new schools? Current schools? Amidst the politics of an anxious electorate will rising state authority frustrate local control or will communities insist on a radical devolution of power? Will the public purposes of schooling be equated with governmental purposes, or will citizens insist upon a broader public interest, in part from an apparently ascendant and profound mistrust of current

government? Amidst tighter human services budgets and efforts to integrate human services delivery, policy makers may finally break out of "the client box," pushed by fears of increased juvenile delinquency and pulled by the allure of a community approach's potential efficiency. Desired or not, the advent of new schools, an anxious political setting, and besieged government budgets present citizens, educators and policy makers an opportunity to set out clearly what public ends schooling should serve, and how to gauge their attainment.

Covello, and those with whom he worked in East Harlem, still warrant our special regard today. Their commitment to public service, their unwillingness to separate schooling from the larger issues of their time, their dedication to the local community as the base unit of cultural democracy, and their insistence on reasoned inquiry into community problems distinguished them in their own time, and in the present era as well. They contributed to building a different discussion about public schooling, and they carried out that discussion in practice. Harlem streets were cleaned, sanitation rules changed, public housing built, citizenship campaigns successfully waged, innovative teacher training carried out, students placed in jobs, extensive adult education developed, and public festivals celebrated among diverse attendees. Students graduated and pursued further education, and many returned to visit the school and its staff. A group of individuals representing a diverse set of intellectual and social traditions found a broad open space to practice inspired and hard-nosed citizenship in Benjamin Franklin's community schooling; sanitized professional boundaries did not yet keep citizen colleagues at arms distance from each other and the common good. East Harlem changed in ways directly attributable to their persistent efforts in a demanding era.

Their distinction did not come without failures, particularly in addressing whose community East Harlem was meant to be. Interethnic tensions remained a persistent problem, and community-building was always only a partial success. Too many East Harlem adults continued to miseducate their sons in interethnic hostility, and high residential mobility weakened Franklin's efforts at community harmony. Dramatic pedagogical innovation likely only reached a significant minority of classrooms, and the storefront units were probably never more than a peripheral activity to many staff. Many staff may have never been convinced by Covello's passionately-held vision, teacher preparation may not have been transformed at local universities, and media attacks on the community were not deterred. Covello himself may have spent too little time training existing staff in the community-centered vision, even with the limited control he had over staff selection. A disjointed city bureaucracy continued to divide up East Harlem in different and uncoordinated ways, and post-World War II shifts may have exacerbated an already weakened local
And Franklin's net contribution to student success may never be known.

Yet in specific incidents—such as the 1938 street fights or the campaign for public housing—Benjamin Franklin's critical role in building a better East Harlem became clearly evident. In so doing, it provided a powerful argument for recovering the public ends of public schooling. Many East Harlemites knew that Covello and Benjamin Franklin intended to fight on their behalf, in both the dramatic and daily battles of neighborhood life. Many of those active in other aspects of the community then joined in the school's varied initiatives.

Whether Benjamin Franklin's efforts at community-centered schooling would have occurred without Covello is not a terribly useful question historically. It would be hard in any era to find a highly-educated visionary multilingual immigrant community resident to lead a local school! But it does raise the question of whether good schools depend too much on individual charismatic leaders. If so, schools seem similar to many organizations. School systems, however, that fail to place the community at the heart of their efforts, and human services that serve functions separately rather than the same people jointly do not augur well for the non-charismatic leader's success. School systems designed to be efficient instructional delivery systems will encourage professional curriculum technicians, and frustrate dynamic public-minded leadership community schooling demands.

In the end, the Franklin staff's early efforts did bring home to them both the complexity and profundity of the task they had undertaken, a task that remains today. Intercultural harmony, for example, depended not simply upon human relations training, but upon a shared public square, a place where community members could face common challenges irrespective of background. Franklin's staff had clear reason to fear the "insidious sowers of anti-social seeds" that English teacher Louis Relin described, and this continues to be a problem in the 1990s. American unity continues to depend upon a shared ideology, facing squarely the question of a common identity, and that places special responsibility upon institutions charged with the public's education. Today, in an era of increased and diversified immigration, during which the opposing political ideology which so shaped the U.S.'s self-conception in the post-World War II period has disappeared, U.S. citizens face again a clear challenge to define their shared identity, their common public ends, as well as their private domains. Cultural democracy in East Harlem required that community schooling serve as an essential training ground in a citizenship that could transcend racial and ethnic differences. Local ethnic tensions today only highlight the present need to build a vibrant local civic culture as a foundation for the nation's democratic survival.
When Leonard Covello was asked by a visiting teacher in 1941 what was most on his mind, he answered in blunt frustration: "The fact that the fate of democracy lies in the lap of the schools, and so few realize it." The story of Covello and his colleagues can broaden the mental landscape into which we place our public schools. His and his staff's visions can allow us confidently to assert reasoned deliberation's role as democracy's handmaiden, and public schooling's role as its workshop.

Correspondence for Dania Kysor to Leonard Covello, November 24, 1941, with attached "Report of Visit to Benjamin Franklin High School, November 18, 1941." CP 38/13.

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