

RECONSTRUCTING THE COMMON GOOD IN EDUCATION

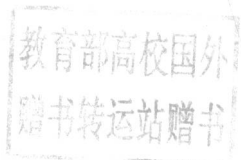
Coping with
Intractable
American
Dilemmas

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Edited by LARRY CUBAN
and DOROTHY SHIPPS

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COPING WITH INTRACTABLE AMERICAN DILEMMAS

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RECONSTRUCTING THE
COMMON GOOD IN EDUCATION

*For David B. Tyack,
outstanding scholar, gifted teacher,
and dear friend*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A conversation triggered this volume. It took place in April 1996 between Dorothy Shipps and Larry Cuban in New York City at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Dorothy suggested that former students find some way of honoring David Tyack, who had just announced that he would retire from Stanford in 2000. Within an hour we had sketched out some possibilities, one of which was a volume of essays drawing from the ideas that David had written about and taught in a career extending from Harvard through Reed College, the University of Illinois, and, since 1969, Stanford University.

Within a few weeks, we compiled a list of David's former students and colleagues, drafted a letter, and enlisted Elisabeth Hansot, his frequent co-author (and wife), in the plan to edit a volume of original essays on the theme of the common good in education. This core notion had inspired not only David's scholarly work for four decades but also those of us who have been his students, colleagues, and friends.

The response from the 25 scholars we contacted was overwhelmingly positive. We began the long winnowing process of figuring out the themes of the volume, determining which writers found the theme congenial and convenient for their schedules in the months ahead, and, of course, seeking a publisher.

For the co-editors, the journey from conversation to published book has been filled with occasional potholes and a few zigzags but has nonetheless arrived at its destination intact. We not only continue to speak to one another but have come to be colleagues full of admiration and affection for each other.

We wish to acknowledge first with much fondness and respect our co-authors, who were prompt with their drafts and tolerant of our editorial peskiness. They have contributed to a volume that honors David's legacy as a historian of education while raising and elaborating important issues at the core of a democratic society committed to public schooling.

Along the way, several individuals contributed ideas that refined our focus and greatly improved this volume. John Meyer and Dan Perlstein gave us new, and quite different, perspectives when the central theme seemed to be pulling in several directions. John Rury and an anonymous reviewer of the manuscript helped with the final conceptual organization of the volume. We thank them all.

At Stanford University Press, we thank the director, Norris Pope, and acquisitions editor Laura Comay. They saw the importance of the intellectual content of this volume to scholars, policy makers, and informed citizens who are deeply concerned about the increasing constriction of the purposes of public schooling. They adopted our call to reinvigorate discussion about education's public purposes at a time when individual interests seem more prized. We also express our appreciation to our production editor Nathan MacBrien, Julia Zafferano, and Janet Gardiner, who shepherded the volume to publication.

Finally, we thank Marla Ucelli at the Rockefeller Foundation for a grant that accelerated publication and publicized the book to an audience beyond scholars. She saw the link between a revitalized expression of the common good in education and the lives of poor and marginalized Americans.

None of this, of course, would have occurred without David Tyack, who has been to all of us a generous, humane teacher, scholar, and friend.

L.C. and D.S.

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TED MITCHELL began his career as an educational historian in an undergraduate seminar taught by David Tyack. That experience started a long, happy collegueship and friendship that continues today. After obtaining his Ph.D. from Stanford under David Tyack's mentorship, Mitchell taught at Dartmouth College and the University of California at Los Angeles. He currently serves as president of Occidental College.

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FOREWORD

Patricia Albjerg Graham

The impetus for this volume is David B. Tyack, whose life and work actively continue, I am happy to report, but whose retirement from the Vida Jacks Professorship of Education at Stanford University will occur in September 2000, after 31 years of service there. Anticipating that occasion prompted a group of colleagues, many of whom were his former students and all of whom have learned immensely from him, to gather their wits and their research interests to prepare essays in his honor. As editors Larry Cuban and Dorothy Shippo observe, each chapter is related to ideas that have long underlain Tyack's work. These issues were evident when he wrote his senior thesis at Harvard College about Cape Verdeans' educational experiences in the United States. The themes are expressed in the title of this book, *Reconstructing the Common Good in Education: Coping with Intractable American Dilemmas*.

Concern with education's commitment to the common good has permeated Tyack's work, from his early discussions of the role of education in the formation of early U.S. national identity to his current essays on the purposes of education at the end of the twentieth century. A fundamental question has been whether inevitable conflicts occur between education that is organized to benefit the society and education that is intended to provide maximum benefit to an individual or selected groups of individuals. The tension between two obviously valuable goals—the benefit to society and the benefit to the individual—forms the central theme of this volume.

Many of the authors, like Tyack himself, are historians, and they trace changes in national expectations for education at different periods in our history and different regions of our nation. Others focus on the lives of individuals whom educators must reach if learning is to occur and the

common good to be realized. Still others discuss the structures and institutions of education and the societal forces buffeting them.

All recognize the American goal of individual advancement through education, one particularly cherished as a universal standard by the portion of the population to whom it most applied: white males. The broader needs for education, however, that would enhance the society as a whole rather than simply those already privileged by race, gender, and disposition constitute much of the work of this volume. How to build a constituency for these needs and then how to manage the organizational effort to provide the education and concomitant social benefit form the essence of Tyack's own scholarship. Perhaps this concern is best captured and expressed in the essay contributed to this volume by his wife and frequent scholarly collaborator, Elisabeth Hansot, "Civic Friendship: An Aristotelian Perspective," in which she sets forth Aristotle's argument that institutions, such as educational systems, rely on the existence of "civic friendship" to sustain their endeavors.

The phrase "civic friendship" captures Tyack's work and life. He is rare among prolific scholars in his willingness to participate avidly with others in talks, walks, bicycle rides, kayak excursions, and other, preferably outdoor and energetic activities. While the calories are being burned, similar intensity occurs in the conversation around issues of social justice, community, and education. Tactful and generous references are made to others' work as well as insightful suggestions for its improvement. Ideally these discussions take place in a setting of remarkable natural beauty, often in the hills or at the ocean near his Stanford home, but they can also occur on treks through city streets, particularly at times of national conferences, when the need for more intense conversation than that afforded by professional meetings overcomes him and his fortunate friend.

The result of these talks, walks, and subsequent correspondence is a group of lucky educators, some of whom were his students but all of whom value him as a teacher and as a friend. In their "civic friendship," they sustain and advance the ideals of "reconstructing the common good" that this volume represents. David B. Tyack has left us a formidable legacy.

RECONSTRUCTING THE
COMMON GOOD IN EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Larry Cuban and Dorothy Shipps

School reform has given pundits, policy makers, and academics full-time work for the past half-century. Highly touted reforms have repeatedly washed over public schools, leaving in their wake the debris of once-heralded programs and public disappointment. Reformers have advocated using schools to solve major social ills, such as poverty and racial oppression, and to prevent drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and crime. Program after program was established and, within a few years, under the shadow of criticism, dismantled.

In virtually every instance in this century, decision makers and school administrators have reacted to reformers' demands by adopting new policies and implementing new programs. Eventually, however, educators, taxpayers, and parents have become frustrated by the gap between their grand expectations and the niggling results. Public schools, it would seem, have been crude and inefficient tools for solving major societal problems. Nonetheless, amid disappointing results, reformers have persisted with almost religious fervor.

Since the early 1980s, a new generation of school reformers has been intent upon solving the nation's economic problems. An economic justification for public schools—helping the nation compete in a global economy while providing marketable skills to students entering a workplace anchored in an information age—has overwhelmed other popular purposes for tax-supported public schools. For almost two centuries, Americans expected that their public schools—the *common* school as it was initially called—would build citizens, cultivate the moral and social development of individual students, and bind diverse groups into one nation. Now, as public schools are being asked to build the human

capital that many believe is essential to maintain economic primacy, other historic purposes appear to be distractions.

Reduced to the dichotomy of private vs. public interests, recent reform proposals have called for more individual parental choice through government-funded vouchers to send children to private schools, independent charter schools, and public schools contracted out to private entrepreneurs. Advocates of choice often see schooling as another consumer commodity. Moreover, private sector management has become the model for public school systems as school and district activities are “downsized,” “restructured,” and “outsourced.” School buses, lunchrooms, and stadiums sport advertisements. Corporate logos dot school corridors. Critics ask, is everything that is public for sale? Is being a good citizen only about being a consumer making individual choices among products? What about the common good the founders of tax-supported public schools so fervently sought?

This tension between public and private, between cultivating the common good and serving individual interests, is one of many conflicts deeply embedded in the institution of public schools and the subject of this book. In the founding of American public schools almost two centuries ago, multiple and conflicting purposes took root, justified on the grounds that both the nation as a whole and individual Americans would prosper as a result.

In the nineteenth century, antebellum school reformers such as Horace Mann and postbellum ones such as William T. Harris believed that publicly funded, locally controlled schools open to all children would promote the common good and improve society. Through universal public schooling, children of the nation would learn the essential knowledge of the past and present to prepare for their future responsibilities. These reformers assumed that public schools were carriers of common democratic values ensuring the survival of the Republic and stability of the social order. Education and the public good were one and the same.

Mid-nineteenth-century public schools were expected to teach basic literacy, strengthen students' moral character, and build citizens who would leave school prepared to discharge their civic duties. With the end of the Civil War, the conquered South presented Abraham Lincoln's successors with the monumental task of transforming four million ex-slaves into literate citizens. In ex-Confederate states, the federal government provided free public schooling for millions of black children and adults, thus forging linkages for the first time between federal action and locally controlled schools and between race and citizenship. Again, education and