

Strengthening Families, Communities and Schools to Support Children's Development

Neighborhoods of Promise

Edited by
Edmund W. Gordon, Betina Jean-Louis
and Nkechi Obiora



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Drawing on a range of contexts influenced by the Promise Neighborhoods Program—a federal place-based initiative to improve educational outcomes for students in distressed urban and rural neighborhoods—this book outlines effective characteristics and elements for implementing supplementary education. Chapter authors demonstrate that the disparities in educational achievement between white and non-white students can only be addressed by a holistic approach that takes the communities in which schools are situated as its focal point. This edited collection distills the insights gained from the communities implementing such comprehensive education programs and provides the framework and models for reproducing such successes.

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First published 2018
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-06222-1 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-16175-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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Foreword

Geoffrey Canada

In a sense, we don't have to test the "theory" of the comprehensive, birth-through-college approach of the Harlem Children's Zone®. The approach is already being used to help millions of children all across America—outside of Harlem, though, it is called middle-class life.

Visitors to the Harlem Children's Zone often arrive ready to take notes and bring home the secret formula for our success: the specially designed curriculum, the staff training; maybe younger ones think we have an app. And we tell them what we do. We are pretty transparent that way. What we are doing is a compilation of things that everybody knows we should be doing. Too many communities, however, have been daunted by the scale of the resources and strategic planning needed for implementation.

What they take home, we hope, is the idea that we love our kids and we do whatever is necessary to get them to succeed. And we commit to doing whatever is necessary until they graduate from college. (After they graduate, I tell kids then that we still love them, but they are on their own.) The Harlem Children's Zone works with more than 10,000 children, and though I may not know every single child's name, all of them are mine. And all of my children are going to succeed.

Of course, stating the goal is just the first step: getting there takes hard work, dedication, creativity, passion, intellectual rigor, and patience. But commitment is what fuels the process, and when I look at America, I have to question our commitment to the country's children.

As any caring parent can tell you, there is no phase in a child's life where you can just step back and safely assume they will be fine. From their first awkward attempts at walking to their stepping up to receive their college diploma, children stumble and fall. Sometimes, they need to be helped up, and sometimes, they need to learn to struggle up on their own. Caring parents are always vigilant, watching as their children grow up, and stepping in when necessary. As parents, none of us are perfect all of the time, but sometimes, just trying is helpful. Certainly, a child who never experiences the adults around him caring enough to help is severely disadvantaged.

What the Harlem Children's Zone has done is attempt to institutionalize this parental vigilance. As our children pass from program to program, the

organization has worked hard to make sure the transitions are seamless, there is a continuity of care, and information about the child is passed along.

That has created a rather unique challenge for our organization. We need to make sure, for example, that our pre-kindergarten team gets all of its children to be “school ready,” or our kindergarten team will have that much harder of a job. We know that there are times that children will be failing, but we are determined to spend the extra time necessary over the years to make sure they succeed.

This unique challenge has reinforced our commitment to early childhood education. Former President Barack Obama’s recent call to extend high-quality pre-kindergarten programs re-ignited a decades-long debate about the efficacy of Head Start and early childhood efforts.

The debate over Head Start, like many of today’s education debates, is beside the point. Head Start isn’t like some polio vaccine that will inoculate small children so they will be assured a lifetime of success. A high-quality pre-K program is a huge boon to children, but its value is limited if the child then spends year after year in lousy schools.

Similarly, another distracting debate is between those who say the key to educating poor children is better schools and those who say the answer lies outside the school building. Schools are the centerpiece of a child’s education, and teachers make a huge difference, but without the support of stronger families and communities, schools will always be fighting a headwind. The stories of children who have triumphed over adverse circumstances are simply the exceptions that prove how strong the gravitational pull of generational poverty is. If we are going to succeed at the scale our country needs, we need to improve what is happening both inside and outside our schools.

Science has shown that without a doubt, parenting techniques make a huge difference in a child’s ability to succeed academically. Simple things like increasing the number of positive interactions with a child—reading, talking, singing—have been shown to vastly improve the physical architecture of the brain. Yet, not all parents know that, so if we are going to improve the odds of children’s success, it is incumbent on our country to ensure all parents know about the science of good parenting. This is where changing the community becomes important—the other adults surrounding the parents need to respectfully help their neighbors improve their children’s odds at success.

The neighborhood also establishes the cultural norms that help guide the individual behavior of the parent and child within it. If everyone in a community is going to college, anyone who is not heading for college will experience enormous pressure to comply. If a child lives in a neighborhood where violence is prevalent, then becoming adept at fighting—not grammar or algebra—becomes the obvious means of survival. In these dangerous communities, schools run the risk of becoming seen as irrelevant by their students.

My organization is working with the overwhelming majority of children who live in our Children’s Zone®. We want kids to see role models wherever

they look. We want 3rd graders to see their older brothers and sisters working hard in high school, not hanging out on the corner, selling drugs or getting pregnant. We want college to be a given in Central Harlem. And we are proving that with the right set of supports, large numbers of poor children can succeed academically.

That said, none of us can be complacent. Poor children, it turns out, are like the canaries in the coal mine for the public education crisis. Anyone looking at national studies and numbers will immediately see that even middle-class schools are not keeping pace today with their counterparts in other industrialized nations.

But how does the country strengthen its communities? The challenge is steepest for cities where poverty has eaten away at their overall economy: Because of lousy schools and fear of violence, anyone who can afford to leave that community often does. Young people who go to college are likely to move somewhere “better” and safer, which contributes to the communities’ decline. The reverse has to become the norm.

What is necessary is that people outside these devastated communities start to think of the children inside these communities as “my children.”

When enough Americans think of these children as “my children” and realize that there is no insurmountable reason they cannot succeed, then the failing status quo will start to crumble. Then, we can move forward and create stronger communities, which will empower families, which, in turn, will allow children to fully contribute to America’s brilliance and strength.



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Part I



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1 Comprehensive Education and Family Resource Centers for the 21st Century

Edmund W. Gordon and Andrew C. Shurtleff

Introduction

There is no doubt that much has been done in the effort to reform schools and reduce the achievement gap between the classes. From “Head Start” to “No Child Left Behind,” the government has made calculable efforts to improve the lot of children in education. However, this has not led to the desired result needed, and so much still has to be done in order to not only make education equitable, but to stop America’s decline in education in the ranks of the developed world. If we agree that efforts have been made towards improving education, what, then, is missing? Extant research has proven that focusing exclusively on schools is inadequate for meeting the complex and myriad factors that impinge on young people today, especially those growing up in impoverished environments. Poverty, both financial and cultural, constricts the opportunities for developing necessary infrastructures that extend beyond schools.

In order to address these concerns, it is asserted that education take a multi-leveled, multi-purpose, and integrative approach that extends beyond the physical locales of schools. Indeed, if one is to make any headway against the pressures and limitations intervening in the road toward personal well-being and academic success, one ought to assume a comprehensive and multi-faceted orientation. With the previous administration’s introduction of the Promise Neighborhoods approach, we here consider the elements of comprehensive education that have proven to be the missing component in the myriad of efforts being made to achieve equity in education. That our hope for reducing the achievement gap be not illusory and our efforts in stopping the decline of quality education in our schools be achieved, we insist that this continuing policy widen its scope to influence different variations of complementary education so long as they show proof of enhancing academic achievement. Thus, what follows considers the value of comprehensive education as a method for empowering students, parents, teachers, and community members. While we consider such approaches where research and models that incarnate this vision are discussed, our overarching aim is to provide insight into how best to meet the needs of schools and communities most in need of attention and support.

Background and Context

Comprehensive (or supplementary) education (Gordon, 1999) is defined as the formal and informal learning and developmental enrichment opportunities provided for students outside of school and beyond the regular school day or year. Some of these activities may occur inside the school building but are beyond those included in the formal curriculum of the school. After-school care, perhaps the most widespread form of supplementary education, includes the special efforts that parents exert in support of the intellectual and personal development of their children (Gordon, 1999). These efforts may range from provisions for good health and nutrition to extensive travel. They may also entail the mediated exposure to selected aspects of both indigenous and hegemonic cultures.

Informed parents, scholars, and educators have known for some time now that schools alone cannot enable or ensure high academic achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Bridglall & Gordon, 2001; Wilkerson, 1979). James Comer asserts this position more forcefully in *Waiting for a Miracle: Why Our Schools Cannot Solve Our Problems and How We Can* (1997). Colloquial knowledge among many parents “in the know” reflect awareness that there are a number of things that occur outside of school that appear to support academic success. Examples can be found in the many education-related opportunities that affluent and academically sophisticated parents make available to their children. These include travel, dance, book clubs, music lessons, scouting, tutoring, and summer camp, among numerous others.

It is reasonable to assume that the most academically successful populations (primarily European Americans and Asian Americans with mid- to high socioeconomic status [SES] backgrounds) tend to have combinations of strong home and school resources to support their academic development. The least successful groups (African American, Latina/o American, Native American, and the poor) have, on average, a much weaker combination of home and school resources (Birch & Gussow, 1970; Gordon & Meroe, 1999; the National Task Force on Minority High Academic Achievement, 1999). Without demeaning the importance of adequate and appropriate school resources, comprehensive education and family resource centers place emphasis on those educative experiences and resources that are accessed through the families and communities from which students come.

In 1966, James Coleman concluded that differences in the family backgrounds of students, as opposed to school characteristics, accounted for the greatest amount of variance in their academic achievement. While this finding was later found to be less valid for low-income and ethnic minority children than for the general population (Gordon, 1999), typically, family background and income stand as strong predictors of achievement in school (Jaynes & Williams, 1989; Gordon & Meroe, 1999; Sexton, 1961). In related works, Mercer (1973) and Wolf (1966) posited that it is the presence of family environmental supports for academic development that may

explain this association between family status and student achievement. They made the now obvious point that reading books, positive academic role models, help with homework, and a quiet place to study in the home are associated with school achievement.

When examined in context, the idea of comprehensive education is based on the premise that beyond exposure to the school's formal academic curriculum, high academic achievement is closely associated with exposure to family and community-based activities and learning experiences in support of academic development that occur outside of school. For low-SES and non-Asian students of color, these opportunities are generally underutilized. In the home environment, for example, high-achieving students benefit from literate adults, home computers, books, magazines, journals, and the academic assistance and encouragement of older siblings and/or parents. In terms of community resources, the combination of local library privileges, mentoring and tutoring programs, peer-based study groups, Saturday and/or after-school academies, and mediated participation in various folk and "high" cultural events and faith-based activities influence the development of proactive and engaged dispositions conducive toward academic learning.

Many activities, considered routine in the settings in which they occur are nonetheless thought to be implicitly and deliberately engaged in to ensure adequate intellectual and academic development of young people. These routines include reading to and with one's children; dinner conversation and inclusion in other family discussions of important issues; exposure to adult models of behaviors supportive of academic learning; active use of the library, museums, and community and religious centers as sources of information; help seeking from appropriate sources; and investments in references or other educational materials (Gordon, 1999).

In a related but different domain are efforts directed at influencing children's choice of friends and peers; guiding and controlling use of their spare time; and guiding or limiting their time spent watching television and being influenced by other media. Here, we find a wide range of deliberate and incidental activities that serve to supplement the more formal and systematically structured learning experiences provided through schooling. These more intentional child development practices are no doubt dually responsive to the folk knowledge of academically sophisticated families and the empirically derived knowledge of experts in child development and education (Gordon, 1999).

In general, high degrees of congruency between the values promulgated at school, at home, and in a student's immediate community are associated with high academic achievement. What may be equally critical are students' perceptions that what happens at school matters and is consistent with what parents and other family members consider important (Wilkinson, 1979). This is conveyed through expectations, physical provisions for academic pursuits, attitudes toward intellectual activity, and models that are available for children to emulate. Participation in supplementary education

activities thus contributes to the development of a sense of membership in the described High Performance Learning Communities (see Chapter 12) and shared values for the importance of academic achievement for personal fulfillment, community development, and social and political upward mobility (Gordon, 1999).

Thinking Comprehensively and Relationally About Education

The term “comprehensive” as a qualifier for education requires that we think of education as inclusive of conditions necessary for effective teaching and learning. Such contexts should also include opportunities to learn and engage in the life processes by which learners encounter the experiences that are the grounds of the development of intellect. Despite the ubiquity of these conditions, opportunities, and processes in life, some institutions carry special responsibility for their delivery (e.g., family and school). Thus, effective comprehensive education is generally associated with the appropriate orchestration of these ubiquitous and redundant experiences.

In Lawrence Cremin’s (1975/2007) friendly critique of his mentor, John Dewey (1916), Cremin argued that Dewey’s conception of education had created an unnecessary dualism—schooling and the other educative institutions of the society. Cremin thought the duality was inappropriate in that he considered education as a single enterprise that should be thought of “comprehensively, relationally and publicly.” The recent growth in the After-School, Supplementary/Complementary/Comprehensive Education and the Out-of-School Learning movements appear to be repeating that dualism. This is generally true, except in the Community Schools (Dryfoos et al., 2005) movement, where school becomes the umbrella for all of the resources that need to be coordinated and directed toward the education of young learners.

Thinking comprehensively with respect to education, then, must include concern for all of the opportunities in life to learn and to teach; for the ways in which they complement each other; and for the appropriate orchestration of these opportunities to learn wherever they may occur. In the context advanced by McLaughlin (2008), Rebell (2008), Weiss (2005), and Varenne (2007) and Gordon, emphasis is given to family/home, school and community, though comprehensive education is not co-terminus with these institutions. It also occurs in peer and inter-generational relationships. It is ubiquitous to one’s personal and public efforts at making sense of the world. It is a function of commercial enterprise, gang life, political participation, fun-seeking, and problem solving. It happens in the solitary practice of shooting baskets on the basketball court, as one of the principal author’s students cautions that we are ignoring the learning involved in epistemic games (Yowell, 1996).

When Tiedemann (1963) distinguished between “other people’s data and one’s personal data” as competing concerns of school learners, he was

referring to the tension between concentration on the mastery of the academic content of schooling and the pressing learning demands of peer relations, dating, pursuit of reputation, athletic and social competition, and the adjudication of the relationships in family as well as community politics. Schooling privileges teaching and learning related to the demands of academic knowledge and process mastery, which often competes with the learning and teaching related to learning to live and survive. Thinking comprehensively about education requires that we privilege both and the ways in which the two are conjoined and dialectically related. If we follow Cremin, logic requires that these processes be thought of as a whole and that they be thought of publicly (i.e. as in the public domain and as part of the public responsibility for education). In some contexts, it is useful to examine the implications of thinking about education comprehensively as posing yet another challenge and opportunity for the pursuit of Educational Equity. Likewise, we view it as a necessary component of the effort.

Family as Educator

The family and the home are both critical education institutions where children begin learning long before they start school and where they spend much of their time after they start school. So it stands to reason that improving a child's home environment to make it more conducive to learning is critical (Barton & Coley, 2007). Indeed, children tend to perform better in school when there are supports for academic and personal development in their homes and communities, Mercer (1973) and Wolf (1966). Among these supports are: a quiet place to read, study, and do academic work; adequate and protected time for such work; books and other reading and study materials; adults, older siblings, or peers who read to and who read with children, talk with them, and engage them in relevant decision making; persons who expect them to put forth effort, to succeed, and who reward them for it; adequate health maintenance and good nutrition; and consistency and stability in relationships and resources (Gordon & Vergara, 2008).

Parents, caregivers, and other interested adults are responsible for providing children with the access to a well-orchestrated, motivating, and engaging learning environment in which students find consistency in the opportunities to learn. Family involvement in the learning process, however, must be a shared and meaningful responsibility. Both outside families and larger social structures play active roles in building and sustaining a family's support for their children's learning. Indeed, society is responsible for making the political, financial, and social investments that can promote a family's capacities and opportunities to support their children's learning and development. On the one hand, a family with ample access to Bourdieu's (1986) forms of education relevant capital tends to provide these supports for the education of their children (see section "A Model from Public Health for Comprehensive Education" below). On the other hand, disadvantaged and marginalized

families tend to need help in understanding the need for such support and are limited in their capacity to make such provisions, even when they are knowledgeable. Thus, family resource centers that provide such assistance and guidance to these families will better enable them to choose from and orchestrate their children's access to a wide variety of opportunities for teaching and learning.

Opportunities for Supplementary Teaching and Learning

Our society has developed a wide variety of educative institutions and resources from which opportunities for teaching and learning can be chosen. Some of these institutions have long histories and colloquial familiarity. Resource centers include advocacy and guidance for the use of these resources, instruction in the accessing and development of such services, and technical assistance to community organizations interested in creating and offering these services. For the purposes of this chapter, seven resource centers are discussed as models to provide perspective on the array of efforts working to embody the vision of supplementary education while the second part of the book is devoted to several best practice models of existing programs of comprehensive/complementary education.

First among these institutions and services are Settlement Houses and Community Resource Centers. These organizations offer social services to low income, immigrant, and highly transient families as a method for providing the structure and support that are associated with healthy family life. Specifically, health, recreation, childcare, employment, personal development, and counseling are all fostered through the efforts of settlement houses and community centers. Example organizations that embody this ethos include the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centers (BASSAC) in the United Kingdom, Hull House in Chicago, and the University Settlement House in New York City. Utilizing the resources and materials that these organizations make publicly available can benefit one's effort to develop similar initiatives.

Second are Faith-based Institutions (e.g., Churches, Synagogues, and Mosques),¹ which emerged very early as institutions concerned with teaching and learning. Initially, they ran educational activities directed at the development of their leaders, where most of the efforts went into the religious training of followers. For a considerable length of time, faith-based institutions have sponsored K-16 education. Moreover, the colloquial perceptions of excellence and structure these institutions provide have established them as the preferred choice in many communities. Furthering the role faith-based institutions maintain as formal settings for academic learning is their substantial provision of the incidental learning of attitudes, habits, mores, and values that are associated with beliefs propagated by the institutions themselves. Such influence ripples out into the lives of those who come in contact with them, thereby contributing to the attitudes and ideologies maintained

within the community. These can have a powerful effect on young people in search of a sense of belonging and inclusion, where the degree to which the institution's ethos can authentically resonate with youth is worth careful attention.

Third are Youth Development Services, which are organizations that offer different kinds of learning experiences for the development of young people.² For example, these services might include pre-vocational education, which entails a variety of organized experiences designed to introduce and orient youth to the life and work of a given profession. In this case, children are exposed to vocational education at an early age with the intention of priming them to the values, goals, and expectations of that profession. This helps the young person populate his/her mind with realistic ideas and skill sets for pursuing and fulfilling specific occupational responsibilities. The Scout Movement (i.e. Boy, Girl, and Eagle Scouts) is also applicable here. Namely, scouting is a worldwide youth movement with the stated aim of supporting young people in their physical, mental, and spiritual development. Here, the goal is to empower youth as they seek to play constructive roles in society, where fostering spaces that provide pre-vocational training can be highly effective.

For later adolescence, apprenticeships provide an excellent avenue for extending one's experiences in pre-vocational education or as mentees of Big Brothers/Big Sisters. More specifically, apprenticeships function as supervised learning experiences that involve engagement in the activities of a craft skill or profession, usually under the supervision of an expert who guides the student in developing the tacit knowledge associated with the area of expertise. Such experiences can make a powerful and lasting impression on young people, especially as they strive to identify and pursue professions that align with their unique skills and interests.

A fourth opportunity for teaching and learning includes coaching, mentoring, and tutoring initiatives, such as with Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Though mentoring and tutoring are more widely recognized as academic resources than coaching, all three place their emphasis on individualization, customization, and personalization.³ In mentoring, the relationship between the teaching person and the learning person is sometimes thought of as primary, where the content of the experience tends to focus more on socialization and psychological development. We associate the coaching function with the learning and honing of a particular skill or set of skills, while the tutoring function is often governed by an emphasis on academic content and academic skill development. Ultimately, however, the product of each of the three functions is the development in the learner of competences comparable to those of the teacher. It is hoped that the achievement in the novice may eventually parallel or even surpass the achievement of the tutor.

Fifth are Boarding Families and Boarding Schools, which function as alternatives for families who want to offer their children the out-of-home life experiences that they consider more appropriate for their development.

Boarding families are more likely to be used by parents who want their kids to be exposed to the experiences of people with greater resources and opportunities. However, it may be the case that boarding schools are used more by high-income families than low-income families. In the former context, affluent parents who send their kids to attend and live in a school away from home do so because it offers a particular type of education in which they are interested. More often than not, however, such schools demand tuition and fees that are beyond the means of lower-income families.

The sixth and final opportunity considered here is the Folk School Movement, which involves schools led by laypersons and communities whose primary focus is on life skills and academic studies. In conjunction with meeting the requirements of the traditional curriculum, these schools respond to the characteristics and needs of the communities who co-sponsor them. Folk schools have emerged in modern times as ethnic-centered or culture-centered schools, where one example is the Children's Defense Fund. This organization champions "policies and programs that lift children out of poverty; protect them from abuse and neglect; and ensure their access to health care, quality education and a moral and spiritual foundation" (see website). Efforts such as these help to ensure that children receive the resources they need in order to not merely survive, but also grow and thrive in a protective and nurturing environment. Thus, identifying opportunities for comprehensive education and examining their practices proves useful as one seeks to purposefully engage communities in the realization of personal well-being and academic goal-achieving.

A Model from Public Health for Comprehensive Education

Programs offered by Comprehensive Education Resource Centers are informed by a public health approach to education. Through this lens, one is able to think comprehensively and relationally about education in the sense that all of the education-relevant forms of necessary capital are considered in their dialectical interactions with one another. As in modern approaches to public health, the resource center promotes the orchestrated availability and utilization of these various forms of education relevant resources in the lives of children and their families. Moreover, programming that strengthens parents and families in their capacity to advocate, encourage, and support academic and personal development of their children is of utmost importance. Facilitating environments in which parent and adult education are nurtured, family members are met and empowered as advocates, and a home environment that supports learning are made accessible helps guide one's vision as one seeks its implementation. Thus, integration of models that also see adults as learners should accompany these efforts, where promoting peer relationships and the facilitation of learning remain ongoing objectives.