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Community-Based Organizing for Educational Justice: A Case Study of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

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Community-Based Organizing for Educational Justice: A Case Study of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

An Honors Thesis Presented by Jessica Kannam
To the Department of American Studies
Advised by Professor Dana Wright

Connecticut College
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Introduction

In *Community-Based Organizing for Educational Justice: A Case Study of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative* I seek to investigate how community-based organizing groups illuminate and engage with issues of educational justice within the current climate of education reform in the United States. Although efforts to reform public education have occurred for centuries, community organizing as a method of inspiring and motivating social change within the U.S. education system is relatively new.¹ The study of community-based organizing for education reform developed into a field of study in the late 1980s and early 90s.² I explore this emerging scholarship and use it to understand how one particular organization in Boston, MA, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), creates a space for opportunities to collaborate, collectively identify, and address barriers to equitable education within the neighborhood and city in which they are situated.

Mark Warren, a scholar of community organizing and education reform, states that, “Community organizing refers to efforts that develop the active engagement of grassroots people themselves in social change, that cultivate the capacity of people to lead change efforts, and that build power to address inequalities and failure in public policy and institutions.”³ Considering this definition, organizing includes engagement of individuals who are living and working within the communities that are seeking change, which can manifest itself in a multitude of ways. While organizing and activism might typically be understood as protesting and methods of direct actions, it can also include the development of leadership and other forms of power among

¹ Kavitha Mediratta. “Outside In: Communities in Action for Education Reform”. *Theory Into Practice*. 46, no. 3 (2007). 194-204.

² Kavitha Mediratta, Seema Shah, and Sara McAlister. *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools: Strategies and Successes*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2009).

³ Mark R. Warren. “Transforming Public Education: The Need for An Educational Justice Movement”. *New England Journal of Public Policy*. 26, no. 1 (2014): 9.

grassroots individuals. This definition will serve as a guide for which to consider the various ways community organizing manifests itself within DSNI.

Community organizing for educational change is rooted in methodology and tactics from various other movements that have sought to address social issues in the United States. Saul Alinsky, an organizer who worked with poor communities in Chicago, is a prominent figure in the intersections of community development and community organizing and developed organizational tools that educational organizers use today.⁴ Additionally, the women's rights movement introduced democratic and consensus-based decision-making, and organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Black Power Movement all introduced how to present systemic and structural racism as a reality and an injustice within American society.⁵ Other movements like the LGBTQ and Anti-War movements also offered techniques and strategies to educational justice organizers.

The constituency of community-based organizing can vary. Organizing can be youth-based and led, parent-led, teacher-led, or it can be intergenerational and combine various constituency groups. Community organizing can manifest itself in community-based organizations (CBOs) that vary in organizational structure. Some organizations consist of other local institutions, while others have direct membership of students, parents, teachers, and other community members.⁶ Community-based organizations are important stakeholders to consider in understanding the scope of educational injustice and inequity in the United States.

The inequities within our education system are evident in the differences in both resource allocation and educational attainment and achievement of various student populations within the

⁴ Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools*.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

system. While discussions regarding educational inequity can often include and emphasize an “achievement gap,” some scholars have shifted the terminology and paradigm to discussing the “opportunity gap” between students of color and their white peers, as well as low-income students and more affluent students. This shift of viewpoint is correlated with examining the macro-level root causes of educational inequities, which will be further discussed in the first chapter.

Though statistics and numbers cannot fully explain the current educational landscape, these statistics offer some indication of the racial and socioeconomic gaps that exist. In a comparison of 46 industrialized countries, the U.S. ranked 42nd in providing an equitable distribution of high quality math teachers to both low income and high-income students.⁷ Additionally, districts that serve the most students of color in the United States receive about \$2000, or 15%, less per student than districts that serve the least amount of students of color.⁸ In 4th grade reading and math, White students scored an average of 26 points higher than Black students in the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress.⁹ In addition, in the 2011-2012 school year, 4% of White students enrolled received an out-of-school suspension, 6% of Hispanic students, and 15% of Black students.¹⁰ In 2012, the “National Event “dropout rate for White students was 1.6%, 6.8% for Black students, and 5.4% for Hispanic students, and dropout

⁷ Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. “Issues A-Z: Achievement Gap”. *Education Week*. July 7, 2011. Accessed March 30, 2016. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/achievement-gap/>.

⁸ "Press Release: Students Who Need the Most Continue to Get the Least." *The Education Trust*. March 25, 2015. Accessed March 30, 2016. https://edtrust.org/press_release/students-who-need-the-most-continue-to-get-the-least/.

⁹ Alan Vannerman, Linda Hamilton, Janet Baldwin Anderson, and Taslima Rahman. “Achievement Gaps: How Black and White Students in Public Schools Perform in Mathematics and Reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Statistical Analysis Report”. *Institute of Education Science: National Center for Educational Statistics*. July 2009. Accessed March 30, 2016. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2009455.pdf>.

¹⁰ National KIDS COUNT. “Children Who Have Been Suspended From School By Race” from the Department of Education (2015) Civil rights data collection: 2011-2012 discipline estimations by disability status. *KIDS COUNT Data Center: A Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation*. Accessed March 30, 2016. <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/8833-children-who-have-been-suspended-from-school-by-race?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/1/any/false/1021/10,11,9,12,1,185,13/17704,17705>

rates for African American students and Hispanic students is double the national average.^{11,12,13} In the U.S., race and class are deeply linked. Black and Latino youth are more likely than white youth to grow up high-poverty neighborhoods, and while one third of black children grow up in poverty, only about one tenth of white children grow up in poverty.¹⁴ In the following chapter, I will argue that these gaps in achievement are framed as individual problems and addressed through reform that neglects the structural reasons—like poverty and institutional racism—for why these gaps and differences exist.

Some community based organizations start participating in education-related issues in reaction to policies at the local, state, or federal level, while other organizations have experience working with other issues like health or safety, and start working on education-related issues as they see its interrelatedness with various other social issues.¹⁵ Since schools are very influenced by the communities in which they reside, community organizing around issues of educational justice is intertwined with community development initiatives.¹⁶ Community-based organizations that work towards educational justice are often independent of schools, yet create connections and develop relationships with schools and other community organizations, universities, and constituent groups as well as look to teachers groups and unions for support and collaboration.¹⁷

¹¹ Prudence L. Carter and Kevin Grant Welner. “Achievement Gaps Arise from Opportunity Gaps” in *Closing the Opportunity Gap : What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance*. (New York : Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹² Stark, Patrick, Amber M. Noel, and Joel McFarland. “Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2012 Compendium Report.” *Institute of Education Science: National Center for Educational Statistics*. June 2015. Accessed March 30, 2016. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015015.pdf>

¹³ As explained in the report cited in the previous citation, the National Event dropout rate refers to “an estimate of the percentage of both private and public high school students who left high school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or an alternative credential” (5). Additionally the report describes that “The measure provides information about the rate at which U.S. high school students are leaving school without receiving a high school credential” but is best used when measuring a particular year (5). For other forms of dropout statistics, visit the NCES website.

¹⁴ Warren, “Transforming Public Education”.

¹⁵ Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Warren, “Transforming Public Education”.

The amount of organizing groups for educational and school reform has increased in the past few decades, indicating an increased grassroots response to educational inequalities.¹⁸

Warren indicates that this increase in organizing among youth, parents, teachers, and other community institutions is evidence of an educational justice movement.¹⁹ These change efforts are not isolated incidents, but rather occurring across the country. The educational justice movement, in particular, focuses on addressing the lack of adequate education available for disenfranchised populations like students of color and low-income students, and acknowledging and framing the lack of opportunity in a structural way.

Since the current education reform landscape is dominated by a cycle of reforms that still result in huge inequities between low-income students and students of color with their white and affluent peers, it is essential to examine how constituencies are countering and pressuring for change. As will be described in more detail in the first chapter, the ways in which low-income communities of color participate and engage in change in their communities is essential to understand, since those communities are the people either deeply impacted or completely neglected from education reform policy. Castells (1983), in his investigation of grassroots action within cities mentions:

“Every day in every context, people acting individually or collectively, produce and reproduce the rules of their society, and translate them into their spatial expression and their institutional management. Because society is structured around conflicting positions which define alternative values and interests, so the production of space and cities will be, too. Urban structures will always be the expression of some institutionalized domination, the urban crisis will be the result of a challenge coming from new actors in history and society.”²⁰

¹⁸ Mark R Warren. and Karen L. Mapp. “Introduction” to *A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁹ Warren, “Transforming Public Education”.

²⁰ Castells, Manuel. *The City and the Grassroots : A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*. (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1983). Xvi.

While the use of the word “crisis” can be disputed, because organizing and the resistance that it provides to a dominant structure does not necessarily lead to violence or danger, this quote offers interesting insight into the relationship between urban spaces and the people that live within them.

The first chapter provides a conceptual framework for the following chapters. In it, I contextualize the injustices present within the educational system by examining the importance of community members in reform efforts, the power dynamics present between disenfranchised communities and policymakers, and how community organizations leverage power. I also examine the conflicting dominant, neoliberal, standard-based narrative and approach to reform and the grassroots counter narratives fostered by community-based organizations. Additionally, I highlight the unique position of community-based organizations in motivating social change within the educational justice movement. This chapter argues that the educational justice movement presents a new narrative within the educational reform debate and that community-based organizing groups, as organizations rooted in the community, inherently engage in counter-framing and democratic processes.

The second chapter, a very brief chapter, provides a critical overview of community-based organizations. In considering the non-profit industrial complex that community-based organizations function within, the reader can see the complexities of addressing issues of educational change. Furthermore, this chapter allows one to understand both the benefits and weaknesses of this particular form of social change, which provides a lens for which to more deeply examine the case study in the following two chapters. I argue that the work of social justice organizations—organizations that advocate for the rights and opportunities for

marginalized communities—is especially complicated because they function within a system of capitalism and privatization that conflicts with their missions and goals.

In the third chapter, I provide a description of the history and current affairs of the case study organization, The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI). I present an example of how educational justice work and community organizing manifests itself in an actual organization. This description chapter includes the history of the organization, as well as explains how particular initiatives within DSNI work on education issues and campaigns. Through this description I highlight the ways in which the mission, goals, and values of the organization are ingrained in DSNI and reflected in its execution of process and strategy.

The fourth and final chapter will utilize various forms of data to provide evidence on how DSNI engages in addressing educational inequity within the neighborhoods of Roxbury and northern Dorchester. In this chapter I argue that community control, democratic practices and processes, community leadership and empowerment, and an understanding of the complexities of organizing for organizational change allow for community members, residents, and staff at DSNI to engage in educational justice work.

In full, this thesis seeks to address the question of how community-based organizing groups, in low-income communities of color, address the barriers to and opportunities for equitable and quality education? I argue that the current neoliberal trend of privatization within education reform, the school practices that this reform fosters, and city policymaking do not typically include the voices of parents, teachers, students, and other community members within low-income communities or communities of color and neglects the structural causes of social inequality, and that the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, through community-based

organizing, uses various processes that enable social change and engage and acknowledge community voices as important stakeholders in the policymaking process.

This thesis truly is a culmination of my four years at Connecticut College and an expression of the interdisciplinary of both American Studies and of the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy. Community-based organizing for educational justice requires one to examine the intersection between class, race, privilege, and power. Drawing from literature and scholars of non-profit studies, urban planning, sociology and youth studies, this project investigates neoliberalism, capitalism, democracy, and other structures that exist—either in whole or in part—in the United States and how they perpetuate and challenge immense educational inequalities and inequities.

Chapter 1: A Conceptual Framework

At his nomination, the current U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, noted that education “is the civil rights issue of our generation”.²¹ This phrase exemplifies the framing of education upon which that the educational justice movement is founded. The educational justice movement has outlined the conditions that have long existed in public education as an assault to justice, and therefore in need of change.²² The injustices present in the U.S. education system—lack of funding and resources, zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline, poor teacher training and staff turnover, and culturally irrelevant curriculum to name a few—fall on low-income students and students of color more consistently than their peers. Low-income children of color bear the brunt of multiple societal inequalities, marginalized due to both their race and class. In this chapter, I provide a conceptual framework for the following chapters. First, I contextualize the injustices present within the educational system. Secondly, I examine the dominant and counter narratives present in the educational reform debate. Lastly, in this chapter, I highlight the unique position of community-based organizations in motivating social change within the educational justice movement. In this section of the chapter, I argue that community-based organizing groups, as organizations rooted in the community, inherently engage in counter-framing and democratic processes, and therefore are essential players in supporting the counter narrative that the educational justice movement presents that challenges neoliberal reform efforts.

Contextualizing Educational Injustices

As a population disproportionately undereducated by the U.S. public school system, youth of color in low-income communities have had a unique position in engaging with

²¹ Warren, “Transforming Public Education”.

²² Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools*.

educational justice and reform.²³ Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2006), scholars of social work and youth studies, offer an insightful interpretation of young people's abilities and potential role in educational reform since they are the individuals experiencing the effects of policy decisions. Youth involvement not only includes youth directed action, but also intergenerational cooperation within formal organizations.²⁴ This participation "includes efforts that address both broad systemic issues related to discrimination and poverty and also everyday experiences with unsanitary toilets and inedible food."²⁵ In this thesis I engage in the discussion of how community based organizations address the visible and more tangible inequalities in schools (like lack of resources, awful food, or dilapidated facilities) and the root causes that have led to these conditions.

The fact that community organizing provides a platform for sharing lived experiences makes it a much-needed perspective in the current field of educational justice and reform. Since people within a given community feel the impact of policies within their community, they play an important role in unmasking injustices and pushing for systematic change.²⁶ Very often, policymakers are isolated from the communities they serve, and therefore may not accurately understand specific community struggles. Levine, in his investigation of issues associated with the bureaucracy within education reform, highlighted the social and psychological distance that often exists between communities and schools, which can lead to limited communication between both parties and differing goals and missions.²⁷ One way of which to close the distance

²³ Barry Checkoway and Katie Richards-Schuster. "Youth Participation for Educational Reform in Low-Income Communities of Color". in *Beyond Resistance!: Youth Activism and Community Change*, ed. Shawn Ginwright, Pedro Noguera, and Julio Cammarota, 319-332. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid, 320.

²⁶ Warren, "Transforming Public Education".

²⁷ Daniel U. Levine. Reprinted from *Phi Beta Kappan*, (1971): 329-333. In *Transforming Urban Education* ed. Joseph Kretovcics and Edward J. Nussel. 99-108. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994).

between the two parties is to include those not typically a part the process of decision making into it.²⁸

Due to this distance and isolation, policymakers rarely apprehend the local assets present within the community that could facilitate positive change. Policy outcomes and issues are framed as naturally occurring rather than a result of faulty policy.²⁹ National accountability standards, while they might be well intentioned, often do not provide the fiscal resources or teacher support that would allow a struggling school to reach certain benchmarks. At a more local level, while educators within a school system may create certain policies, often voices of parents and children are neglected during decision-making. Emma Fuentes (2013), a scholar of urban education, studies the parent voice in her research with three independent mothers groups in African American and Latino communities in northern California. She found that the mothers in these community groups challenged the common assumption that they did not care to be involved with their children's schools, by sharing their children's experiences and the exposing the inequalities that existed in the school system.³⁰ Fuentes' work is a representation of the fact that not only are youth involved in educational justice efforts, but parents and community members are as well.

There are many multiple forms of power that different constituencies can have, and these different kinds of power can be utilized to pressure for social change. The power dynamics between communities and the institutions that have decision-making power are essential to consider when examining the impact of community-based organizations. Ralph Edwards and Charles V. Willie, comment on the power dynamics that can exist within a community, in their

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Warren, "Transforming Public Education".

³⁰ Emma Fuentes. "Political Mothering: Latina and African American Mothers in the Struggle for Educational Justice". *Anthropology & Educational Quarterly*. 44 no. 3 (2013): 304-319.

examination of both black power and white power in Boston. They use “power structure” theory to understand the city.³¹ While certain constituencies may have more resources or decision-making capabilities, Edwards and Willie challenge the idea that they have a complete monopoly of power by stating that “both dominants and subdominants possess power. The latter, for example, possess the power of the veto, or the ability to stop “business as usual” when they believe that their fundamental interests are not being well served.”³² While Edwards and Willie seem to simplify the ability of these so-called subdominants to use their democratic right to vote, assemble, and petition, their points are important to consider in examining historically disenfranchised groups of people.

Edwards and Willie also believe that their methods of examining power lessens the likelihood of oversimplified essentialist thinking that whites are dominant and therefore contain all forms of power.³³ Community-based organizing groups therefore can gain democratic power by strengthening the support of their campaigns amongst community members.³⁴ Warren (2011) states that parents in low-income communities tend to have less political clout, and therefore organizing allows for increased participation in educational reform.³⁵ Pedro Noguera’s research focuses on organizing that empowers low-income parents to participate in the decision-making process, resulting in more attention to student needs and strong partnerships between parents and schools, in a time in which schools do not often focus on including low-income communities in reform efforts.³⁶ Evans and Didlick-Davis (2012), scholars of education and grassroots

³¹ Ralph Edwards and Charles V. Willie. *Black Power/White Power in Public Education*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

³² *Ibid*, viii.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools*.

³⁵ Warren and Mapp, “Introduction” to *A Match on Dry Grass*.

³⁶ Pedro A. Noguera. “Transforming Urban Schools Through the Investment in the Social Capital of Parents” in *Social Capital and Poor Communities. A Volume in the Ford Foundation Series on Asset Building* by Susan Saegert, Phillip J. Thompson, and Mark R. Warren. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001).

organizing, examined six community-based organizations that address the school-to prison-pipeline and who built strength among their community members.³⁷ All six community organizations participated in relationship-building through meetings and interviews that identified community leaders and collected community opinions and voices.³⁸ This collection of voices offered a counter narrative to how these communities were being portrayed by the media. Additionally, students and parents in all the organizations participated in public forums, such as community meetings, thus giving them a chance to share their experiences publicly to various stakeholders and be active participants in reform efforts.³⁹ Evans and Didlick-Davis' research highlights the democratic and grassroots nature of many community-based organizations.

The power differential between low-income communities of color and other stakeholders, and the role that community organizing has within these communities, can be examined further by considering the tension between top-down policymaking and grassroots community-based organizations. While not all community-based organizations are democratic in nature, as explained earlier in the chapter, community-based organizations offer a potential space for communication between community members and building strength in numbers by networking. Community-based organizations and organizing are forms of external pressure that challenge educational institutions. Since community members feel the effects of policy, they are more likely to be invested in addressing the root causes of inequity in education, like poverty and structural racism. Warren explains:

“The traditional top-down, programmatic emphasis of school reform initiatives fails to appreciate that institutional change is always a collective processes. This approach lacks a strategy for engaging the hearts and minds of educators at the school level, for valuing their experience and

³⁷ Michael P. Evans and Celeste R. Didlick-Davis. "Organizing to End the School-to-Prison Pipeline: An Analysis of Grassroots Organizing Campaigns and Policy Solutions." *JEP: Ejournal Of Education Policy* 1. (2012). *Supplemental Index*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 3, 2015).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

understanding as part of the change process, and for bringing them together as a group committed to improvement. Meanwhile, it ignores the important roles parents and young people themselves play in school changing initiatives.”⁴⁰

Warren explains that top-down decision-making is not inclusive, and hinders the ability for institutional and sustainable change.

Collaboration between organizers and various other stakeholders is fundamental for educational change to be made.⁴¹ One theme that Evans and Didlick-Davis found in their study of community organizations was mutual accountability.⁴² The researchers discovered that often in education organizing, organizations stay involved in the implementation process of reform, since community members have knowledge and connections within the community that policymakers may not have.⁴³ This particular example highlights the collaboration and partnerships can be beneficial for communities. Rather than stakeholders viewing each other as competition, scholars, community organizations, policymakers, school administrators and parents should see how each other’s strengths and knowledge could compliment one another.

Community organizations have used their power to become driving forces in challenging national, state and local policy. Recent research provides evidence that community organizations have the power to impact social change in cities across the United States. These groups illuminate the barriers to quality resources that exist within low-income communities of color, lead to more equitable district funding techniques, and result in government initiatives that mirror the campaigns and concerns of community groups.⁴⁴ When national initiatives like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) strongly promoted teacher, student, and school accountability

⁴⁰ Mark R Warren. and Karen L. Mapp. “Conclusion” in *A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴¹ Warren and Mapp, “Introduction” in *A Match on Dry Grass*.

⁴² Evans & Didlick-Davis, “Organizing to End the School-to-Prison Pipeline”.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Michael B. Fabricant. “Organizing for Equity: Most Policymakers Have Done Little for Our Poorest Schools—Can Parents Fill the Void?”. *American Educator*. (2011): 36-47.

through high-stakes testing, community groups challenged the government to provide their communities with the resources essential to reach those national standards.⁴⁵ Policymaker accountability is essential, and requires groups to monitor the implementation of certain reforms and maintain public pressure on public officials.⁴⁶ One particular impulse within the larger educational justice movement is the school-to-prison pipeline movement. The school-to-prison pipeline movement has made significant gains in certain districts and made national news.⁴⁷ The school-to-prison pipeline is examined later in the chapter, to show how communities use counter framing to challenge negative perceptions of themselves circulated by others.

Short-term reform must be coupled with systemic and sustainable social change that addresses the root causes of the inequities within our educational system. A social movement is required in order for institutional change to occur. Yet how do community-based organizations address the deeply rooted causes of educational inequity? First, one must establish what the issues within the U.S. education system actually are. Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister (2009) found that community-organizing groups believe that urban public schools lack resources and often perform worse than suburban schools. For them, this underperformance stems not from a lack of understanding of the organizational methods that result in high-performing schools, but rather it is because of the limited decision-making power that communities have due to race, gender, and class marginalization.⁴⁸ Warren, like other scholars, sees underperformance not as a product of quality education, but of inequality within our education system.⁴⁹ He explains that schools succeed when they are well funded and therefore have access to various school

⁴⁵ Mediratta, "Outside In".

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Warren, "Transforming Public Education".

⁴⁸ Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools*.

⁴⁹ Warren, "Transforming Public Education".

materials, held accountable, incorporate the community and the culture of the children for which they are providing, and when families themselves are well-resourced.⁵⁰

That being said, it is clear that only certain schools have the ability to meet those criteria. Scholars highlight how current education reform focuses too little on the societal issues that influence schooling—such as poverty, racism, and power—and demonstrate how the current educational system actually perpetuates racial inequities. Many scholars believe that the change necessary to offer equitable education to all children requires a social movement, with large-scale societal goals. Education reform is not often framed in political terms, or analyzed for its approach to mending oppression or power inequities.⁵¹ These concepts can be explained by comparing transactional versus transformational change. While short-term policy changes are necessary and practical, they must be coupled with transformational change that pressures social norms and values.⁵²

Dominant and Counter Narratives within Education Reform

The debate of how to address the underachievement and under-resourced nature of many American schools through reform includes opposing narratives about the roots of inequity, and how that inequity should be addressed. While this chapter will not examine each of these narratives in depth, a brief overview of the landscape of education reform will offer a foundation for the following sections. The dominant narratives are ingrained and perpetuated in the policy that shapes educational reform, while the counter narratives fuel the organizing that challenges current reform efforts. *A Nation At Risk* is one example of a report that contributed to the education reform debate by disseminating a narrative of inadequacy and urgency.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

A Nation At Risk is a report that many scholars argue framed the education reform debate in the 1980s and still impacts that way that reform is discussed. Ronald Reagan appointed Terrel Howard Bell as the Secretary of Education to examine the quality of education in the United States, since he questioned the role of the federal government in education.⁵³ Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education, asking them to submit a report of their findings after eighteen months of research.⁵⁴ The report, as demonstrated in its naming, emphasized the urgency of change and described our education system as “being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.”⁵⁵ The report emphasized how this mediocrity was not only a threat to the United States’ position amongst other industrialized countries, but also a threat to the ideals of freedom and democracy that this country values so highly. The commission explained that people must be educated in order to become employed and participate and contribute to society.⁵⁶ The report cited a decline in literacy rates, poor comparisons with international competitors, and declining SAT scores as evidence that the U.S. was falling behind other countries.⁵⁷

Many scholars see *A Nation at Risk* as a turning point in education policy in the U.S. One of those scholars, Jal Mehta (2015), participates in this dialogue in arguing that the report placed the blame of mediocrity on schools rather than framing the situation as a societal problem. The report defines excellence based on standards that schools should adopt, and then defines an

⁵³ John Boyd. "A Nation at Risk." *Salem Press Encyclopedia Research Starters*, 2015. EBSCOhost (accessed December 2, 2015).

⁵⁴ National Commission on Excellence in Education. *A Nation At Risk: The imperative for educational reform: a report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education*. (Washington, D.C.: The Commission, 1983).

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

⁵⁷ Jal Mehta. “Escaping the Shadow: A Nation at Risk and It’s Far Reaching Influence”. *American Educator*. 39 no. 2. (2015). Academic OneFile. Web.

excellent society as one that has followed those particular policies.⁵⁸ This emphasis on standards supported the concept of assessment-driven reform, which we still see as a central aspect of the education reform debate today. Mehta compares two decades, the 1960s as characterized by national desegregation efforts, while the 1980s was a period in which national responsibility for education lessened.⁵⁹ While the existence of the commission and the report demonstrates a dedication to improving education in the country, the emphasis on schools as the institutions that bear the responsibility of “fixing” this crisis highlights how educational achievement became a more individualist venture.

Mehta (2015) explains how many factors contribute to the acceptance of the report, such as the timing of its release during a recession when people were searching for explanations for why other industrialized nations were improving, and during a period (i.e., post-Watergate) where people were disillusioned by other public institutions and could accept that the institution of the school was failing them as well. In addition, the focus on schools benefitted both political parties since the reports suggestions would not require attention to deep societal and institutional issues, and still championed the idea of improving education in the U.S. which was something both parties could agree on.⁶⁰ The report’s emphasis on school standards fueled a cycle of school reform with conflicting perspectives between policymakers creating the rules and school staff who are often resistance to rigid and standard-based curriculum.⁶¹ The report underscored the economic benefits of improving education, and while that is not a new argument, it gained significant traction.⁶² The media attention the report received from major U.S. newspapers

⁵⁸ National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk*.

⁵⁹ Mehta, “Escaping the Shadow”.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

exemplified this perspective, as did the hundreds of requests for the report following its release.⁶³

The emphasis on international comparisons, standardized testing, standard-based reform, and competition is reflected in other reforms from administrations following Reagan's such as GOALS 2000, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top.⁶⁴

As explained above, a dominant narrative within education reform has become an individualistic model of focusing on schools and teachers as accountable for low performance. This low performance is based on results from standardized tests, which has been endorsed by many states as an appropriate way of testing proficiency of material. Standardized tests have become the primary criteria for judging a school's success.⁶⁵ Tests are used because they are thought to be objective ways of measuring achievement and this in turn allows for accountability.⁶⁶ Neill and Medina (1989) highlight how standardized testing relies on the assumptions that intelligence can be narrowly confined, that the tests are reliable and produce similar results with multiple completions, and that they actually evaluate a student's ability to understand certain information. Additionally, Neill and Medina (1989) highlight that the disproportionately lower performance of students of color on standardized tests is a reflection of the inequities in the American public school system, and also illustrates that the test is targeted towards middle and upper class white students. These assessments not only affect decisions like school closings, but also classroom instruction and curriculum.⁶⁷ Assessments also perpetuate tracking within schools, which infringes on students learning and disproportionately limits the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Julie Hisey Maranto. "The Effect of Standardized Testing on Historical Literacy and Educational Reform in the U.S." *Academic Leadership Journal In Student Research* 3 (2015).

⁶⁵ D. M. Neill, and N. J. Medina. (1989). "Standardized Testing: Harmful to Educational Health". In *Transforming Urban Education* ed. Joseph Kretovics and Edward J. Nussel. 128-145. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

academic potential of students of color.⁶⁸ Assessments must be questioned and problematized since they dictate reform.

The individualistic mentality of reform efforts that has focused on schools rather than society can be clearly connected to the pervasiveness of neoliberal education reform. Neoliberal theory and neoliberalism has had a large impact on how government has chosen to support or neglect certain communities and public resources, and is essential to understanding the current educational reform agenda. Neoliberalism, as defined by David Harvey, is "... a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."⁶⁹ In essence, neoliberal theory supports capitalism. State intervention is appropriate when it supports the accumulation of wealth.⁷⁰ As will be described in chapter three, disinvestment of cities significantly influenced the economic landscape of Boston, and the social institutions available to communities within Boston. Since this thesis is focused on low-income communities of color, one must examine how the shift towards neoliberal policies in the 1970s affected these communities.

Neoliberal policies manifest themselves in school systems by the privatization of public schools. Management of schools by private companies and corporations, and public private partnerships are apparent in the increase in publicly funded and privately run charter schools, schools voucher, and choice programs. Those that support neoliberal policies believe that it

⁶⁸ Jeannie Oakes. (1986). "Tracking, Inequality, and the Rhetoric of Reform: Why Schools Don't Change". In *Transforming Urban Education* ed. Joseph Kretovics and Edward J. Nussel. 146-164 (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994).

⁶⁹ David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2005). 2.

⁷⁰ Pauline Lipman. "The Cultural Politics of Mixed-Income Schools and Housing: A Racialized Discourse of Displacement, Exclusion, and Control". *Anthropology & Educational Quarterly*. 40, no. 3 (2009): 215-236.

sparks innovation, increases competition, and gives schools and companies the flexibility to be creative and work within their capacities.⁷¹ Chicago is a prime case study to examine in studying neoliberalism. The Renaissance 2010 program began in 2004, in hopes of closing approximately 60 schools and opening 100 new schools, two-thirds of which would be charter or contract schools.⁷² While some school officials and families argue that Renaissance 2010 increases the agency that families have in choosing schools for their children and promotes high achievement through competition, other students, parents, organizations and unions feel that the program decreases the interaction between community and school, increases student mobility (which can potentially hinder their safety and creates a lack of consistency), increases gentrification, and disproportionately negatively affects students of color.⁷³ While schools were closing due to lack of enrollment, Lipman (2011) highlights that enrollment and redevelopment are linked, and one must consider how gentrification will decrease enrollment. Neoliberal reform has also contributed to an increase in school closings and rebranding of schools as charter or privately run, a common source of concern within the education justice movement.

Many urban education scholars are critical of neoliberal theory and how it has manifested itself within cities and resulted in the privatization of education. Pauline Lipman, a scholar of educational equity and social justice, strongly critiques neoliberal theory for placing blame on low-income communities of color for lack of academic achievement, school closings, and other community issues when many of these problems stem from neoliberal policy. She suggests that neoliberal theory must be examined through a racial lens, explaining that, “The cultural politics of race are the ideological soil for racially coded neoliberal ideology of individual responsibility

⁷¹ Pauline Lipman. "Contesting the city: neoliberal urbanism and the cultural politics of education reform in Chicago." *Discourse: Studies In The Cultural Politics Of Education* 32, no. 2 (2011): 217-234.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

and reduction of ‘dependency’ on the state.’⁷⁴ Lipman highlights how educational institutions and cities can both be examined as case studies of the effects of neoliberalism.

While educational reform has been dominated by neoliberal policies that focus on individualism and perpetuate the blaming and shaming of certain stakeholders, new scholarship, community organizers, and grassroots people have begun to present a counter narrative that emphasizes community voices and input as essential to addressing systemic and institutional problems. Not many people will argue against the idea that all children should have access to a quality education, but it is the method of which to reach that goal that is so highly contested. When considering how to address the education of disenfranchised communities, in particular low-income communities of color, the communities and the people within them are often viewed as problems that need to be fixed. The trend of education reform thus far still neglects the structural reasons for why access to quality education for all students is not a reality in the United States. In addressing issues of racial achievement gaps and dropout rates, urban students of color are viewed as problems. Checkoway and many other scholars in the field of education, as well as activists, organizations, parents, and students are increasingly flipping the common narrative, by considering young people as the solutions in addressing these systemic problems. Students have particularly important insights because they experience and are exposed to the consequences of the policies enacted.

The concept of viewing students as problems rather than solutions, is a manifestation of deficit model thinking, and deficit ideology. Paul Gorski defines deficit ideology as “A worldview that explains inequalities as resulting from moral, intellectual, and cultural

⁷⁴ Lipman, “The Cultural Politics of Mixed-Income Schools and Housing”.

deficiencies in disenfranchised communities and individuals”.⁷⁵ Rather than problematizing systems of injustice, social and economic inequalities are blamed on the behavior and actions of individuals. In addressing certain inequities within education, such as the achievement gap, deficit-model thinking and ideology ignores the root causes and systems of power like institutional racism, poverty, and capitalism.⁷⁶ On a micro-level, deficit-model thinking reinforces stereotypes that already exist in people’s minds.⁷⁷

While the “culture of poverty” and pathologizing that can occur during discussions and policymaking regarding low-income communities of color, asset-based methodology and thinking can counteract deficit-model thinking. Rather than focusing on the hardships experienced by people living in lower income urban communities of color, scholars and policymakers should see community members and the institutions that exist in the communities as necessary and critical aspects of change making. Racial discrimination and race-based policy have systematically segregated and isolated people of color within the U.S. and in conjunction with disinvestment of cities, it has resulted in spatial inequality that scholars call “geography of opportunity.”⁷⁸ Previous work on the geography of opportunity concludes that the structures that shape the geography of opportunity are racialized, that they affect students’ access to quality education and schools, and often low income communities of color are isolated from other potential opportunities like affordable housing, health care centers, and areas of high employment.⁷⁹ Terrance Green (2015), highlights how this term can be switched into “opportunity in geography,” highlighting the assets within each community. Kretzmann and

⁷⁵ P. C. Gorksi. “Countering Deficit Ideology, White Privilege, and the Well-Intentioned Cycle of Racism”. Presentation. 2010. <http://www.ywca.org/atf/cf/%7BAC4038C4-BCCA-4F24-B55C-F41063EDF6FE%7D/>. YWCA-Madison-deficit-ideology.pdf.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Terrance L. Green (2015). “Places of Inequality, Places of Possibility: Mapping “Opportunity in Geography” Across Urban School-Communities”. *Urban Rev.* 47. (2015). 717.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

McKnight (1993) coined the term “asset-based community development”, defining assets as “...gifts, skills, and capacities of individuals, associations, and institutions” that community members have that can be used to alleviate poverty and other deeply ingrained social issues.⁸⁰ In one study, Green (2015) used GIS to map poverty rates, educational attainment, and neighborhood assets—like places of worship, schools, community centers, universities, and libraries. He found a significantly larger proportion of churches in lower income areas, which is interesting to consider since many community-based organizations are faith-based and churches historically are safe spaces for communities of color.⁸¹ Additionally, the amount of assets that Green (2015) found across all his maps emphasized the resilience present in these communities; some of the institutions had been in these communities for over 50 years. While Green only seemed to track institutional assets, another community asset is the people that live within it. The power that people have to make change is significant and must be considered. In chapter three, this thesis will explore how the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative has utilized the institutional and human assets within the Dudley community.

The Educational Justice Movement and Community Based Organizing as a Counter-Frame

The educational justice movement presents a new narrative within the educational reform debate, and community-based organizing groups, as organizations rooted in the community, inherently engage in counter-framing. In discussing power, opportunity, and access within low-income communities of color, racial frames and theory must be applied. The United States is dominated by the white racial frame, characterized by Joe Feagin as a “dominant frame...that encompasses a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images,

⁸⁰ Ibid, 722.

⁸¹ Ibid.

interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate.”⁸² The white racial frame is a worldview that dominates many areas of the world, that positions white people and whiteness as superior, and therefore frames how people interpret the world around them. Various counter-frames exist that challenge the white racial frame that permeates our communities, societies, and public policy. While counter-frames were initially created for survival, they are now sources of resistance.^{83,84} One can see how community-based organizations in their engagement with the educational justice movement both engage with the oppressive nature of certain policies and challenge the pathologization of black and brown bodies that still exists today. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) is an example of an organization that disseminates a black counter-frame with campaigns for housing and employment accessibility.⁸⁵ Similar to CORE, community-based organizations challenge and pressure educational institutions to address how they perpetuate institutional racism and the white racial frame. Chapters three and four will investigate how one particular community-based organization in Boston, MA, The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, engages in counter framing.

Counter-framing is part of engaging with critical race theory. Critical race theory encourages the intersectionality between various disciplines to examine how race and racism function in the world. Stovall (2005) emphasizes that critical race theory allows for the discussion of the continuing reality of racism today, problematizes “colorblind” and civil rights

⁸² Joe R. Feagin. *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-framing*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013). 3.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Racial counter-framing has a history. David Walker, an abolitionist in Boston, articulated one of the first written accounts of counter-framing that included critique of white oppression and a countering to negative framing of African Americans. Counter-framing continued and evolved, in the 1930s Oliver Cox, a black sociologist, presented counter frames that strongly highlighted how racism in the United States is institutional (Feagin, 2013). Today, various institutions and organizations promote counter frames and engage in critical race theory.

⁸⁵ Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*.

policies, supports the voices of people of color, and questions educational reforms.⁸⁶ Earlier in the chapter, the necessity of a social movement to create change was discussed. Critical race theory supports this notion by emphasizing how racial prejudices and discrimination in education reform cannot be addressed by maintaining the status quo, but rather by questioning how certain techniques may function to further perpetuate racial divides. Emma Fuentes, in her study of various mothers groups within Latino and black communities in northern California and their role in improving education for their children, highlights how, “One of the major tenets of CRT is the centrality of experiential knowledge. It asserts that the everyday, lived experiences of marginalized communities are critical in exposing racial privilege and understanding and addressing racial inequity.”⁸⁷ In her study, she found how mothers of students of color in communities in northern California participated in counter-framing by exposing the injustices in their children’s educational access, while also challenging other community members’ negative perceptions of them.⁸⁸ The organizations of mothers collaborated with each other, participated in their children’s schools in non-traditional ways, and developed their own “safe spaces” to discuss community issues.⁸⁹ The ways in which the case study organization, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, counters negative stereotypes and creates safe spaces for community members are concepts that will be examined further in the fourth chapter.

Many scholars, activists, educators, and other educational advocates see this need for transformative change as evidence that educational justice should be framed in social movement terms. Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister (2009) cite that “Frames are abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings. Frames influence the perception of the news of the

⁸⁶ David Stovall. “A Challenge to Traditional Theory: Critical race theory, African-American community organizers, and education”. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. 26 no. 1 (2005): 95-108.

⁸⁷ Fuentes, “Political Mothering”, 309.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

audience; this form of agenda-setting not only tells what to think about an issue (agenda-setting theory), but also how to think about that issue.”⁹⁰ Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers believe that the educational reform movement has been framed around the concept of merit, deficit, and scarcity.⁹¹ These specific frameworks are especially problematic because they assume that all children have access to the same opportunities. In addition, these frameworks suggest that racial, cultural, community, or individual deficits are what cause the inequities, described earlier in the chapter as the deficit model.⁹² Oakes and Rogers, among many others, see educational justice organizing as a counter-frame, highlighting the institutional and systemic problems that result in inadequate and inequitable education. Not only is educational justice a counter-frame, but also the lived experiences of members of community organizations offer an important and essential (counter) viewpoint to current educational debates.

Organizing Against the School to Prison Pipeline: An Example of Counter-framing

The school-to-prison pipeline is a phenomenon discussed by various educational justice scholars and serves as a great example of how zero-tolerance and disciplinary policies perpetuate criminalizing narratives that disproportionately affect students of color, and how those communities affected can provide counter perspectives and solutions. The school-to-prison pipeline campaign has been and continues to be a success among educational justice oriented community-based organizations. This integral campaign has interrupted and raised awareness of the pathologization and criminalization of black and brown bodies in the United States, and how those trends trickled down into the institution of the school. The school- to-prison pipeline is a term for the funnel of students that are being sent from schools into the juvenile justice system as a result of an increase in “zero-tolerance” policies. Zero-tolerance policies are strict and

⁹⁰ Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools*, 34.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

authoritative, functioning under the idea that punishment will deter students from participating in “disruptive” behaviors. This is no surprise given that while the U.S. only contains 5% of the world population, it accounts for 25% of all the prisoners in the world, and the majority of the people in U.S. prisons are people of color.⁹³ Zero-tolerance policies in schools stem from larger efforts in the 1970s and 1980s to combat the “War on Drugs” by sentencing lower level offenders.⁹⁴ This increased policing, more often than not, streamlined citizens of color into the prison system and dramatically increased incarceration rates.⁹⁵

These widespread public policies trickled down into schools. Beginning in the 1980s and into the 2000s, federal legislation such as the Drug-Free Schools and Community Act (1989) and No Child Left Behind (2001) focused on eliminating drugs and gang activity in schools and identifying underperforming school districts through increased standardized testing methods.⁹⁶ In addition, due to school shootings in the late 1990s, heightened perceptions of threat prompted more punitive policies. While the efforts to eliminate drug and gun use and identify underperforming schools seems admirable, these policies targeted students of color and perpetuated student dropout and failure. Schools became, and still are, highly policed spaces. Violations of school policy have been extended to more minor behaviors, yet still resulted in harsh punishment. Zero-tolerance policies have removed students from their classrooms through suspension and expulsion, which has increased rates of dropout and underachievement. Additionally, some scholars state that tracking—the separating of students into different classes based on academic ability—also contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, due to the methods

⁹³ Harry Wilson. “Turning off the School-to-Prison Pipeline”. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*. 23 no. 1 (2014): 49-53. www.reclaimingjournal.com

⁹⁴ Judah Schept, Tyler Wall, and Avi Brisman. “Building, Staffing, and Insulating: An Architecture of Criminological Complicity in the School-to-Prison Pipeline”. *Social Justice*. 41 no. 4 (2015): 96-115.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

of teaching used in lower level tracks, which disproportionately consist of students of color.⁹⁷ The school-to-prison pipeline shows how zero-tolerance policies and tracking have criminalized youth, hindered their access to college, and reproduced existing inequalities between students of color and white students in the American school system.

The link between law enforcement and education are demonstrated in the increased presence of police officers, often referred to as Student Resource Officers (SROs) in schools.⁹⁸ When students are suspended or expelled, they fall behind in their schoolwork, which contributes to dropout rates. Children not in school and without a high school degree have a higher likelihood of court involvement.⁹⁹ Additionally, some students are sent to alternative schools that lack state accountability and make it more difficult for students to re-acclimate into a traditional school setting. Once in juvenile detention centers, children often do not have adequate access to lawyers or educational material.¹⁰⁰

The streamlining of students of color from school to prison stems from the pathologization of these students and their communities. Low-income communities of color are often characterized as areas of crime, filth, and hopelessness. The phrase “culture of poverty” encompasses the idea that the supposed morals and cultural differences of people in low-income communities of color are to blame for difficulties in these communities. This pathologizing of people of color not only exists at a community level, but also within schools. According to 2011-2012 federal data, Black students make up 16 percent of all students enrolled in school, yet

⁹⁷ Chauncey D. Smith "DECONSTRUCTING THE PIPELINE: EVALUATING SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE EQUAL PROTECTION CASES THROUGH A STRUCTURAL RACISM FRAMEWORK." *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 36 (2009): 1009-1049.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ "What Is the School-to-Prison Pipeline?" *American Civil Liberties Union*. Accessed December 2, 2015. <https://www.aclu.org/fact-sheet/what-school-prison-pipeline>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

consist of 31 percent of in-school arrests.¹⁰¹ Additionally, Black students are three times more likely to be suspended than white students.¹⁰² These statistics clearly demonstrates the systemic pattern of students of color moving from schools to prison, which is evidence of institutionalized racism.

On an interpersonal level, teachers and other educators, whether they realize it or not, can function with biases and racial stereotypes that pathologize students of color. Although the actions of teachers are not excusable, Beverly Daniel Tatum (1992), a researcher and professor of the psychology of racism and racial identity, explains how prejudice and racism have been prevalent in the environments in which Americans grow up and therefore contributes to the perpetuation of racial prejudices.¹⁰³ While racial stereotypes are constantly presented and circulated in the media, educational material, and policy, it does not excuse their detrimental effects. Both institutional and interpersonal racism perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline.

Evans and Didlick-Davis, in their examination of community voices within the school-to-prison pipeline issue, highlight how efforts to address the pipeline are still confined. Currently efforts include legislative reform—such as the collection of school data to assess arrests and other student-law enforcement encounters, and the requirement of advocates for children going through school disciplinary processes—and school and district level efforts.¹⁰⁴ During the authors’ examination of six community organizations, they identified three themes: counter-

¹⁰¹ Libby Nelson and Dara Lind. "The School to Prison Pipeline, Explained." *Justice Policy Institute*. Accessed December 13, 2015. <http://www.justicepolicy.org/news/8775>.

¹⁰² Matthew Lynch. "5 Facts Everyone Needs to Know About the School-to-Prison Pipeline." *Education Week*. Accessed December 13, 2015. http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/education_futures/2015/08/5_facts_everyone_needs_to_know_about_the_school-to-prison_pipeline.html.

¹⁰³ Beverley Tatum. "Talking About Race, Learning about Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom". *Harvard Educational Review*. 61, no. 1 (1992): 1-24.

¹⁰⁴ Evans and Didlick-Davis, "Organizing to End the School-to-Prison Pipeline".

discourse, dignity-based alternative policies, and mutual accountability.¹⁰⁵ These three themes connect very well to the earlier discussion of counter narratives and asset-based thinking, as well as more democratically oriented methodology for which community organizations allow.

Youth on Board, a prominent youth organizing non-profit organization in Boston, MA, works alongside the Office of Engagement at Boston Public Schools to support and advise the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC).¹⁰⁶ BSAC works on multiple campaigns, one of which is addressing the school-to-prison pipeline within Boston Public Schools. BSAC organizers met with school administrators in 2009 to express their opinions and concerns with the Code of Discipline, in an effort to make sure that the Code reflected the experiences of students.¹⁰⁷ BSAC members are also a part of Chapter 222, a coalition of various stakeholders intent on creating new legislation related to discipline and restorative justice.¹⁰⁸ This provides another example of the important work that community-based organizations and coalitions have in fostering collaboration between stakeholders and critical conversations about student experience.

The Democratic Aspects of Community-Based Organizing

When it is evident that community members have necessary and important insight into tackling the issues within our educational system, why are their opinions devalued and not included in decision-making? Why is the country stuck in a cycle of reform that has not produced large-scale change over the past fifty years? One explanation for this is the process in which policy making occurs. As has been explained earlier in the chapter, low-income communities and communities of color are systemically excluded from conversations and decision-making due to their lack of political power and top-down decision-making styles.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ “Boston Student Advisory Council Campaigns”. Youth on Board. Accessed May 3, 2016. <http://www.youthonboard.org/#!/bsac/c1duk>

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Scholars and activists increasingly emphasize the need to return to the democratic ideals upon which the United States was founded. Community-based organizations often champion democratic methodology and include various stakeholders in their decision-making. The pressure that community-based organizing groups put on policymakers, government officials, and school staff is an exercise of people's democratic rights. Critics of neoliberal policy believe that increased privatization in schools eliminates the democratic rights of individuals to participate in decision-making. Transparency is necessary and the community voice is essential if the policy changes are going to affect the communities in which they live. Lipman (2011) highlights these points in explaining that "Neoliberal urbanism is also defined by a shift from government to governance: leadership as efficient management, weak forms of democracy and public participation in civic life, decision making by public-private partnerships, and valorization of the interest of capital as synonymous with public welfare."¹⁰⁹ In summary, neoliberalism focuses on efficiency and material capital that can be detrimental to democracy processes and values.

Many scholars in reference to social movements and democratic ideals discuss the concept of participatory democracy and decision-making. Participatory democracy refers to a form of democracy that includes consensus building, collaborative decision-making, and participation from those within a movement or organization. Francesca Polletta, in her investigation of social movements throughout American history, mentions that aspect of participatory democracy is questioning what is considered legitimate authority within a movement.¹¹⁰ Polletta also highlights that when people are part of the decision-making process their solidarity with the movement is increased, and the act of engaging in dialogue about a

¹⁰⁹ Lipman, "Contesting the City", 220.

¹¹⁰ Francesca Polletta. *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

certain issue allows room for understanding others opinions.¹¹¹ The inclusion of community members, parents, youth, teachers, and other educational stakeholders in the decision making process contributes to a further commitment and potential sustainability of involvement in the issues moving forward.

Conclusion

A focus on democratic participation among stakeholders is an emerging positive counter-frame that community-based organizations participate in. The field of education has become increasingly attentive to community voices and the historical systematic neglect of them. Community-based organizations, while not perfect, offer an avenue for participatory strategy. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative will serve as a case study in the third chapter and illustrate how community based organizations offer a more participatory and inclusive methodology and challenge those in decision-making power to address the value of their voice and opinion.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Chapter 2: A Critical Look at Community-Based Organizations and Non-Profits

Since community-based organizing often collaborates with and is supported by community-based organizations, I will offer a brief overview of literature regarding the benefits and critiques of non-profit organizations. It must be acknowledged that while community-based organizations are a model that allows for a more democratic, grassroots, and bottom-up approach to decision-making and policy, it is not without faults. Understanding both the strengths and weaknesses of community-based organizations will be helpful in considering the process, success, and impact that the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative has in the next chapter.

As described in the introduction, community-based organizations vary in organizational structure and membership. Andrea Smith (2007), in her introduction to *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, explains that many social justice organizations have resorted to the 501 (c)(3) non-profit model and similar to many scholars, she critically questions the current state of social justice organizations and their future in creating social change in an increasingly private and competitive social service environment. The most common form of tax-exempt non-profit organizations are in the 501 (c)(3) Internal Revenue Service tax bracket and are registered with the United States government.¹¹² This category also gives organizations other privileges such as the ability to receive government and foundation funding that is not taxed, yet also requires organizations to follow certain rules like have a board of directors, keep documentation of board decisions, and publically share organizational information and documents.¹¹³

While the support for social justice organizations was radical and grassroots during the social movements of the 1960s and 70s, since then organizations have increasingly structured

¹¹² Eric Tang. "Non-Profits and the Autonomous Grassroots" in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

¹¹³ Ibid.

themselves using the non-profit model.¹¹⁴ Foundations emerged in the early 1900s as supporters of social issues and a method of which wealthy individuals could consolidate their money where it could not be taxed.¹¹⁵ As restrictions were made on foundations in the Tax Reform Act of 1969, foundations began giving their money to non-profits, which increased the amount of non-profit organizations.¹¹⁶ This consolidation of wealth in the private sector that is not taxed can be problematic because although many foundations are giving their money to non-profits and social service organizations, where and to whom that money goes to is decided by the foundation. This puts organizations at the will of foundations.

Social justice activists and scholars have coined the term the “non-profit industrial complex” (NPIC) to describe their skepticism of the non-profit sector. Smith (2007) describes the NPIC as serving capitalist interests characterized by the use of non-profits to subvert and de-radicalize social movements, funnel public money into private organizations, and perpetuate competition between non-profits. David Rodriguez and Ruth Wilson Gilmore deem the NPIC as serving as a “shadow state” that performs many of the social services that the government should be doing.¹¹⁷ Rodriguez, Gilmore, and other scholars highlight how non-profits should not be the drivers of social movements, but rather entities that support movements. This phenomenon can exist when the focus is on the goals and mission of the organization, rather than solely on the organizational structure and funding source.¹¹⁸

Similar to Rodriguez and Gilmore’s discussion of a “shadow state,” Schmid highlights how non-profit human service agencies have become buffers between constituents and the

¹¹⁴ Andrea Smith. “Introduction” in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

government. Non-profit organizations can become direct service providers and the role of the government in providing for its people can become blurry as non-profits become middle-men between people and their local authorities.¹¹⁹ This raises questions about the role of governments in providing services to the people of the United States, and how an increasing non-profit sector can detract from the government facilitating and implementing the services itself.

As alluded to earlier, funding is very important in the existence and sustainability of an organization, yet can detract from a non-profit organization's ability to maintain its mission and remain a radical force that pressure societal norms and institutions. Amara H. Perez, a member and leader of Sister in Action for Power in Portland, OR through her experience in a community-based organization, explains the wider issue that many organizations face in balancing the power of foundation funding and participation in the "organization market" while also maintaining their grassroots day-to-day work.¹²⁰ This "organization market" creates an atmosphere where organizations that do similar work are in competition with another for limited resources and money, rather than collaborating with one another.¹²¹ Effort that could be spent on petitioning and changing government policy is instead used to secure foundation funding.¹²² Perez explains that in her experience, their organization looks "at ways to develop an organizational culture and practice inspired more by revolutionary and holistic paradigms than corporate and business models".¹²³ Perez's viewpoint relates well to Benjamin Shepard's book *Community Projects as Social Activism: From Direct Action to Direct Service*, as it mentions in reference the non-profit industrial complex that "All too often the organizations we create emulate the systems we hope

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Amara H. Perez "Between Radical Theory and Community Praxis" by *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid, 97.

to avoid”.¹²⁴ Capitalism and the neoliberal trend towards privatization perpetuates and supports competition that makes it difficult for organizations to practices similar to those that have created the environment they are trying to change.

That being said, non-profit organizations as a whole should not be completely discounted. There are benefits to formal organizations, especially when certain precautions are taken. Shepard (2015) emphasizes the importance of social organizing in creating counter-narratives, and being an act in which people increase their social relations and make connections that results in reduced isolation.¹²⁵ This isolation of individuals, especially the poor, people of color, gay people, and other oppressed and marginalized people, increases in a capitalist and individualistic society.¹²⁶ Shepard finds that this isolation of people makes community building that much more important.¹²⁷ While he acknowledges the NPIC, he also mentions that organizing is necessary when the government refuses to address social issues, and offers clear examples of organizations—like the Black Panther Party, Housing Works, and the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power—that have supported and encouraged radical and revolutionary work while also providing direct services and functioning in an organizational model.¹²⁸

This relationship between direct service and radical social movement work relates very well to Paul Kivel’s comparison of social service work and social change work. Paul Kivel (2007)—, the co-founder of the Oakland Men’s Project, a community education center focused on the prevention of male violence—, explains in his contribution to *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* the important distinction between social service work and social change work. Social

¹²⁴ Benjamin Shepard. *Community Projects as Social Activism: From Direct Action to Direct Services*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2015). 160.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

service work refers to addressing everyday issues that exist due to institutional forces, while social change work addresses the root causes of these everyday occurrences that cause institutional problems.¹²⁹ These two types of work are not synonymous and the distinction must be made in considering how non-profits function as supporters of larger movements. The non-profit sector has come about in reaction to social issues and thus without those social issues, they would not exist. The fact that these social issues provide an industry of work can conflict the methods of which the organizations function within that industry.¹³⁰ For this reason, I will look at both how the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative addresses tangible educational issues, while also critically thinking about the root causes of those issues.

An ability to balance day-to-day work and challenge systems of oppression relates to the organizational identity of an organization. Hillel Schmid (2013) examines the identity of organizations and their ability to change. An organization's identity can fluctuate as the organization forms, loses or gains key leadership, expands, or tries to balance organizational structure and sustainability with mission and goals.¹³¹ Schmid explains that, "Organizational identity is a key intangible aspect of any institution. It affects not only how an organization defines itself, but also how strategic issues and problems, including the definition of firm capabilities and resources, are defined and resolved."¹³² Identities can change based on the environment that the organization finds itself in, and can even adopt multiple identities.¹³³ Funding can skew an organization's identity.¹³⁴ Additionally, the distinctions between for-profit and non-profit organizations have become confusing as for-profit human service organizations

¹²⁹ Paul Kivel. "Social Service or Social Change?" in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Hillel Schmid. "Nonprofit Human Services: Between Identity Blurring and Adaption to Changing Environments". *Administration in Social Work*. 37 (2013): 242-265.

¹³² Ibid, 243.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

have become increasingly prevalent.¹³⁵ The case study of DSNI will offer insight into their organization's identity, and the complex balance between values, mission, and goals, and the actual execution of those values.

While the NPIC describes a very real system of non-profit organizations that are forced to compete for funding that often compromises the initial values of the organization or supports the creation of organizations that support and encourage private social services, non-profits can and have supported social justice movements and efforts. The work of social justice organizations is especially complicated because of the nature of the system it functions within, that often counters the goals and values of those organizations. That being said, community-based organization offer important spaces for resistance and empowerment.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 3: Description of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) is a community-based organizing and planning organization located in Roxbury, MA. DSNI is known across the country as an organization that has successfully organized and empowered residents to make change in their community. Since this organization has existed for over thirty years, developed strong ties with community members as well as local and city stakeholders in the city of Boston, and executed campaigns related to other issues within their community, such as housing, DSNI offers an informative case study in further understanding how communities dedicated to social change address education-related issues. This chapter describes the ways in which educational change and education reform issues have manifested themselves and been addressed within this community-based organization. Firstly, this chapter will historicize the organization and how the process of its establishment strongly reflects values that the organization still has to this day. Secondly, this chapter examines how the Boston Promise Initiative (BPI), as part of the Promise Neighborhoods federal program, has contributed to educational change in the Dudley neighborhood. Lastly, this chapter will highlight the missions, goals, and values deeply ingrained in the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and the Boston Promise Initiative, and the effects that they have had on the process and strategy used to address educational inequity.

History of The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

The neighborhoods in Roxbury and Dorchester within DSNI's catchment area of work have changed drastically in their population over the past two centuries. In the early 19th century, Roxbury and Dorchester were neighborhoods where wealthy white families would have their country homes, yet as immigration increased, more affluent families resorted to living in the

suburbs and these neighborhoods were occupied by working-class Irish families.¹³⁶ In the early 20th century, with the industrialization in the South, many African Americans migrated to the North. The white population living in the Dudley neighborhood drastically decreased starting in 1950. In 1950, 95% of the Dudley neighborhood was white, decreasing to about 16% in 1980.¹³⁷ The black population—including African Americans, black Hispanics, and Cape Verdeans—increased from 5% in 1950 to 53% in 1970.¹³⁸ The Latino population living in the Dudley neighborhood increased in the 1960s and 70s as many Latinos got displaced from the South End of Boston during urban renewal projects in addition to an increase of immigration of people from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Guatemala to name a few.¹³⁹ Additionally, a large amount of people emigrated from Cape Verde in the 1960s and by the 1990s, Cape Verdeans made up about 25% of the population.¹⁴⁰

The movement of white populations out of cities in the mid-1900s is referred to as “white flight”. White flight was a trend in cities across the United States as a result of government policies and opportunities for white families that encouraged movement to the suburbs.¹⁴¹ The GI Bill allowed subsidized housing loans for veterans, most of which benefitted white individuals.¹⁴² Moreover, federal and local governments supported race-based housing policies that strongly impacted where people of color had the opportunity to live, which resulted in segregation.¹⁴³ The Federal Housing Authority evaluated property values and used the racial and

¹³⁶ Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar. *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood*. (Boston: South End Press, 1994).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Richard Rothstein. “The Racial Achievement Gap, Segregated Schools, and Segregated Neighborhoods: A Constitutional Insult”. *Race and Social Problems*. 7 (2015): 21-30.

ethnic composition of a neighborhood as an indicator of value.¹⁴⁴ Additionally redlining occurred throughout the country, the practice of banks and insurance institutions not giving loans to certain populations of people, or to residents in certain neighborhoods.¹⁴⁵ Racial zoning, although declared unconstitutional in 1917, continued to be legislatively practiced in various cities well into the 1960s, and urban planners consciously placed housing projects in areas of cities that were isolated or physically separated by infrastructure like highways.¹⁴⁶

Medoff and Sklar (1994), authors of *Streets of Hope*, a book describing the history of DSNI, highlight how the money and wealth in the city significantly shifted in the mid-20th century, in explaining that the per capita income was higher in the city pre-1950, but post-1950 became higher in the suburbs. As the wealth left the city, many companies and businesses also left. Manufacturing jobs significantly decreased, which left many low-income citizens of color working in service industry jobs.¹⁴⁷ The Dudley neighborhood that at one point had been thriving with local businesses soon became full with vacant lots and buildings.¹⁴⁸ Redlining is a form of disinvestment, which lenders remove themselves from neighborhoods they believe are in decline.¹⁴⁹

Between the 1960s and 80s, as certain sections of Boston were struggling economically, city officials began discussing the “urban renewal” projects to revitalize distressed areas of the city. So-called urban renewal projects would increase the taxes that the city could collect, as property values would increase.¹⁵⁰ Urban renewal projects were characterized by gentrification, in which people of color were displaced and due to discriminatory housing policies were very

¹⁴⁴ Medoff and Sklar, *Streets of Hope*.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Rothstein, “The Racial Achievement Gap”.

¹⁴⁷ Medoff and Sklar, *Streets of Hope*.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Arthur J. Naparstek and Dennis Dooley. "Countering Urban Disinvestment through Community-Building Initiatives." *Social Work* 42, no. 5 (September 1997): 506-14.

¹⁵⁰ Medoff and Sklar, *Streets of Hope*.

limited in where they could relocate.¹⁵¹ The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) was established in 1957, and as Medoff and Sklar astutely highlight, one of the major goals of the program was to have the city reflect the diversity of the state, which would require large population shifts, indicating the mindset of the BRA.¹⁵² The city had a history of clearing out racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods. The West End, the Roxbury Washington Park Renewal Project, and the South End are three examples of neighborhoods in which large numbers of low-income residents, especially those of color, were displaced.¹⁵³ Medoff and Sklar characterize the renewal project workers as “social engineers” that left community members out of decision-making, and neglected to consider the options for the residents of the homes of which they were destroying.¹⁵⁴ During these urban renewal projects in Boston, community activism increased, such as tenant groups that would advocate for the rights of residents.¹⁵⁵

As described above, and similar to the engineering of renewal programs, redlining strongly affected the makeup of various neighborhoods in Boston. Charles Finn, a researcher of mortgage lending in Boston, explains that “Banks, as an important source of capital, play a pivotal but often invisible role in determining whether a community will thrive or decline”, since they will choose which neighborhoods or people they are willing to lend or invest in.¹⁵⁶ In Boston, the ratio of white people to Hispanics and blacks offered loans was three to one.¹⁵⁷ Of the loans and mortgages that were offered to people of color, many had hidden payments that caused people to go into foreclosure, or they were rehabilitation loans that discouraged

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 25.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

investment in the area.¹⁵⁸ Due to the very low valued properties in the Dudley neighborhood, and vacant lots and buildings from foreclosure, arson became a huge issue.¹⁵⁹ Developers and residents could make more money off of burning down buildings. This arson, as well as the pre-existing vacant lots, created large amounts of space for illegal dumping of waste.¹⁶⁰ The threats or urban renewal, as well as the issues of illegal dumping and arson, led to the mobilization of community members to discuss how to combat these issues.

The beginnings of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative started when various community institutions started conducting research about their neighborhood. Roxbury Community College did a survey of residents about their feelings toward the neighborhood and community issues, and called a meeting with local organizations to discuss the results.¹⁶¹ Additionally, the Alianza Hispana, a multiservice agency in the area, began working with a professor and his students from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) on plans for urban planning in the area, reaching out to the Riley Foundation, a foundation that would soon be the primary funder and supporter of the DSNI. Director of Alianza Hispana, Nelson Merced, invited members of the Riley Foundation to the Dudley neighborhood in order for them to see the community and understand where their funds would go, and presented a detailed plan of how the potential funds could be used utilize the vacant lots in the area.¹⁶² The Riley Foundation was known for being a foundation in Boston that preferred to give to organizations that aided low-income communities and had the reputation of giving only to a few organizations, but giving very large amounts of money, as to be invested in the organizations they gave to.¹⁶³ The Riley

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Foundation also had a legacy of supporting communities of color, after supporting the desegregation of schools in Boston in the 1960s.¹⁶⁴ The Riley Foundation decided that they wanted to focus their money in Dudley; feeling like their funds could actually support real city change.¹⁶⁵ Medoff and Sklar also highlight how The Riley Foundation wanted the funding they gave to the Dudley neighborhood to allow time, space, and effort towards planning and strategy, rather than worrying about fundraising and making payments.

Medoff and Sklar's comment about the intentions of The Riley Foundation connect well to the earlier discussion in chapter two of the non-profit industrial complex and common difficulties faced by social justice non-profit organizations. The non-profit sector can foster competition between many organizations all vying for the same money to exist and provide certain social service to the communities in which they work. The Riley Foundation believed that they could have more of an impact by focusing their money on one neighborhood organization, rather than giving out many smaller grants. The fact that The Riley Foundation wanted DSNI to spend time thinking about planning and strategy demonstrates recognition of the importance of non-profits focusing on their organizational identity, mission, and values. Due to the fact that DSNI received such a large grant with flexibility to use that money how it felt fit, allowed for innovation and resident decided campaigns and social change.

Understanding the interest that The Riley Foundation had in the neighborhood, Merced and other local organizations and community leaders came together and created the Dudley Advisory Board.¹⁶⁶ The Dudley Advisory Board decided on the geographic area where the foundation funds would go, and thus created a core area and secondary area of where services

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

and efforts would be focused.¹⁶⁷ The Board held a meeting with The Riley Foundation representatives to share the concept of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative with the larger community.¹⁶⁸ While the Board had not anticipated this response, many community members voiced their concerns with the lack of resident representation on the Board.¹⁶⁹ Che Madyun, a woman who in the future would become the president of DSNI, challenged the Board and the community members present to really think about the function of community-based organizations, and the power dynamics involved in making decisions for the community. DSNI decided on community control, which resulted in the establishment of a 31-person board, 12 community member spots with 4 additional spots for residents, and equal representation of all four major ethnic/racial groups in the neighborhood—White, African American, Cape Verdean, and Latino.¹⁷⁰ The Board also included non-profit organizations from the core and secondary areas, community development organizations, businesses, religious leaders, and one city and one state official.¹⁷¹ These decisions quickly turned to action as DSNI had their first elections a month later, which resulted in a balanced Board of residents and community stakeholders with various perspectives.¹⁷² The Board also went through a lengthy process to find DSNI’s first director, Peter Medoff, a man with expertise on organizing that would help the organization get on its feet and start their first “Don’t Dump On Us” campaign.¹⁷³ This particular campaign demonstrated how organizing would become a major part of DSNI and create a legacy of an

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

organization that would address current issues as well as mobilize for long-term sustainable solutions that would address root causes to the particular problems the organization faced.¹⁷⁴

After the establishment of the Board, one of the main areas of which the organization focused was to address the massive amounts of empty lots in the neighborhood. In developing plans with the Public Facilities Department for the city of Boston, DSNI really began showing their value in and expertise at bottom-up decision-making and policymaking.¹⁷⁵ DSNI wanted to take the responsibility of creating plans for the project and presenting it to the department, so that anything executed really reflected the wants and needs of the community.¹⁷⁶ As Medoff and Sklar emphasize, DSNI demanded respect from the city.

The plan for development was centered around the idea of an “urban village”, a communal, practical, and safe space that families would feel comfortable living.¹⁷⁷ It included a nine-month process of planning, in which basic strategies for the project were established so as to keep DSNI aware and focused on what the goals of the project were. One such strategy was titled “the force” and was described as, “The objective is to introduce a new sense of pride, dignity, energy and self-help effort that would support existing efforts and mobilize untapped resources.”¹⁷⁸ After finalizing a consultant to work with on the project, Mayor Flynn endorsed the project and showed his support during the public announcement of the plan at a community gathering in the Dudley neighborhood.¹⁷⁹ This particular moment was not only important because of the positive news coverage spread around the city about the change DSNI was

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 109.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

making in their neighborhood, but also because of the recognition of power and importance that Mayor Flynn acknowledged by attending the event.

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative Today

In 1993, DSNI established a Declaration of Community Rights, in which it voiced the rights that all residents have as members of the Dudley community.¹⁸⁰ This declaration relates to the DSNI Community Values which are also stated on the website – collective resident leadership and control, linked community destiny, community political power and voice, mutual and shared responsibility and accountability, power in organized community, vibrant cultural diversity, community collaboration, fair and equal share of resources and opportunities, development without displacement, high quality of life, individual and community entitlement, and anything is possible. In the next chapter, I compare the mission and values of the organization to how it executes its campaigns and relates to members and residents.

Currently, according to 2010 Census data and the American Community Survey 2007-2011 5 Year Estimates compiled by Tufts University researcher James Jennings, approximately 24,400 people live in the Dudley Village Campus. Twelve percent of people living in the DVC are White, 57% Black or African American, 21% Some Other Race, 7 % two or more races, and 28% Latino (which is a category based on ethnicity rather than race; Latinos are included in multiple races within the above statistics).¹⁸¹ The percentage of youth in the neighborhood is large, with 30.7% of Dudley Village Campus residents ages 19 and under.¹⁸² The amount of families living in poverty in the DVC is 34.1% while the rate of poverty in Boston is 16%.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Medoff and Sklar, *Streets of Hope*.

¹⁸¹ James Jennings. “Select Profile of Poverty-Dudley Village Campus, Dudley Square, Dudley Triangle, and Grove Hall Boston, Massachusetts” Research Brief. 2014. Accessed March 15, 2016 at www.dsni.org/for-researchers/.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

In working with and supporting the residents and community partners, the organization's strategic focus splits its goals, programs, campaigns, and committees into three areas – sustainable economic development, community empowerment, and youth development and opportunity.¹⁸⁴ The sustainable economic development focus includes work and issues surrounding affordable housing and homelessness, jobs and employment, neighborhood safety, arts and culture, and food justice. This focus area includes Dudley Neighbors Inc. (DNI), which is a Community Land Trust, created in 1987 when the neighborhood was going through a process of redevelopment.¹⁸⁵ In 1988, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) approved DNI as a 121A Corporation that gave DNI the ability to claim eminent domain over the large amount of vacant lots in the area.¹⁸⁶ The land trust allows DNI to manage land with various developers and allow for affordable housing in the Dudley neighborhoods.¹⁸⁷

The Community Empowerment focus includes the Boston Promise Initiative, to be explained in more depth later in the chapter, as well as the Resident Leadership Initiative.¹⁸⁸ The Youth Development and Opportunity includes the work, programming, groups, and campaigns involving those below the age of twenty-four in the Dudley Village Campus.¹⁸⁹ This area includes parent advocacy and parenting support programs, a youth employment program, a college readiness program, DSNI Youth Organizers, among many other groups and programs.¹⁹⁰ DSNI is still governed by a Board made up of residents and other community partners, now comprised of thirty-five members. In the following section, I examine the Boston Promise Initiative and its relation to the larger organization.

¹⁸⁴ "Home." DSNI. Accessed March 20, 2016. <http://www.dsni.org/>.

¹⁸⁵ "Background." Dudley Neighbors Incorporated: The Community Land Trust. Accessed April 24, 2016 www.dudleyneighbors.org.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ "Community Empowerment" DSNI. Accessed April 24, 2016. <http://www.dsni.org/community-empowerment/>

¹⁸⁹ "Youth Opportunities & Development." DSNI. Accessed March 20, 2016. <http://www.dsni.org/youth/>.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Promise Neighborhoods and the Boston Promise Initiative

The Boston Promise Initiative sits within the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative non-profit organization, and is a part of the national Promise Neighborhoods program. Promise Neighborhoods are funded under the Fund for Improvement of Education Program (FIE) within the U.S. Department of Education.¹⁹¹ Three different entities can apply for these grants, non-profits, institutions for higher education, and Indian tribes.¹⁹² The program acknowledges the impact of the community that a school is in and strives to support communities in increasing the educational attainment for children, and ensuring adequate education and development from birth through college.¹⁹³ The Department of Education hopes to carry out this vision by identifying stakeholders who support children and their academic success, establishing and supporting schools and family and child programs in the community, assist the collaboration and sustainability of stakeholders and programs, sustain infrastructure and resources in the community, and learn about best practices through data collection and cross-neighborhood comparisons.¹⁹⁴ Promise Neighborhoods is a holistic educational policy that focuses more broadly on the community rather than just the school.¹⁹⁵ The idea of Promise Neighborhoods stems from the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), a non-profit organization that supports educational and social services in an 100-block zone in Harlem, New York.¹⁹⁶ Services in Harlem Children's Zone include afterschool programs, parenting classes, health programs, and

¹⁹¹ "Promise Neighborhoods-Purpose". U.S. Department of Education. Accessed April 1, 2016. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html>.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Jeremy R. Levine and William Julius Wilson. "Poverty, Politics, and the "Circle of Promise": Holistic Education Policy in Boston and the Challenge of Institutional Entrenchment". *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 35 no. 1 (2013): 7-24.

¹⁹⁶ Grover J. Whitehurst and Michelle Croft. "The Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Neighborhoods, and the Broader, Bolder, Approach to Education". *Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings*. Report. July 20, 2010.

tenant organizations.¹⁹⁷ Congress gave the program \$10 million for Promise Neighborhoods and over three hundred different organizations applied for the funding to make their neighborhood a Promise Neighborhoods.¹⁹⁸ The program includes two types of grants—a one-year planning grant in which organizations plan how they would support their children in growing educationally and developmentally and a three-to-five year implementation grant during which their plan is executed.¹⁹⁹

The Harlem Children’s Zone model is not without critique. Whitehurst and Croft offer different statistics and comparisons of test scores arguing that children within the Zone do not perform better than students attending other charter schools, or those who do not receive the social support package.²⁰⁰ Similarly, others question if achievement of students is actually due to the community support model, and comment on the expensive nature of such programs. These programs are often funded federally, and rely on huge amounts of money in order to function. Similar to many social service non-profit organizations, the ability to provide services can be hindered by lack of funds.

DSNI is currently three years into their five-year implementation grant, and receives over one million dollars a year.^{201,202} The grant strongly impacted the size of DSNI, making their staff and capacity much larger.²⁰³ The Promise Neighborhoods grant manifested itself in the Boston Promise Initiative (BPI). BPI sits within the community empowerment area of DSNI’s work.²⁰⁴ DSNI separates its work into three key areas, sustainable economic development, community

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ “Archived: 2012 Promise Neighborhoods FAQ.” U.S. Department of Education. April 20, 2012. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/fy12fq.html>

²⁰⁰ Whitehurst and Croft, “The Harlem Children Zone”.

²⁰¹ “Promise Neighborhoods-Awards”. U.S. Department of Education. Accessed April 1, 2016. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/awards.html>.

²⁰² Katrina Brink. Interview by author. January 14, 2016.

²⁰³ Brink, Interview.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

empowerment, and youth development and opportunity.²⁰⁵ Katrina Brink, the Education Manager at DSNI, explained that DSNI is currently going through strategic planning and trying to figure out the BPI branding, what the initiative means to the larger organization, and how it is going to continue to develop over the next few years of the grant.²⁰⁶ BPI function similarly to Dudley Neighbors, Inc., the Community Land Trust that was established in the 1980s after DSNI gained eminent domain from the city of Boston for 62 acres that are now known as the Dudley Triangle, which is its own entity but still governed by the DSNI Board.^{207,208}

Brink distinguished BPI from other Promise Neighborhoods in how DSNI uses the grant. True to the value of community control that DSNI holds very important, while DSNI is a non-profit organization that facilitates the grant similar to other cities, the focus of the grant is still to meet the needs of residents and empower the community.²⁰⁹ Some other Promise Neighborhoods are more integrated into the school district.²¹⁰ In reference to the more specific organizational impact that BPI has had on DSNI, Brink explains that DSNI focused mostly on older youth in their previous work, in their youth advisory council, the youth that sit on the DSNI Board, and youth employment and leadership development groups. BPI has given DSNI the opportunity to have programming geared towards the development of children from birth to eighth grade.²¹¹

Over the thirty years that DSNI has been in existence, there has been various work with schools and related to education. DSNI pursued the grant to become a Promise Neighborhood because education was and still is a priority amongst residents. Brink explained that with the land trust, the neighborhood can develop without the displacement of residents. Yet, a key reason for

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ "Home." DSNI.

²⁰⁹ Brink, Interview.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

why people might want to move out of the neighborhood would be for better educational opportunities for their children.²¹² DSNI went through a seven-year planning process before deciding to pursue the grant by the federal government. The implementation proposal narrative for the Boston Promise Initiative (BPI) generated by DSNI to apply for the Promise Neighborhoods grant offers a multitude of reasons for which the Dudley neighborhoods felt the community could benefit from the grant.

At the time of the proposal, the DSNI catchment area included one parochial school and ten Boston Public Schools, and two schools had recently been closed due to their poor performance.²¹³ Three of the ten existing public schools were Level 4 schools.²¹⁴ Level 4 schools are those designated as “underperforming” because of low scores in English, math and science on the MCAS exams for four years in a row, and Level 4 status prompts schools to be participating in turnaround efforts to plan how to reach state standards.²¹⁵ Additionally the proposal highlights that many of the youth in the Dudley neighborhood were associated with indicators that Boston Public Schools found correlated to poor performance among students, like being an English Language Learners (ELL), having a learning disability, or being low-income.²¹⁶ At one of the high schools in the Dudley Village Campus, Burke High School, the graduation rate for students was 34.4%, 75.9% of students were on free or reduced lunch, 20.4% were in special education, and for 38.7% of students English was not their first language. MCAS scores for the African American/Black Latino, ELL and low-income students in the Dudley Village

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. “Boston Promise Initiative Narrative Implementation Proposal”. Submitted to the Office of Innovation and Improvement, ED. July 27, 2012. Accessed January 10, 2016 at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/awards.html>.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ "Frequently Asked Questions." Executive Office of Education. Accessed April 23, 2016. <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/support-for-level-3-4-and-5-districts-and-schools/school-and-district-turnaround/level-4-districts-and-schools/frequently-asked-questions.html#B5>.

²¹⁶ DSNI, “BPI Narrative Implementation Proposal”.

Campus were lower than the average Boston district scores and lower than their middle to high income and white peers.²¹⁷ Dudley Village Campus youth also were and continue to be influenced by other factors unemployment, lack of affordable housing and accessibility to healthy food options, and increased rates of asthma, high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes than the Boston district averages.²¹⁸ These various in schools and out-of-school factors influence the children in the Dudley neighborhoods emphasize the need in the area for increased social services that DSNI wanted to provide through the Promise Neighborhoods grant.

There are many benefits to being a Promise Neighborhood. BPI receives a lot of money each year, which in the practice of community control, sub-grants out to schools and other partner organizations.²¹⁹ Another benefit of the program is the direct connect with the federal government for which the program allows. Brink discussed in her interview that while certain issues that DSNI deals with can remain fairly local, schools and education are highly impacted by district, state, and federal policies.²²⁰ Thus DSNI is in tune with the current policies influencing their neighborhood because of their network of connections and also have access to federal resources that other educational support programs might not.²²¹

These connections between Promise Neighborhoods and the federal government are also fostered by the data collection and establishment of a common language across neighborhoods. Promise has coined the term “results-based accountability” to describe how change and progress will be evaluated.²²² The grant has allowed BPI to focus on research and data collection within the neighborhood— collection that has a purpose, is ethical, and can really present findings that

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Brink, Interview.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

can be efficiently used.²²³ Data is collected in all twelve Promise Neighborhoods, and compiled and presented by researchers at the Urban Institute.²²⁴ Coupled with the data collection is the establishment of a common language to talk about outcomes. For example, all interventions are called “solutions” and various “indicators” are followed over time.

Conclusion

This previous chapter provides a historical background and current status of the organization to help guide the analysis of the organization. Next I will analyze the various data sources that I collected to understand how DSNI engages in educational reform and change.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Community Control, Democratic Practices, and Empowerment as Methods of Sustainable Change

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), similar to their work surrounding other social issues, understands the importance of integrating the community when addressing educational change. In this chapter, I analyze the processes that DSNI engages in to promote change within the Dudley community. I examine four key themes to highlight the ways in which the values and goals of the organization are reflected in the organization and its processes, and how DSNI engages in educational justice work: community control, democratic practices, community leadership and empowerment, and the complexities of community-based organizing for sustainable change.

The methodology of this thesis is a basic case study.²²⁵ The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative functioned as a case study to examine themes of democracy, counter narratives, and educational justice developed in the first chapter. This thesis does not intend to be a longitudinal case study, but rather a “snapshot” investigation of the organization. Analysis was drawn from two interviews of DSNI employees, two documentaries, direct observation at DSNI’s annual Open House, *Streets of Hope* (a book co-written by the first executive director of DSNI), meeting minutes, and online and paper organization publications. The organization website and the resources recommended on the site were used as data as well. By using these particular sources I provide analysis of how DSNI as an organization, and its affiliates—employees, other researchers, and residents—view the organization and its role in change. While many of the

²²⁵ John W. Creswell in *Research Methods: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, cites scholars Stake (1995) and Yin (2009, 2012) in defining a case study as “... a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bound by time and activity, and researchers collected detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time”. (Creswell, 2014, 43).

resources used were those recommended by the organization itself, others were individual perspectives on the organization. I examine the limitations of this case study in the conclusion.

Community Control

DSNI has established a strong sense of community control within the neighborhoods it serves by the organization's accessibility to the community, the fostering of safe spaces and sites of resistance, development of indigenous leadership, and programing among various community stakeholders. First, this community control is evident in multiple of the DSNI Community Values, which DSNI states on their website are "...beliefs or principles we hold precious. These principles are our internal guidelines for distinguishing what is right from what is wrong and what is just from what is unjust. These principles are held tightly and are not changed or swayed by external forces".²²⁶ The mere fact that DSNI highlights that these values have the ability to be co-opted by external forces demonstrates the awareness of the organization that the community's control of the values and their execution is of utmost importance and can be challenged. Particular Community Values like "Collective Resident Leadership and Control," "Mutual and Shared Responsibility and Accountability," and "Power in Organized Community," highlight the numerous aspects of how a community can maintain control over what happens in their neighborhood.²²⁷

Community control has been a value deeply ingrained in the organization since it's founding. As briefly mentioned in the last chapter, a few of the first major campaigns of DSNI in the 1980s centered around the idea of community ownership of the space that they called home, and the spaces' mistreatment by others in the city. The "Don't Dump On Us" campaign focused on eliminating the dumping of waste on vacant properties in the neighborhood and was a

²²⁶ "History." DSNI. Accessed March 13, 2016. <http://www.dsni.org/dsni-historic-timeline/>.

²²⁷ Ibid.

campaign that allowed the organization to demonstrate the organizing potential it had.²²⁸

Additionally, DSNI was the first neighborhood group in the country to win an eminent domain case to claim the plots of vacant land from the city in order to develop affordable housing and establish a land trust.²²⁹ Once DSNI had obtained the land, they were able to work with residents and other stakeholders to decide how the area would be developed on their terms.²³⁰ This will be discussed further later in the chapter.

A Village and A Campus

In the 1980s, during the process of establishing urban development plans for the neighborhood, the organization began envisioning what type of a neighborhood was desired in comparison to what existed currently. Dudley Street was not a destination of its own, and Medoff and Sklar highlight how the goal of the revitalization was to create an “urban village” in which residents would feel safe and also have accessibility to various resources and services.²³¹ The term village is an interesting choice of words, since a village implies people living in a community in which there is shared responsibility, collaboration, and a sense of unity. This tradition of fostering a cohesive community is exemplified currently by the establishment of the neighborhoods as a Dudley Village Campus (DVC).

Katrina Brink, the Education Manager at DSNI, pointed out the importance of the Dudley area being viewed as a campus. She explained that Dudley is viewed as a campus because of the idea that children are learning and developing at all times and in all places.²³² Learning is not only contained to school or the classroom, it is happening in their interaction with students and

²²⁸ *Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street*. Produced by Mark Lipman and Leah Mahan. Holding Ground Productions, 1996. DVD.

²²⁹ Medoff and Sklar. *Streets of Hope*.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Brink, Interview.

programs after school, in their homes, and in the summer.²³³ Additionally, Brink mentioned that the campus concept promotes cohesiveness, since she works to make sure that the messages that students receive about expectations are consistent in school, in the home, within the organization, and in the larger community.²³⁴

This campus cohesiveness was made evident in the way in which DSNI decided to execute their Annual Open House. DSNI demonstrated the concept of perpetual learning that Brink mentioned, in the use of interactive activities that encouraged youth to think about their future and also asked residents to answer questions as a method of collecting data. One activity asked children to think about how old they would be in 2030, and envision what they wanted to see in the Dudley community and the city of Boston by that time.²³⁵ This allowed people to think about their neighborhood not only in that moment, but also as something evolving and changing in the years to come. Additionally, this exercise potentially made children consider how they are agents in the change that occurs in their lived environment. Another display at the Open House included three stations—for jobs/careers, education, and housing—with staff or Board members stationed at each, encouraging residents to answer questions about their lived experiences in each of those areas.²³⁶ For example the education poster-board asked people to indicate how long it took people to get to school and the manner in which they got to school. This could potentially have correlated with the emphasis by the Education Committee to address issues of transportation in the community.

The accessibility of both city officials and the DSNI Team demonstrated at the Open House also contributes to the concept of a Dudley Village Campus in which collaboration

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ “2016 DSNI Open House”. Direct observation by author. January 23, 2016.

²³⁶ Ibid.

between various stakeholders is possible. Carlos Henriquez, a former City Council member, and John Barros, the Chief of Economic Development for the City of Boston and former Executive Director, both attended the Open.²³⁷ Additionally many other leaders, city officials, and policymakers were present at the event such as current Executive Director Juan Leyton, Chief of Education for the City of Boston Rahn Dorsey, City Counselor Tito Jackson, Massachusetts Representative Evandro Carvalho, a staff person from Massachusetts Senate Representative Sonia Chang-Diaz, Shelia Dillon from the Mayor's Office of Development, Boston Public Schools School Committee members Jeri Robinson and Alexandra Oliver-Davila, and the Mayor of Boston Marty Walsh.^{238, 239} The DSNI staff had nametags with their position in the organization, allowing visitors to know with whom they were talking.²⁴⁰

Additionally DSNI Village Campus supports the idea of the Dudley neighborhood as an area of unity, cohesiveness, resident participation, and power. This counters the idea that external forces are the only means to develop a community and combat social issues.

Indigenous Leadership

Since the organization's founding in 1984, residents have been engaging with DSNI in various ways. The documentary *Breaking Ground* (2012) highlights how youth that became involved in the organization at its inception continue to be involved in the organization to this day. One example is John Barros, who was involved as a young adult, and then after attending college came back to DSNI as an organizer and eventually became the Executive Director of DSNI.²⁴¹ Additionally, the documentary follows Carlos Henriquez's campaign for City Council,

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Katrina Brink. E-mail message to author. April 20, 2016.

²⁴⁰ "2016 DSNI Open House".

²⁴¹ *Gaining Ground: Building Community on Dudley Street*. Produced by Mark Lipman and Leah Mahan. Directed by Llewellyn Smith. (Harriman, NY: New Day Films, 2012). DVD.

a man who also participated in the organization as a youth. Towards the end of the documentary, as Enriquez steps down from the DSNI Board, a young man in the neighborhood is preparing to run for his spot.²⁴² This exemplifies how some young people in the organization are compelled to become leaders not only in the community but within the organization. Rather than solely relying on organizers and staff from other areas of the city or the country, major leadership positions within the organization are youth who grew up in the neighborhood. Indigenous leadership further bolsters the concept of community control, since those that are leading influential organizations, like DSNI, are people from within the neighborhood. Leadership from within the community stems from DSNI's focus on community empowerment as well as encouragement of youth participation, which will be examined later in the chapter.

Collaboration Through Programming

Collaboration between various educational stakeholders is made possible through events and programs hosted and/or facilitated by DSNI. Katrina Brink explained in her interview that one of the priorities of DSNI, established during the Education Town Hall in August, was to increase parent engagement.²⁴³ One potential consideration was to hold trainings about what effective parent councils look like.²⁴⁴ Additionally, DNSI held an event in December 2015 that celebrated engaged parents and principals. Another educational priority of DSNI's was staff diversity and cultural competency.²⁴⁵ As a result of this priority, two Education Committee members had been examining Boston Public School student and teacher data, as well as researched teaching training programs.²⁴⁶ An event titled, "So You Think You Can Teach?" was held on February 4th, that people in the neighborhood could attend and be exposed to teacher

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Brink, Interview.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

training programs used by the Boston district, as well as those run by local partners. The event also included a principal that spoke to the importance of well-trained teachers.²⁴⁷ Two additional events hosted by the Boston Promise Initiative—PromiseFest and the Nelson Chair Roundtable—have also facilitated collaboration between residents and partners, as well as between various partners themselves.²⁴⁸

The first PromiseFest was hosted at Orchard Gardens K-8 School on October 18th, 2014, and was hosted by the Boston Promise Initiative and a number of different partners that BPI works with. The event allowed the community to learn about BPI, to explore the resources available to children and youth in the neighborhood –such as afterschool programs, ways to get involved at the neighborhood schools, and information about enrollment and registration.^{249,250} It also allowed attendees to meet BPI staff as well as community partners.^{251,252} This event has become annual; the 2nd Annual PromiseFest took place on November 10th, with the theme “#StraightOuttaHighSchool: Colleges, Connections, and Careers.”²⁵³ The event included activities like the interactive data visualization in which pieces of wood from an art installation in the neighborhood had words carved into them in which youth could arrange into poems, sentences, or other expressions.²⁵⁴ Members of the data team from the DSNI youth employment program had done a survey of youth about what they thought of employment and careers, and used an application to find the most commonly used words from the survey. These were the

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Brink, Interview.

²⁴⁹ "Home- Promise Fest Boston 2014 Video." Boston Promise Initiative. Accessed April 04, 2016. <http://www.promiseboston.org/>.

²⁵⁰ Chris Conroy. "Boston Promise Initiative Kicks Off at PromiseFest 2014: RSVP Today." Boston Promise Initiative. September 24, 2014. Accessed April 04, 2016. <http://www.promiseboston.org/the-promise-blog/boston-promise-initiative-kicks-off-at-promisefest-2014-rsvp-today>.

²⁵¹ "Home-Promise Fest Boston 2014 Video".

²⁵² Conroy, "Boston Promise Initiative Kicks Off at PromiseFest 2014".

²⁵³ "Interactive Data Visualization at PromiseFest." DSNI News and Events - DSNI Blog. November 16, 2015. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://www.dsni.org/dsni-blog/2015/11/16/interactive-data-visualization-at-promisefest>.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

words that were carved into the wood.²⁵⁵ This activity incorporated many projects that DSNI was working on, thereby showing the collaboration between the various sections of the organization, and also facilitated engagement among attendees of PromiseFest.

While PromiseFest supported the collaboration between residents and community partners, the Nelson Chair Roundtable on April 9-10th, 2015 at Boston College allowed for the Boston Promise Initiative and other community partners to engage in conversations with each other. I investigated the Roundtable through online research, and the examination of the Roundtable program and post-event report. The Roundtable is hosted by the Boston College's Lynch School of Education and characterized as a "'think tank' meeting" which is "...about pursuing excellence through sharing mutual competency in an intimate professional forum."²⁵⁶ The mission of the Roundtable is to allow community program professionals to step back from their work and reflect on common issues and solutions that can be shared and supported by each other.²⁵⁷ Every year the Roundtable includes different community-based programs and in 2015, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and the Boston Promise Initiative partnered with the Lynch School of Education to host the event.²⁵⁸ The Roundtable included a variety of stakeholders in Boston such as staff from BPI and DSNI, representatives from the City of Boston, Boston Public Schools, community partners in the Dudley Village Campus, as well as those affiliated with Boston College.²⁵⁹ Additionally, Elson Nash, a representative of the U.S. Department of Education, and Michael McAfee, the Director of the Promise Neighborhoods

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ "Roundtable." Boston College Lynch School of Education. Accessed April 05, 2016. <http://www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/nelson/roundtable.html>.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Anderson J. Franklin. *2015 Nelson Chair Roundtable on Networking Community Based Programs*. Report. Accessed March 28, 2016. <http://www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/nelson/roundtable/2015Boston.html>.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Institute at PolicyLink, also attended and presented at the Roundtable.²⁶⁰ The Roundtable started its first day with goal-setting and overviews of the National Promise Neighborhoods Initiative, Boston Promise Initiative, and explanations of sub-grantees, partners, and data use within BPI.²⁶¹ The discussion of partners is particularly interesting in considering why collaboration is so important. The Roundtable report stated in its definition of a partner, that “The goal is to build social, political, and human capital” by making sure that organizations and institutions working in the Dudley Village Campus understand the populations of people they are working with, in an emphasis for “place-based community change” that occurs when partners and stakeholders functioning with common goals.²⁶²

What is social, political, and human capital and why is it important? Social capital is described by Pierre Bourdieu as “the benefits gained by individuals through the social context of community life.”²⁶³ Woolcock and Narayan define social capital as “the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively.”²⁶⁴ Woolcock and Narayan while they acknowledge the asset in having connections and relations with other people, they also mention how social capital can be used to discriminate or corrupt.²⁶⁵ Social capital as a means of economic development can be used in various forms—for example by poor populations to survive, or by middle class or wealthier populations as a means to continue to economically thrive.²⁶⁶ This concept can be applied to how social capital can be used by marginalized populations—like people of color or low-income people—as an asset in developing relationships not only as a means of survival but

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ *Nelson Chair Roundtable on Networking Community Based Programs in Partnership with Boston Promise Initiative*. Event Program. <http://www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/nelson/roundtable/2015Boston.html>.

²⁶² Franklin, Report.

²⁶³ Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister, *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools*, 2.

²⁶⁴ Michael Woolcock and Deepa Narayan. "Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy." *The World Bank Research Observer*, (2000). 225, JSTOR Journals, EBSCOhost (accessed April 26, 2016).

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

also a form of resistance. The convening and conversation between various stakeholders at the Nelson Chair Colloquium fostered dialogue and networking that allowed DSNI the space to interact with partners and allies, while also reflecting. In engaging in the development of social capital and relationships with others, it is also important to consider the power dynamic present between the two parties, and how certain relationships benefit or potentially coopt a cause. This concept relates to the history of DSNI in creating relationships with the City of Boston, while also understanding the mission and values of the residents, and the ways in which those two interact.

The second day included the Nelson Chair Colloquium, which included four speakers discussing their perspectives on the topic of cradle to career policy, and breakout sessions, in which attendees split up groups differentiated by age (e.g. Birth-5, K-8, etc.).²⁶⁷ These breakout sessions allowed already established working groups to discuss how their frameworks for change could be implemented in the DVC, or begin conversations to support the establishment of working groups between stakeholders. The High School breakout session, for example, focused on the importance and need for more data – gathered not only from schools but also parents, students, and teacher—to better inform how transitions to college and career can be made more smoothly and successfully by high school graduates.²⁶⁸ This event truly highlights the benefits of collaboration between service providers that work with similar populations but have different strengths and knowledge bases. By sharing knowledge and allowing time for cooperation and reflection, DSNI and BPI are creating a stronger community in which the perspectives of many are considered and valued. This itself highlights a more democratic and participatory method of change making and counters neoliberal and capitalist conceptions in which competition between

²⁶⁷ *Nelson Chair Roundtable*, Event Program.

²⁶⁸ Franklin, Report.

providers is thought to produce better outcomes, rather than collaboration. Additionally, this collaboration seems to be mutually beneficial. Rather than just the expectations that parents or youth are benefiting from services, the event is mutually beneficial since DSNI and partners learn more about the community in which they work and how the services and programs they provide are received by those the population they serve.

Polletta (2002) explains that Saul Alinsky, in his work *Reveille for Radicals* (1946), describes a new type of organizing in which various community institutions and people came together to voice concerns and challenge employers.²⁶⁹ This form of organizing, in which various different institutions with similar goals came together collectively for a common purpose, is paralleled in the collaboration these events facilitated. Dennis Shirley also highlights how communication and dialogue among diverse stakeholders is not only democratic, but also enables for the development of social capital among community members like parents and educators, as well as policymakers.²⁷⁰ The representation of various voices “at the table” is the essence of democracy that community-based organizations support.

Democratic Practices and Processes

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative critically thinks about the ways to engage stakeholders and facilitate grassroots participation of those in the Dudley neighborhood in decision-making, planning, and research at both the local, city, and state level. The structures established at the founding of the organization have set the precedent for how change making occurs and who is involved in that change. Additionally, similar to other professionals and organizations in education reform, DSNI questions methods and definitions of engagement. In adherence with DSNI’s Community Values, community control has been maintained not only

²⁶⁹ Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*.

²⁷⁰ Dennis Shirley. “Building Laboratories of Democracy” in *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

through democratic processes, but with how those structures allow the organization to hold the City of Boston accountable, as well as establish and maintain complex relationships and partnerships with the city.

DSNI Democratic Structures

The DSNI Board is a key part of the organization and its functioning. As explained in the last chapter, the nature of the board allows various stakeholders from the Dudley neighborhood to collaborate and participate in decision-making. DSNI also consists of many specialized committees including the Education Committee, the Sustainable & Economic Development Committee, and the Youth Committee.²⁷¹ Committee meetings are typically once a month, as well as Board meetings.²⁷² Katrina Brink, the Education Manager at DSNI, explained that the Education Committee met once a month with fifty members, thirty of which are actively engaging and attending meetings.²⁷³ The Education Committee was one way in which people could be involved in educational change in the organization.²⁷⁴ Polletta (2002) mentions in her study of democracy in relationship to two case study community-based organizations, “both groups see democracy within the group as vital to build democracy outside it.”²⁷⁵ Polletta’s comment can be applied to DSNI’s organizational structure. In creating and maintaining democratic structures within the organization, and also holding Community Values that

One particular event that Brink mentioned was the Education Town Hall that occurred on August 26, 2015. The Town Hall engaged people in discussing key education-related issues within the Dudley Village Campus and setting a list of priorities for the coming school year.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ "Home." DSNI.

²⁷² "Youth Opportunities & Development." DSNI.

²⁷³ Brink, Interview.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, 177.

²⁷⁶ Brink, Interview.

Approximately forty people attended the Town Hall, each with the opportunity to vote four times to determine how to prioritize certain themes such as safety, facilities, resources and budget, and transportation.²⁷⁷ The three themes with highest priority were hands on/real world experiences for students, family engagement and communication, and staff diversity (focusing on increasing the amount of younger teachers and teachers of color in the workforce).²⁷⁸ These priorities focused the actions that members of the Committee would take in the coming year and allowed members to see the connections and interconnectedness between various issues. Brink shares that “if you are prioritizing and bringing people together in the conversation to prioritize, it becomes easier to see which is the next issue, the next action, the next whatever, but DSNI holds that larger community vision and it needs to connect to that, like ‘why is this important’? And how is that connected to what we ultimately want”.²⁷⁹ These meetings become a space in which collaboration, conversation, and decision-making occurs. However, democratic structures and processes come with challenges which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Various different processes that DSNI has indicate that the organization is self-reflective of the decisions that it makes and how those decisions align with the principles of the organization. One aspect of the organization that highlights the democratic nature of decision-making in the organization is the planning processes that accompany decisions. Brink described that the community planning process to bring the Boston Promise Initiative to Boston and DSNI was about seven or eight years.²⁸⁰ Additionally, DSNI is going through strategic planning to figure out how the Boston Promise Initiative fits within the larger organization and how the three

²⁷⁷ “DVC Education Town Hall Notes and Themes”. Meeting Minutes. August 27, 2015. DSNI. Received from Katrina Brink on January 27, 2016.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Brink, Interview.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

areas—youth development and opportunity, sustainable economic development, and community empowerment—function in the organization.

David Swindell, a professor and scholar of the relationship between community development and non-profit organizations, speaks to the potential misleading assumption that community-based organizations are democratic.²⁸¹ Swindell (2000) examines representation within community-based organizations to evaluate who is included in representation and who is not, in response to gaps in the literature in of the evaluation of democracy. Swindell questions the ways that other scholars have viewed representation previously, highlighting that while socio-economic and demographic indicators are important, scholars must also investigate whether the social issues that the organization focuses are representative of the issues that the residents find most critical in the community.²⁸² While there are certain factors that are difficult for community-based organizations to control, organizations can create as many opportunities for “open-decision making” as possible.²⁸³ The different structures within DSNI make the potential for open-decision making possible.

Dennis Shirley coins the term “laboratory of democracy” which refers to “a site in which citizens come together around common concerns, identify strategies for engaging public servants and the private sector, and negotiate solutions which can enhance the quality of lives in their communities”.²⁸⁴ I would argue that these various DSNI structures are laboratories of democracy, in which people convene to discuss educational issues, in the hopes of developing campaigns and strategies to work towards a better community.

²⁸¹ David Swindell. “Issue Representation in Neighborhood Organizations: Questing for Democratic at the Grassroots”. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 22 no. 2 (2000): 123-137.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Shirley, “Building Laboratories of Democracy”, 283.

Polletta acknowledges in her study of participatory democracy, that this particular form of decision-making takes a lot of time and energy.²⁸⁵ That being said, democracy can also foster a more egalitarian value structure, one that favors the process that is used rather than the outcome. Efficiency is not necessarily the primary factor considered in the approach taken to make decisions. In considering the effects education reform fueled by concepts like neoliberalism and capitalism, one must ask themselves, who is that “efficiency” benefitting? The democratic structures within DSNI, while they may involve more time, demonstrate a commitment to community values like collective resident leadership and control, mutual and shared responsibility and accountability, and community collaboration.

Redefining and Rethinking Engagement

When asked about how DSNI effectively engages with community members, both employees mentioned various ways that the organization facilitated participation and indicated that engagement needed to be continually interrogated. One of the top priorities from the Education Town Hall was to address parent engagement in schools and Brink mentioned that one of the primary responsibilities of her colleague was evaluating the amount, type, and effectiveness of engagement in schools and the ways in which DSNI could support that engagement.²⁸⁶ At DSNI there are many ways that stakeholders participate in educational change. DSNI works with principal groups that brings together leaders from various school to discuss issues and concerns, the staff support the development of and sustainability of parent councils at specific schools, and the Education Committee discusses local, state, and federal education issues and policies.^{287,288} Additionally, DSNI also works with partners and sub-

²⁸⁵ Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*.

²⁸⁶ Brink, Interview.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ "Home." DSNI.

grantees, such as the Boston Plan for Excellence which is well known for its program the Boston Teacher Residency. Although Brink indicated that many in the community were hesitant for the Boston Plan for Excellence to take over two schools in their community, she explained that the Boston Teacher Residency was working hard to train and retain teachers of color in the Boston Public Schools. The Boston Promise Initiative worked with Boston Teacher Residency who created the Dudley Promise Corps (DPC), specifically individuals supporting schools in the Dudley neighborhood.²⁸⁹ Brink mentioned that DPC differed from other residencies because DPC members were required to be engaged with the community.²⁹⁰ This is evident in that one of the focus areas of DPC is community engagement, in which members “...learn about the Dudley community history, assets, and aspirations, and engage with community partners through multi-faceted experiences outside of schools”.²⁹¹

Rosselló-Cornier explained that effective engagement of DSNI with the community is supported by the fact the structure of DSNI’s Board is inherently representative of the diversity of the neighborhood and strongly represented by residents.²⁹² As an organizer, he highlighted his work that involves door knocking for specific campaigns, as well as one-on-one conversations with community members. He mentions “...you can develop flyers, but flyers are not really what moves people to come...it’s really like the one on one conversations that really motivate people, engaging people, making sure they take ownership of what’s being developed here”.²⁹³

The availability for mutual collaboration explained in an earlier section, as well as the democratic and participatory structures within DSNI, relate well to literature that critically

²⁸⁹ Brink, Interview.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ "Dudley Promise Corps." Boston Plan for Excellence. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.bpe.org/schools/promisecorps>.

²⁹² A. Bayoán Rosselló-Cornier. Interview by author. January 22, 2016.

²⁹³ Ibid.

analyzes parent involvement. Increased popularity in education reform has led to a more focused emphasis on parent involvement, which although its definition can be debated, is based on the idea that involvement increases achievement and parent-school communication, among other things.²⁹⁴ Various scholars point out that often involvement is “school-centric,” meaning that the schools define what methods of engagement can be, while many other scholars in trying to explain low-income parents low involvement, still tend to view involvement from the perspective of the school.²⁹⁵ Jackson and Remillard (2005) conducted a study to expand the traditional understanding of parent involvement among low-income African American mothers and think of parents as “intellectual resources” rather than deficits or problems in education reform efforts. In using a parent-centric model, the researchers gained valuable information that might not have otherwise been known. For example, they found that involvement in children’s learning tended to happen outside of the school context, like in the home, or public locations like the grocery store.²⁹⁶ Additionally, Jackson and Remillard (2005) found that standards-based math approaches were often confusing for parents, who expressed a lack of communication or information sharing on the schools part about changes in their children’s curriculum.

Relationships and Accountability with the City of Boston

The relationship that DSNI and the Dudley neighborhoods have with the City of Boston has changed over the years. DSNI as a community-led organizing body has allowed community members to hold the city accountable for their actions and policies. The first organizing efforts that DSNI made was the “Don’t Dump On Us” campaign that highlighted and worked to stop the illegal dumping occurring on the vacant lots in the neighborhood. Medoff and Sklar highlight

²⁹⁴ Kara Jackson and Janine Remillard. "Rethinking Parent Involvement: African American Mothers Construct Their Roles in the Mathematics Education of Their Children." *School Community Journal* 15, no. 1 (2005): 51-73.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

how this campaign was not only an effort to eliminate dumping, but to also shift the narrative that politicians and city officials, as well as others outside the community, viewed Dudley Street and the people that lived there.²⁹⁷ When Mayor Flynn unexpectedly showed up to a community meeting among residents, Medoff and Sklar also emphasize that this action was symbolic of a potentially changing relationship that DSNI would have with the city and its mayor. In various other important moments in DSNI's history, the current mayor at the time has often made an appearance.²⁹⁸ Mayor Flynn also attended the event in which DSNI revealed its development plans with DAC to revitalize the neighborhood on its own terms.²⁹⁹ During the opening of the Kroc Center, a community center administered and funded by the Salvation Army that opened in the Dudley Village Campus in 2012, there were mixed emotions about how the center would be run by the Salvation Army and the accessibility of the center to residents.³⁰⁰ Carlos Henriquez, a member of DSNI and resident who had grown up in the neighborhood, shared those concerns with Mayor Menino, who wanted to understand the feelings of residents and advocate on their behalf.³⁰¹ This public support from the Mayor of Boston was also observed this year at the DSNI Annual Open House.

At the Annual DSNI Open House, Mayor Walsh attended and spoke of personal experiences that he had with community members and DSNI staff. He described playing basketball with Carlos Henriquez and other youth and talking about need for more safe spaces for children to play.³⁰² He mentioned in his address at the Open House that upon arriving at the event, a young girl had asked him what he was going to do about homeless children, which really

²⁹⁷ Medoff and Sklar, *Streets of Hope*.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ *Gaining Ground*.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² "2016 DSNI Annual Open House".

stuck with him.³⁰³ At the Open House, city officials were not only accessible to community members, but also had the opportunity to be held accountable.³⁰⁴ Shirley emphasizes that part of creating laboratories for democracy includes spaces in which people can hold themselves accountable, as well as others accountable for their actions.³⁰⁵ He also mentioned in his speech that youth had encouraged the Mayor to come to one of their meetings, he explained that was something he was going to try to do, because he supported the youth perspective and voice.³⁰⁶ While speech does not necessarily guarantee action, the presence of the city officials and the partnerships that DSNI and the city have together indicates a growing and strengthening relationship that is beneficial for both parties.

Rosselló-Cornier expressed that the relationship that DSNI has with City Hall is different than it used to be. As a result of the community control that DSNI has managed to foster in the Dudley community, city officials now approach DSNI members and staff in considering solutions or input for certain issues. Rosselló-Cornier mentioned in reference to city hall, the Boston Redevelopment Association, and the Department of Neighborhood Development: “Like they come to us...to our meetings...the reason we can put these land, these community gardens on the land trust, is because the city is like, okay, what do you want us to do. They come to community meetings with residents”.³⁰⁷ DSNI, and the residents that make up the organization, are deemed critical actors in policymaking efforts, and the collaboration and dialogue between city officials and DSNI staff and members shows that the insight and opinions of residents matter. What Rosselló-Cornier observed also proved to be true for certain education related issues within the organization. Brink mentioned that DSNI was going to partner with a city

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Shirley, “Building Laboratories of Democracy”.

³⁰⁶ “2016 DSNI Annual Open House”.

³⁰⁷ Jackson and Remillard, “Rethinking Parent Involvement”.

council member to hold a hearing in order to strategize plans for addressing issues of transportation to school for children.³⁰⁸

Community Leadership and Empowerment

The manner in which the organization views the members of the community in which it works demonstrates the respect and value the organization has for the people and space. DSNI frames the stakeholders involved in the issues present in the neighborhood as leaders. This framing and value system reflects an asset-based and solution-based model of thinking. Brink explained this concept of community leadership clearly during her interview saying: “What I would have to say, for me, is that I have realized is, DSNI is first and foremost in my mind a leadership development organization. Any who walks in this door, you are looked at as a community leader, whether you live in this neighborhood or you just work in this neighborhood”.³⁰⁹ Brink also referenced that DSNI thinks of its principals as community leaders, demonstrating the understanding of the deep integration of schools in communities.

Community accountability, responsibility, and leadership are fostered by community empowerment. Rosselló-Cornier explained how community leadership is facilitated by DSNI staff, yet the staff recognize the importance of passing off responsibility to community members.³¹⁰ In his role as an organizer he acknowledged that while he was there to assist “if you really want to build community leadership, you have to build community members as leaders, and they should be leading the meeting”.³¹¹ One way in which DSNI develops resident leaders is through the Resident Development Institute, a set of workshops that Board members attend.³¹²

³⁰⁸ Brink, Interview.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Rosselló-Cornier, Interview.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

Florin and Wandersman (2006) discuss empowerment in relationship to the development of a sense of community. Rappaport defines empowerment as "...a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs."³¹³ Florin and Wandersman make comparisons between "empowering organizations" versus "empowered organizations." While empowering organizations affect individuals' perceptions of self and ability, empowered organizations have influence on a larger, community level and have the potential to redistribute power and decision-making within a community.³¹⁴ From the data analyzed, it seems as though DSNI is both an empowering and an empowered organization, having an impact on both individuals and on a more communal level. While it is acknowledged that some scholars consider the term empowerment to be reflective of deficit-model thinking, that is not within the scope of this project.

Youth Voice and Development

While DSNI focuses attention on development of community leadership, special efforts are made in engaging and involving youth in the decision-making and programing that DSNI provides. Brink mentioned that one of the key priorities determined at the Education Town Hall in August, which of experiential learning in schools, was taken on by the Youth Committee. By giving youth responsibility within the organization and allowing youth to participate in decision-making, through groups like the Youth Committee and DSNI Youth Organizers, DSNI fosters a sense of commitment and agency among the youth in the Dudley Village Campus. This is especially important considering that, as explained in chapter three, that schools in the DVC with students that are academically struggling, are impacted by many other out-of-school factors, and

³¹³ Paul Florin and Abraham Wandersman. "An Introduction to Citizen Participation, Voluntary Organizations, and Community Development: Insights for Empowerment Through Research." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 4 (1990): 41-54.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

may enjoy a space in which they feel they have agency and the ability to make change.

Donoghue, in her investigation of two multiethnic community-based youth organizations, found that structured ways of facilitating participation, like councils, aided youth in feeling able to engage in decision-making.³¹⁵

At the DSNI Open House, John Barros and Mayor Walsh both highlighted the importance of youth involvement in creating and pressuring from increased opportunities for their development and wellbeing.³¹⁶ Both insisted that the next mayor of Boston could have been at the event. This language relates to literature presented in the first chapter regarding viewing youth as assets and solutions in addressing education reform.

Ownership of Community

The sense of community control that DSNI and residents have over the Dudley community contributes to a sense of ownership of the space and neighborhood in which they live. Brink explained that the Boston Promise Initiative was purposely spaced in within the community empowerment focus area.³¹⁷ Empowerment of a community leads to educational change and collaboration within a community, and vice versa education contributes to children and youth adults being empowered to make change in their community.

DSNI was created because of the will of community members to actively participate in addressing social issues within the Dudley neighborhoods, to take control of the space in which they lived. Donoghue, in her research about the experience of urban youth in youth oriented community-based organizations, cites Fraser (1992) and Evans and Boyte (1992) in their

³¹⁵ Jennifer L O'Donoghue. "Taking Their Own Power': Urban Youth, Community-Based Youth Organizations, and Public Efficacy". In *Beyond Resistance!: Youth Activism and Community Change*, ed. Shawn Ginwright, Pedro Noguera, and Julio Cammarota, 229-245. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³¹⁶ "2016 DSNI Annual Open House".

³¹⁷ Brink, Interview.

concepts of “counterpublics” and “free spaces” respectively.³¹⁸ Counterpublics and free spaces are spaces and places in which marginalized people come together to collaborate, foster collective and self-identity, and take action.³¹⁹ These spaces can be placed in which people feel more comfortable and are “Located between private lives and large-scale institutions, these settings provide conceptual and physical space within which ordinary citizens can come together to engage in democratic action.”³²⁰ Donoghue explains that these free spaces can support a sense of agency among those that enter and spend time in those sites of resistance.³²¹ These sites of resistance allow for the development of counter narratives. In her research she found that community-based youth organizations not only allowed marginalized populations to gather in counterpublics, but also allowed these counterpublics to engage with other “publics” such as policymakers.³²²

Rosselló-Cornier discussed a really interesting aspect of his work at DSNI as an organizer of sustainable economic development called creative placemaking. He explains that:

“...residents that are creative forces and have talents...focusing on a specific area, so for us its Dudley, the Dudley Village Campus...and using all those talents to redevelop and create arts and culture, but not from the outside, or forces coming in, which tends to happen, right. It happens in neighborhoods all across the country, like in Brooklyn, all these artists move into Brooklyn and then the people in Brooklyn move out. So it is really focusing on the residents as creators, and not spectators of art and culture”.³²³

This quote by Rosselló-Cornier not only highlights how DSNI views those within its community as important assets, but also how the organization understands the importance of space and the relationship that residents have with where they live. Creative placemaking is reframing the way

³¹⁸ O’Donoghue, “Taking Their Own Power”.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Rosselló-Cornier, Interview.

that certain communities are conceptualized. Rosselló-Cornier also highlighted how creative placemaking was being facilitated by the Boston Promise Initiative in which DSNI hired six artists.³²⁴ These artists worked and lived in the community for sixteen months and facilitated the creation of art within the neighborhood.³²⁵ One of those artists, Nancy Guevara, worked specifically within education related projects, including a mural that she worked on with students from Burke High School.³²⁶

The ownership that residents have for their community in part seems to be related to the self-reflection on behalf of DSNI staff, as well as an understanding by staff members of their positionality. Both DSNI employees interviewed understood the different roles they occupy. Rosselló-Cornier mentioned how he used to be a resident of the neighborhood as well as an employee, but when he moved to another neighborhood he understood how his stake in particular matters changed. He also mentioned that as an organizer he would sometimes have to remind himself “...I have to take a step back and say, I actually don’t have a vote in this, I am just a facilitator.”³²⁷ When asked about some of the most rewarding parts of the work that she does, Brink explained her appreciation for the ability for residents to hold staff accountable. She explained “You are constantly getting a lot of feedback from a lot of people about how you are or are not doing a good job. And that is very rewarding in a lot of ways. That opportunity to be having a dialogue about that is really powerful. And it also keeps you connected to that vision, and that work.”³²⁸

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Brink, Interview.

Complexities of Organizing for Sustainable Change

The first chapter highlighted how the educational justice movement offered a counter narrative to the dominant idea of assessment-based accountability and the focus on schools and teachers, rather than larger societal issues that perpetuate inequities in schools. In considering the processes that community-based organizations take in engaging with schools and local, state, and national policies, while also engaging in organizing efforts with their community members, DSNI offers an interesting case study in how organizations must balance short term needs, and also address the larger and longer term issues that influence the neighborhoods they exist within. From speaking with Katrina Brink and Bayoán Rosselló-Cornier, DSNI manages to engage in system-level work by collaborating with partners and community members, and staying true to the organization's mission and values.

The committee meetings are one way in which parents and other stakeholders can connect and communicate with one another. Brink mentioned that sometimes people like being able to talk about education issues in spaces other than the school itself and will come to Education Committee meetings with concerns and, “Almost all the time, over time, they will come together with other parents that are experiencing the same thing, or experiencing something different, and they start to see systemic issues.”³²⁹ In this case, interacting with other community members allows for the understanding of issues on a larger scale and potentially also a sense of camaraderie knowing that one's concerns are also felt by others. Brink explains that supporting the community voice and helping community members support other community members in participating in social change is how DSNI engages in systemic change.³³⁰ Similarly,

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

Rosselló-Cornier says that as a resident-led organization every action comes back to the mission.³³¹

That being said, both expressed the difficulties that come both with organizations that are resident-led and democratic, as well as the balancing of priorities that comes with working in social justice organizations. Brink mentioned that while everyone has their own story, which is very valuable and important, at the same time decisions are being made for the larger community.³³² She explains that “...what is best for your child or for you in this community isn’t always what you believe what’s best for the whole community” and navigating that can be difficult.³³³ Additionally, Brink highlights that within the field of education and policymaking, there are constantly things to which DSNI must react like immediate needs in the schools or activity surrounding a particular policy change that might detract from more sustainable efforts.³³⁴ Additionally, although DSNI has established a sense of community control in the neighborhood, not all community members agree with one another. Part of maintaining democratic representation and participation is accepting the various perspectives and finding ways to compromise and find solutions.

³³¹ Rosselló-Cornier, Interview.

³³² Brink, Interview.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

In my thesis, I sought to explore how community-based organizing groups engage in education reform efforts within historically neglected and disenfranchised communities. A review of the literature highlights how grassroots organizing within communities allowed a more democratic space for people to share and voice their experiences and concerns, and present a counter narrative to the assessment-driven and increasingly privatized reform efforts. To further explore these claims, the final two chapters of the thesis included a case study of a community organizing and planning organization in Boston, MA, The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. This case study offered insight into how educational change takes form within an actual organization. From conducting two interviews, attending DSNI's Annual Open House and an Education Committee meeting, and compiling archival data, the researcher examined the ways in which community control of the neighborhood was fostered through collaborative events and programming, indigenous leadership and the promotion of unity. Additionally, I found that residents and other community stakeholders participated in democratic practices facilitated by organizational structure, critically thought about engagement, and that the organization partnered with and held the City of Boston accountable. Through community leadership and empowerment, I saw that DSNI encouraged the idea that community members were assets in social change efforts. Finally, in examining the organization, it became clear the balance that organizations must have in addressing current campaigns and issues within the community, as well as staying true to organizational values and addressing the more deeply rooted and systemic causes of the challenges faced within the neighborhood.

This project acknowledges the deep educational inequities that still exists in the U.S., and explores the ways in which educational organizing within marginalized communities addresses these inequities. Community organizing was a logical route to explore this phenomena, as it

included grassroots participation of communities in actively working against injustice and for more socially just communities. In completing this thesis, it became clearer that community organizing work allows for a more democratic method of change—since it involved many different people, organizations, and institutions to engage in the conversation and decision-making. The case study also offered insight into how development of community control and leadership can allow a neighborhood to recreate not only the way in which the residents view the space in which they live, but also how others view that space. Organizing allows areas that have been historically neglected by the government to become sites of resistance.

This thesis has also functioned as my Senior Integrative Project as a scholar of the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy. This research in community-based organizing and the investigation of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative has potential implications on public policy and the work of community based organizations, especially for policymakers and organizations that work with and support communities similar to those within the Dudley Village Campus. Policymakers should strongly consider incorporating a variety of stakeholders into the decision making process. An examination of who has “seat at the table” and the ability to voice their opinion, may shed light on whose interests are being addressed and met, and expose representation of various parties, or the lack thereof. Additionally, in an effort to create sustainable and effective policy, policymakers may want to consider rethinking and innovating new ways for people to engage in education reform and change. The processes that are traditionally used to involve parents and communities in school and education reform can be expanded upon or completely rethought. In communicating with community members, non-profits, faith-based organizations, businesses, and others, policymakers may more clearly

understand the local assets within the community, and more effectively use those assets for sustainable policy.

There are limitations to this research project. Given the nine-month time frame of this project, I gathered and collected as much data as I could. A longer time frame would have allowed for a deeper relationship with DSNI, and potentially more opportunities for interviews and direct observation. This additional data might have offered a more holistic view of the organization. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that I primarily used organizational materials and data that the organization publicized itself, and in doing so was examining the narrative that DSNI creates and disseminates for itself. Further research could examine how those outside the organization view its work. I also chose to focus on the process of which DSNI does educational work, and less on the measurable outcomes or educational improvements that result from their work. This could be an avenue for additional research.

This project may have implications for community-based organizations as well. In studying CBOs it became clear the importance of maintaining a sense of representation of the community of which the organization is serving. DSNI's Board with designated spots for residents made resident participation a permanent commitment and structure. Certain programs or structures that allow community members to hold the organization itself accountable can facilitate the reflection and evaluation of if the missions and values of the organization are demonstrates and reflected in the actions the organization takes. Within DSNI, lengthy strategic planning processes and accessibility of staff allowed for both reflection and accountability, methods that other community-based organizations could consider in order to keep their mission and values in check. Although I observed that residents are extremely important and central to

the work of DSNI, the organization also works to engage other community stakeholders and partners to facilitate and encourage collaboration and collective work towards common goals.

It has become evident in completing this project the immense importance of processes that allow all the stakeholders involved in education reform the ability to discuss, theorize, and strategize how to tackle issues facing disenfranchised communities. While I have spent my years at Connecticut College grappling with how systemic injustices within our education system can and should be addressed, and now I more fully understand the immense power of people in demanding rights and opportunities they deserve.

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