

**Grassroots Organizing, Social Movements, and the
Right to High-Quality Education**

**Jeannie Oakes, John Rogers, Gary Blasi, & Martin Lipton
UCLA**

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- In Texas, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)—with roots in Saul Alinsky’s 1930s organizing in Chicago’s poor neighborhoods—led local congregations in organizing low-income parents to fight for better schools. Through mobilizing and direct action, the IAF forged reform “alliances” between activist parents, clergy, and educators and won new state funding for these “alliance” schools.¹
- In New York and Philadelphia, ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) led a coalition of activist groups that defeated officials’ plans to turn over so-called “failing” schools in black, Latino, and immigrant neighborhoods to the for-profit education management organization, Edison Schools.²
- In Los Angeles, 30 grassroots and advocacy groups (some of which were ad hoc groups that emerged to fight against Ward Connerly’s Proposition 209 that ended affirmative action in California, and retained their activist identity after their defeat) campaigned together successfully for a school district policy to give all high school students a college preparatory curriculum.³
- In Boston, Chicago, Miami, Oakland, Sacramento, and elsewhere, activist community members, including those without a previous position of power in the political economy, are organizing outside the education system to build and use power to “win” better schools for the nation’s least powerful communities.⁴

¹ Dennis Shirley, *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997; Dennis Shirley, *Valley Interfaith and School Reform: Organizing for Power in South Texas* (1st ed.). Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002; Mark R. Warren, *Dry bones rattling: Community building to revitalize American democracy* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.

² “Broad Coalition in Philadelphia Fights State Takeover,” *Education Organizing*, Newsletter of the Center for Community Change, Issue 8 • Spring 2002, online at <http://communitychange.org/issues/education/publications/downloads/edorg8.pdf>.

³ Jeannie Oakes and John S. Rogers, J, *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Justice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2006.

⁴ Case studies of such efforts can be found in *From Schoolhouse to Statehouse Community Organizing For Public School Reform*. New York: National Center For Schools And Communities, Fordham University, 2002, online at <http://www.ncscatfordham.org/binarydata/files/schoolhousetostatehouse.pdf>; Kavietha Mediratta and Norm Fruchter *Mapping the field of organizing for school improvement: A report on education organizing in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, the Mississippi Delta, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington D.C.* New York: Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University; California Tomorrow;

In light of these and other examples of successful grassroots organizing for high-quality education, this paper addresses four questions regarding a broader effort to secure a fundamental right to high-quality education: Will securing a right to high quality education require a social movement? What could a social movement add to the conventional reform strategies of lawyers, policy elites and professional educators? What role might current grassroots organizing around education, such as that described above, play in such movement? Under what conditions might such grassroots activity lead to a social movement for a right to high-quality education?

For answers, we turn to social science scholarship on education reform, community organizing, and social movements, and to legal scholarship on the impact of social movements on law and policy. We also bring to bear our own experience over the past five years working with organizations and studying education organizing in California.

We conclude that establishing education as a fundamental right requires social movement activism, and that such social movement activism already exists in incipient form. Grassroots groups have laid the groundwork for significant changes in educational policy by building power among those most affected by inadequate and unequal education and by providing new sites of public deliberation about the role of public education in American democracy.

We also conclude, however, that, on their own, organized and activist low-income communities are unlikely to bring about the broad based cultural and political shifts necessary for establishing the right to a high quality education. Likewise, legal victories are often implemented with little fidelity or not implemented at all unless they are broadly supported by public norms. Individually, then, legal efforts and grassroots organizing are necessary but not sufficient to achieve the social shifts necessary to sustain high quality and equitable schooling. Together, law and organizing must simultaneously appeal to and create a public whose support is predicated on the unshakable belief that all children can be, deserve to be, and by law, *must* be well educated. Such “broad” support must include middle class participants. This paper is mindful of the necessary alignment of norms, power, and law that constitute the coalescing of public thinking and support that we are calling a “social movement.”

We end the paper with the implications of our analysis for lawyers, policy advocates, educators, and organizers seeking to make high-quality education a fundamental right.

Will Securing the Right to Education Require a Social Movement?

The first challenge to establishing high-quality education as a fundamental right is to demonstrate convincingly that grievous wrongs are perpetrated in the absence of such

Designs for Change; Southern Echo, 2001, online at http://www.nyu.edu/iesp/publications/cip/mapping/mapping_final_report.pdf.

a right. This knowledge, obvious to many who study or experience school inadequacy and inequality, is not widespread. Although data on students' unequal opportunities to learn, schools' inadequate resources for teaching, and other schooling equity and quality indicators can be marshaled effectively, making data on schooling conditions *available* does not mean that they will be widely known. Further, prevailing norms and ideologies severely constrain how people *make sense* of these data.

Year after year, education polls find a majority of parents to be satisfied with the schools in their community, even those in the most educationally disadvantaged communities. In 2005, 69 percent of parents gave the school their own child attends an A or B grade.⁵ Latinos, whose children often attend low-performing, under-resourced schools, are among those most supportive.⁶ Thus, those who stand most to gain from establishing the right to high quality education are insufficiently aware or insufficiently outraged about the denial of high-quality education they currently experience.

At the same time, many middle class people often see or define their children's education quality relative to the other (often limited) instantiations of quality with which they are familiar. Parents may be adamant about their child being assigned to the "best" teacher or best school without regard to that teacher's qualifications or the school's actual quality. Parents may feel secure in sending their child to the community's "award winning" school even if that school is, compared to schools in other states, woefully understaffed, lacking resources, and low-performing.⁷ As long as this is the case, the middle class that is so necessary for providing the critical numbers and authority for broad social and schooling change is both unavailable to bolster a social movement and consigned to acting against its own interests in its pursuit of maintaining relative advantage.

Powerful Cultural Logics Sustain the Status Quo. At least three powerful cultural "logics" shape how people make sense of the schooling that society provides to various groups of students: the logic of *scarcity*; the logic of *merit*; and the logic of *deficits*. The first assumes that our society can afford only limited investments in public life and public education. Hence, the supply of "quality" schooling cannot keep pace with increased demands for more and better education that is needed for good jobs and middle class lives. The second assumes that young people compete for scarce schooling advantages

⁵ *The 37th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, online at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0509pol.htm#4>.

⁶ Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, *National Survey of Latinos: Education*, 2004, online at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/25.2.pdf>. See also, Los Angeles Alliance for Student Achievement, *Survey of Parents of Children Attending School Within the Los Angeles Unified School District*, Los Angeles: Fleishman-Hillard Research, 2001.

⁷ California state data, for example, show that nearly all California schools have serious infrastructure problem (too few teachers and counselors, for example) compared to the national average. These problems reflect the state's low-level of education spending. See John Rogers, Veronica Terriquez, Sio Valaderez, and Jeannie Oakes, *Educational Opportunity Report 2006: Roadblocks to College*, online at www.EdOpp.org.

with their talents and effort in a context of equal opportunity, and are rewarded with educational opportunities commensurate with the degree to which they deserve them. The third presumes that low-income children, children of color, and their families are limited by cultural, situational, and individual deficits that schools cannot alter. That these children get fewer education and social advantages is a result of these deficits and not of structures within the educational system. Together, these three narratives make it difficult for Americans to see that inequality is the result of flawed policies and structures rather than attributes that adhere to individual children and their families. In other words, limited opportunities, educational “winners” and “losers,” and unalterable deficits all *make sense* and seem *normal* to people across political and socioeconomic spectra. Consequently, Americans have established a very low “floor” of basic education. Americans see the promise of equal educational opportunity (including the opportunity to rise above the “floor”) in much the same way that they view the guarantee that all Americans are allowed to compete for wealth or good jobs. It is no more sensible to most Americans that all students, at least in the short term, will actually obtain (or deserve) a high quality education, than they will all obtain a middle class lifestyle.

Most reforms—including those ordered by courts—fail to anticipate Americans’ deep attachments to the logics of scarcity, merit, and deficits. Instead, many reformers assume that providing a lesser education to some children—poor children of color, in particular—is at odds with basic American values.⁸ This misreading of the culture is understandable. Americans do agree on certain highly abstracted and universally sound principles (e.g., “leave no child behind”), but these broad principles can mask the need to examine underlying values. As a result, inadequacies in American education are attributed to various policy, pedagogical, or “cultural” anomalies that lend themselves to technical fixes; for example, more knowledge about best practices, more appropriate incentives and sanctions, and so forth. Yet, the logics of scarcity, merit, and deficits are *normative*, not *technical* impediments to high quality and equitable education.

We see this technical emphasis (and ignoring of the normative logics and beliefs) in reforms that originate from “experts” within the education system (e.g., comprehensive school reform packages), from policymakers (e.g., rules and practices prescribed under NCLB), and from judges (e.g., requiring student assignment plans or funding formulas).⁹ The struggles over the past three decades reveal a failure of faithful implementation and enforcement of such policies, even when they result from court orders. Schools remain racially segregated and plagued by racial inequalities—in funding, in access to decent school facilities, qualified teachers, culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum, college preparatory programs, and more. In the abstract, *improving* education is a desirable pursuit, but improvement efforts are mightily resisted if they threaten the logics of schooling— which is to say, if they alter the current hierarchy of school achievement that parallels parents’ wealth and power.

⁸ Jennifer Hochschild, *The New American Dilemma*. New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 1984.

⁹ Jeannie Oakes, Kevin Welner, Susan Yonezawa, and Rick L. Allen, “Norms and Politics of Equity-minded Change: Researching the “Zone of Mediation””. In Andy Hargreaves, Ann Lieberman, Michael Fullan & David W. Hopkins (Eds.), *International Handbook of Educational Change*. London: Kluwer, 1998, pp. 952-975.

In sum, the failure of conventional reforms has not come from the technical challenges, but from the cultural and political resistance such efforts face.¹⁰ All change requires power,¹¹ and the amount of power required is proportional to the degree of resistance the change engenders. Providing high quality education to all children, by virtue of their having a right to such an education is a big change that requires big power.

Securing a Right to High-Quality Education Requires Disrupting Prevailing Logics. Broadening the distribution of educational opportunity requires reformers to anticipate resistance that accompanies rearrangements of the power that benefits entrenched interests. For example, education reforms that redistribute resources (such as fiscal equalization reforms) are typically rejected as unfair “Robin Hood” policies that take from the rich in order to provide for the poor. Even though equalization proposals rarely reduce the material or non-material opportunities of more advantaged students, there is no hiding the reform goal of *relative* redistribution of schooling resources and status. So long as the logics of scarcity, merit, and deficits prevail, it seems inevitable that many will experience equity reform as a *loss* if low-income students and students of color gain the opportunities and life outcomes that are currently held by white higher income students,

Equal access to opportunity, especially in the context of scarcity, threatens the tenuous status of the privileged.¹² What may at first appear as a contradiction (tenuous status of the privileged), is a deepening reality or threat felt by many middle class and wealthier families. And, since those currently advantaged nearly always have disproportionate political influence over the conduct of schools—including school change efforts—the specifics, if not the abstraction, of equity-focused change are resisted by those with the power to halt them. To be sure, technical changes in the rules, structures, and practices of schooling will be necessary. But the heart of the struggle will be to expose, challenge, and disrupt prevailing norms and politics of education, and, inevitably, of the larger society from which they emanate.

For example, the conditions revealed in cases such as *Williams v State of California* attest to the fact that qualified teachers and inadequate space cannot be blamed on the overall limited resources in a state with one of the highest per capita income rates

¹⁰ Michael A. Rebell and Robert L. Hughes, “Schools, Communities, and the Courts: A Dialogic Approach to Education Reform,” *Yale Law and Policy Review*, 14, 1996; Oakes and Rogers, *Learning Power*, 2006; Seymour Sarason, *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform: Can We Change Course Before it is Too Late?* San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1990.

¹¹ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, Macmillan, New York, 1990

¹² In California, for example, middle class public schools, far from enclaves of educational privilege in a low-spending state, do enjoy clear advantages in terms of qualified teachers and counselors and rigorous curriculum offerings. For details, see *California Education Opportunity Report*. Los Angeles: Institute for Democracy, Education and Access, 2006.

in the nation.¹³ California and other states have made a political decision *not* to expand the seats in higher education in response to the increased demand for and worth of a college education. California's higher education system can no longer accommodate all students from middle class families with an interest in higher education, let alone all students from poor and working class families. By allowing college access to become a game of musical chairs, California's policy choices have raised the stakes for gaining the highest quality learning opportunities. Because middle class constituents will be affected by challenges to the status quo, they will play a large role sustaining or changing prevailing norms.

We believe that reformers grassroots and elites alike must pay greater attention to shifting the norms of scarcity, merit, and deficit in order to permit an alliance between poor parents and middle class parents. This alliance can take the shape of an affirmative campaign that asserts counter narratives to the prevailing logics: rather than being scarce, educational opportunities can be plentiful; rather than needing to merit or *deserve* opportunities, all students are entitled to a high quality education; and rather than deficits, students' "background characteristics" of race, family income, parents' educational attainment, disability, and so forth represent information that educators must take into account when determining resource needs. It is also likely that such a profound change will demand recognition that the quality of education is inextricably tied to the overall quality of life for children and their families—that educating children well requires that they have decent health care and housing, income security, public safety, and environmental protections. That, in turn, would require alliances between educational reformers and other advocates for children's welfare and social democracy. Such broad alliances and cultural shifts are rarely the goal of policymakers, including the courts, or the result of conventional politics and professional reform efforts. Accomplishing them is a far more complex cultural and political undertaking than "experts" such as educators and lawyers assume or have the tools to accomplish. This is where social movements come in.

What Can a Movement Add to Conventional Reform?

Social movements focused on expanding opportunities and public participation—such as the Civil Rights, feminist, and labor movements—help us envision the possibility of a movement for "education equity and quality" to ensure education as a guaranteed and protected fundamental right.¹⁴ Following this tradition, a social movement for high

¹³ *Williams v. State of California*, No. 312236. First amended complaint for injunctive and declaratory relief (Cal. Super. Ct. 2000); Jeannie Oakes, Education inadequacy, inequality, and failed state policy: A synthesis of expert reports prepared for *Williams v. California*. *Santa Clara Law Review*, 43:4 (2003), pp. 1299-1398.

¹⁴ Of course, not all social movements are progressive, and non-progressive movements use many of the same strategies as progressive ones. Our references here however, are two examples of the literature on progressive movements. For a comprehensive review of the literature on social movements, see Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani. *Social Movements. An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999; David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, Malden,

quality education would challenge the view that quality education is something which must be earned by establishing that: a) participants in social movement are deserving—that they are public agents with the same set of entitlements from the system as everyone else; b) the human dignity of these participants is wedded to their receiving a high quality education; and c) the social interests of the broader community demand that high quality education not be left up to chance or, worse, be subject to broader and historically created social inequities. Unlike conventional technical improvements of conventional education reform, social movement activism addresses the resistance to equity reforms that arises when status is jeopardized —i.e., explicitly challenging prevailing cultural norms and the distribution of resources and opportunities that advantage elites.

Alter Cultural Logics. Social movements engender broad public support among individuals who act, at least partly, according to social convictions distinct from narrow economic or political self-interests. Movements embody collective demands on the established order through public protest and other actions in order to gain support for changes in laws, social policies, and institutions.¹⁵ Additionally, social movements add value to changes in law and policies by placing them in the context of new norms and political arrangements directed to benefit non-elites. Thus, movements and successful implementation of new laws are iterative: first, a changed cultural climate provides a receptive social environment for new law to come about; second, the tangible “gain” represented by a law generates new energy to monitor the law’s implementation and to press for continuing social change.

We have ample evidence that social movements have altered cultural logics, which in turn have brought new policies, social practices, and laws.¹⁶ Over the past few decades, social movement activism has changed the vast majority of Americans’ view about racial segregation and discrimination; women’s social, political, and economic positions; the environment; and more. As people construct new cultural meanings, new actions make sense, and new political arrangements become congruent with the movement’s ideological framework. New rules, structures, and practices follow, almost “naturally,” as the rules, structures and practices of the past no longer make sense. On the other hand, the concept of ongoing “struggle” runs deep throughout movements, as can be seen by the unfinished cultural work of the movements just mentioned.

MA: Blackwell, 2004.

¹⁵ William N. Eskridge, Jr., “Some Effects of Identity-Based Social Movements on Constitutional Law in the Twentieth Century,” *Michigan Law Review*, 100: pp. 2062-2406, 2001-2002; Joel F. Handler, *Social Movements and the Legal System: A Theory of Law Reform and Social Change*, 1978; Edward L. Rubin, “Passing Through the Door: Social Movement Literature and Legal Scholarship,” *Symposium: Social Movements and Law Reform*, *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 150: 1, 2002.

¹⁶ Jennifer Earl, “The Cultural Consequences of Social Movements,” in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 508-530; Eskridge, “Some Effects of Identity-Based Social Movements,” 2001-2002; Handler, *Social Movements*, 1978; Rubin, “Passing Through the Door,” 2001

Movement activism can expose through public discourse the cultural and political shifts required to establish a right to education. This discourse will need to examine and unpack the prevailing logics we have put forth in order to reveal how the logics serve or do not serve different groups. For example, elite parents may be the only group to reap unambiguous benefits from the current distributions of school opportunity and services. Conversely, the middle class is not well served by policies emerging from the logic of scarcity. Opposition to the universal provision of high quality schooling, based on ideology or fears of the ‘racial other’, may not, in fact, be in the material interest of middle class parents. Thus, an argument in favor of securing high quality education as a right may be persuasive to middle class constituencies. This opening means that building a movement for high quality education need not deceive middle class communities nor require them to adopt a “moral” position at odds with their own interests.

Build a Broad Base of Support. Notably, social movement participants include far more than those who stand to benefit directly (or narrowly) from demanding and winning policy or institutional change. Some whites act to achieve civil rights protections for blacks; some men advocate equal pay for women; some middle class people engage in welfare rights campaigns, and more. Appeals to the *general* welfare can garner adherents who do not necessarily benefit or are even personally disadvantaged; for example, smokers who support no-smoking facilities or wealthy persons who support higher taxes. Social movements foster connections among individuals and groups whose material positions are quite different from one another. Social movement scholars argue that these connections and collective political action result from ideological shifts, the construction of new identities, and the development of new commitments. In turn, the relationships and joint action foster deeper ideological commitment and the construction of collective identities.¹⁷

Establishing a right to education could benefit enormously from these social movement dynamics. In addition to engaging middle class parents, they could foster other alliances, including alliances with organized teachers and others who work in schools. Currently, teacher unions are uncertain allies on matters of school equity, particularly as regards forced reassignment of teachers to achieve greater equity in access to qualified teachers. A shift in cultural norms, however, could not only bring significant changes to teachers’ perceptions of the desirability of teaching in low-income communities of color, it could also lead teachers’ unions to marshal the commitment necessary to improve the working conditions for teachers in those communities’ schools.

Shape the Law. Legal scholarship on the role of social movements in constructing constitutional concepts also suggests that social movement activism is likely to be necessary to secure high-quality education as a fundamental right. Over the past three decades, legal scholars have traced the impact that social movements have had on changes in the interpretation of constitutional provisions, including rights. Handler’s 1978 book, for example, shows the connection between social movement activism and

¹⁷ Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, *Blackwell Companion*, 2004; see also, Eskridge, “Some Effects of Identity-Based Social Movements,” 2001-2002; Rubin, “Passing Through the Door,” 2001.

changes in laws related to the environment, consumer protection, civil rights, and social welfare.¹⁸ Others have traced the origins of changes in federal and state constitutional doctrine to social movements. Even when changes are enacted through the formal processes of legislation, litigation, or referendum, far less legal change would have been accomplished, without the impact of social movement activism¹⁹ Especially in California, provisions of the state constitution are born in the mass electoral process of the initiative and referendum.

Rubin suggests that the Constitution itself can be viewed as “a part of a larger social process, the product of a mobilized citizenry whose members were either attempting to achieve particular goals or to define their own identity.”²⁰ His historical tracking of this dynamic includes, among other prominent examples, the abolitionist movement’s influence on the adoption of statutes eliminating slavery in the North and, eventually, on the post-Civil War’s Amendments. He also notes the similar, if “darker”, dynamic in the Klan and Redeemer movements’ impact on laws and decisions rolling back these legal advancements. These are just two of the many examples he uses to advance the analysis that social movements have “altered people’s conception about the proper role of government, and about the content of due process and equal protection.”²¹ His most relevant conclusion for the argument here, however, is that the concept of rights is a socially constructed and socially contingent concept amenable to social movements’ efforts to expand them.²² In education, we have seen that it certainly mattered to the Supreme Court of Kentucky, for example, that a considerable array of the social and political forces in Kentucky supported the position of the plaintiffs in *Rose* that the state’s system of school financing was in violation of Kentucky Constitution.

Similarly, Reva Siegel and Larry Kramer both argue that this influence of social movement conflict is not only tolerated by the Constitution but an integral part of its

¹⁸ Handler, 1978; see also discussion in Eskridge, “Some Effects of Identity-Based Social Movements,” 2001-2002; Rubin, “Passing Through the Door,” 2001.

¹⁹ Eskridge, “Some Effects of Identity-Based Social Movements,” 2001-2002; Larry D. Kramer, “Popular Constitutionalism, circa 2004,” *California Law Review*, 92:4, pp. 959-1011; Ruben, “Passing Through the Door,” 2001; Reva B. Siegel, “Test in Contest: Gender and Constitution from a Social Movement Perspective,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 150: 2001; Reva B. Siegel, “Constitutional Culture, Social Movement Conflict, and Constitutional Changes: The Case of the DeFacto ERA,” *Brennan Lecture* (2005 draft).

²⁰ Ruben, “Passing Through the Door,” 2001, p. 65.

²¹ Rubin, “Passing Through the Door,” 2001, p. 69;

²² Rubin, “Passing Through the Door,” 2001, p. 80; See also Siegel (draft), for a similar set of arguments. Siegel extends the argument to show how new meanings and interpretations of Constitutional rights result from social movement conflict, even when the backlash foils an attempt to establish new rights. Even with the defeat of the ERA, Siegel argues, the interaction of the movement for and the movement against it produced new understandings of Constitution protections not unlike what ERA advocates sought. For a somewhat different take, see Tomiko Brown-Nagin, “Elites, Social Movements, and the Law: The Case of Affirmative Action,” *Columbia Law Review*, 105:1436.

democratic authority. Kramer uses the principle of “popular Constitutionalism” and Siegel hearkens to a “Constitutional culture” to argue that popular participation in Constitutional change is not only legitimate, but also desirable. Both emphasize the centrality of shifts in cultural norms and power arrangements to this process.

Both social science and legal scholarship on the impact of social movements, then, suggest that social movement activism is likely to be necessary to secure high-quality education as a fundamental right. Unlike conventional education reforms, movement activism could move the culture away from the limiting norms of scarcity, merit, and deficit and alter the unequal power arrangements that sustain the inadequate and inequitable provision of high-quality education. Although the exact nature of these shifts cannot be predicted, they are likely to include the following:

- Making salient the importance of high-quality educational conditions to human dignity and the civic/economic health of the broader community;
- Inserting positive narratives about knowledgeable and efficacious community members into public consciousness that can replace negative images of low-income communities of color which otherwise buttress arguments against universal rights.
- Constructing a shared awareness among working class and middle class Californians that as a group they are a) aggrieved by current educational services; b) unable to realize high quality education for some at the expense of others; c) entitled to a high quality education for their children.
- Creating power for participants in social movement activism (in the form of social capital, public recognition, and knowledge and skills about the educational system and civic life) that enables participants to sustain the press for equity even after ideals are adopted into law.

What Role Can Grassroots Organizing Play?

In recent years, a number of grassroots and activist organizations have mobilized students, parents, and community members in powerful actions aimed at exposing and disrupting schooling inequalities. These organizations include neighborhood groups and national networks; religious congregations and secular organizations; and groups with a narrow focus on educational justice as well as organizations that address a range of social justice issues. The very diversity of these groups and alliances—their histories, core missions, size, and so forth—characterizes a central dynamic of movement (or *pre-movement*) organizing. As in a Venn diagram, their individual commitments to greater power for low-income communities of color overlap to define a joint agenda for providing high quality schooling for all students.

Through the mass participation of their members, these groups demand attention and accountability from public policymakers and public education officials. Importantly,

these actions create new civic capacity and social capital for the groups. By presenting an inclusive and efficacious public, the actions also prompt questions about the logic of scarcity, merit, and deficits. Although such grassroots groups, in themselves, don't constitute a social movement, they can be characterized appropriately as "social movement organizations."²³

The scholarly literature on grassroots organizing coheres with findings from the social movement literature. Stall and Stocker define community organizing as "the work that occurs in local settings to empower individuals, build relationships, and create action for social change."²⁴ Similarly, Marshall Ganz, former civil rights and farm worker organizer and now lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, argues that organizing activities seek to create networks that can sustain a new activist community, to frame a story about the network's identity and purpose, and to develop a program of action that mobilizes and expends resources to advance the community's interests. Ganz argues that these three domains of activity (building relationships, developing common understandings, and taking action), when combined into campaigns, enable ordinary people to develop the knowledge, capacity, and power that social change requires.²⁵

We see all of these dynamics at work in the California's grassroots organizations we discuss below, and in particular, the work of the Education Justice Collaborative (EJC), a loose coalition of approximately thirty organizations from around California with which we are most directly involved. The EJC groups range from state-wide youth groups like Californians for Justice, to civil rights organizations like MALDEF, to faith-based networks such as California PICO. .

Building Relationships. Grassroots activist organizations like those in the EJC understand and expect that their efforts to address unjust social policies will generate conflict with those who have disproportionate influence over the conduct of social policy and the flow of information. They expect that elites will selectively gather data to frame arguments that add to their advantage. Therefore, although social activists are eager for knowledge that reflects the actual distribution of resources and suggests plain solutions to inequality, they also understand that it's naive to believe that once knowledge is made known, it will easily win support. They know that people in underserved communities typically lack "conventional" resources for developing or buying power—access to leadership positions, research, media, and networking expertise. Accordingly, they counter these putative *disadvantages* by developing collective leadership, constantly involving new people in leadership roles, convening community meetings that involve as

²³Elisabeth S. Clemens & Debra C. Minkoff, "Beyond the Iron Law: Rethinking the Place of Organizations in Social Movement Research in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 155-170.

²⁴Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker, "Community Organizing or Organizing Community? Gender and the Crafts of Empowerment," *Gender and Society*, 12:6 (1998), 729-756.

²⁵Marshall Ganz, "What Is Organizing?" *Social Policy*. Fall 2002. 33(1); see also the working papers on Ganz's Harvard University website at <http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~mganz>.

many people as possible in decision-making, and creating a collective vision. They build their collective power through their relationships with one another and through strategic alliances with those whose expertise, resources, and access to power can provide them with political clout.

In California, the *Williams* case served as a symbolic, substantive, and strategic impetus for grassroots, civic, and advocacy groups to join together in an Education Justice Collaborative.²⁶ *Williams*' focus on both decent schooling and democratic accountability caught the attention of education justice organizations as well as groups that had been active in California around "non-educational" issues such as living wage, affordable housing policies, immigrant rights, and affirmative action. The deplorable conditions of many California schools made public in the complaint and then illuminated in research conducted by the *Williams* expert team, demonstrated to grassroots groups that their local battles were part of systemic problems that required state-wide alliances.²⁷ *Williams* was like a keystone that allowed local groups and broader networks to understand seemingly disconnected "actions" as part of a more powerful and coherent strategy for affecting school change. As Liz Guillen, an attorney and legislative advocate with the EJC member group Public Advocates, explained, "Each of us has different strengths and roles to play."²⁸

Understanding and Knowledge Construction. Organizing nearly always engages participants in inquiring into how their immediate problems fit into the larger social, economic, historical, and political context; identifying likely solutions to those problems; and constructing an agenda for change. According to Ganz, understanding comes from fusing local knowledge with facts and broader social theories that help communities see their particular circumstances in a larger social and political context. Connecting to broader social theories builds their understanding of problems and potential solutions. It also enables members of grassroots groups to generate wholly new ways of thinking and plans of action—what sociologist Francesca Polletta calls the "innovatory" and "developmental" elements of democratic participation.²⁹ Polletta argues that members of grassroots groups constantly develop new strategies and skills in the course of political action as they share leadership, exchange ideas, and negotiate consensus.³⁰

²⁶ *Williams v. State of California*, No. 312236. .

²⁷ Oakes, "Education Inadequacy, Inequality, and Failed State Policy," 2003.

²⁸ Oakes and Rogers, *Learning Power*, 2006

²⁹ Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

³⁰ The idea that powerful knowledge and solutions to problems reside in communities themselves was also at the core of the training offered to community leaders in Appalachia by the Highlander Folk School (now the Highlander Center) in Tennessee beginning in 1932. Highlander's founder Myles Horton argued "the answers to the problems facing society lie in the experiences of ordinary people. Those experiences, so often belittled and denigrated in our society, are the keys to grassroots power." (See Highlander Center Website, 2005.)

Groups in the EJC invest considerable energy making sense of the conditions in California's schools and the possibilities for promoting educational justice—often accomplished through monthly conference telephone phone calls. They meet face-to-face at “educational exchanges” around particular issues such as teacher quality. For example, after considerable inquiry and testing the research literature against their own experiences, EJC members framed the conditions in the *Williams* schools as denying students “opportunities to learn.” “Opportunity to learn” calls attention to concrete, policy-alterable conditions, and offers a clear alternative to prevailing logics for understanding schooling. Such a framing, offered the EJC groups a “common sense” appeal while tapping into the public's value for basic fairness, thereby advancing their agenda of remedying the *Williams* issues.

Use Collective Action to Press for Change. Organizing groups not only create “disruptive knowledge,” but act on it to shift the existing power balance, to persuade through force of argument, and to enhance their opportunities for civic participation. Faced with unjust social conditions, they ask: What are we going to do about it together?” Grassroots groups use a repertoire of social movement actions—actions that persuade with the weight of their numbers, their capacity for material damage, and the garnering of sympathy and support by bearing witness.³¹ Actions based on the power of numbers include marches, rallies, petitions, letter writing, and mobilizing voters. Like democratic political processes, such actions attempt to persuade elites that there is large public support for or against a particular policy. Actions reflecting a theory of “material damage” include, boycotts, strikes, blocking traffic, disrupting business, and, at the extreme end, damage to property. The theory here is that actions will be powerful and persuasive if they cause some noticeable impact on the economy or disrupt normal processes. Actions based on “bearing witness” include forms of civil disobedience such as hunger strikes, burning draft cards, refusal to pay taxes, and chaining oneself to a tree. These strategies seek, “to demonstrate a strong commitment to an objective deemed vital for humanity's future” by engaging in behaviors that involve personal risk or cost.³² Together, these actions insert, figuratively and literally, the bodies of their members into the public sphere—using this presence to assert pressure for change.

For example, in 2003, Californians for Justice led a coalition of groups in a campaign to halt the “diploma penalty” associated with California's High School Exit Exam. Using the slogan, “First Things First,” they argued the unfairness of making students pay such a high price for their schools' failure to provide adequate opportunities to learn. Abdi Soltani, then the Executive Director of Californians for Justice, described the campaign as a synthesis of inquiry, disruptive knowledge, and action that, in this case, employed the persuasive influence of numbers.

We framed the campaign on the theme of opportunity to learn, putting a spotlight on unequal resources in schools, resulting in an unfair punishment of students. We combined research on what was happening in

³¹Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 1999.

³²Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, 1999, p. 178.

*the schools with a spirited campaign of youth and parents demanding an equal opportunity to learn.*³³

In May 2003, CFJ's California Bus Tour for Quality Education traveled the state making 12 stops, raising the voices of students and parents in communities of color and low-income communities, attracting media coverage, and gaining the attention of the State Board of Education. At the end of the tour, hundreds of students converged on the Board's meeting in Sacramento. Soltani recalled:

*State board members referred to newspaper headlines about school inequalities as they met and deliberated the exit exam. Ultimately, when they met to vote on whether to delay the exam, youth and parents from around the state packed their meeting and delivered testimony that the board president called the most powerful he had heard in his years on the board. . . . One great highlight of the action was that when we arrived en masse to enter the state board's hearing room, an hour before the hearing was set to start, the guard tried to deny us seats. Anticipating this, we had brought an attorney with us, who cited the code that allowed us to all sit, first come, first serve. An hour later, as the meeting was set to start, several dozen professional lobbyists in suits had to stand outside, much to their chagrin, because the seats were filled with youth and parents.*³⁴

The two-year delay won by Californians for Justice and their allies speaks to the power that grassroots groups can generate by building relationships, forging new understandings, and taking strategic actions. Yet the power to postpone an ill-conceived graduation policy pales in comparison with the power required to leverage the commitment and resources necessary to ensure all students a high quality education. Although the EJC groups have demonstrated their efficacy, they will need to build more power to accomplish their goal of being more than a starting point for a substantial campaign.

What Conditions Could Fuel a Social Movement for the Right to Education?

Grassroots organizing and mobilization, such as that described above, must also capture cross-social class support and the interest of the legal community to become a social movement. Only then can a campaign among like-minded allies become a broad-based movement. Grassroots *campaigns* are measured in "wins," in robust memberships, and in the groups' capacity to leverage tangible improvements in their members' lives. On the other hand, a movement adds sustained, coherent, and timely progress toward altering the cultural logics that rationalize the status quo. A social movement, we have argued, can alter the collective sense making in ways that will lead to litigation and prod policy that results in the right to and the reality of high-quality schooling for all.

³³Oakes and Rogers, *Learning Power*, 2006.

³⁴Oakes and Rogers, *Learning Power*, 2006.

Under what conditions can the current networks of grassroots organizations, coalitions, and interest groups—and those that might join them—actually *become* a social movement? For insights, we again turn to the social science scholarship on social movements. Scholars in the field define social movements as “collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional and organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority . . .”³⁵ They identify three requisites to a social movement: “collectivity,” “organization,” and “continuity.”

Most scholars agree that acting together to sustain a coherent challenge to existing authority requires (a) a processes through which sufficient numbers of people come to see their grievances and their possible remediation in shared and compelling terms (commonly referred to as “framing”); (b) organizational and leadership resources sufficient to move from shared understanding to concerted action; and (c) sufficient allies and resources to sustain concerted action over time and in the face of significant resistance. In this section we examine these three conditions, generally, and as they may exist at the present time in California.

Framing. As we discussed earlier, social movements challenge society’s collective sense making in ways that conventional reform strategies do not. This comes about through a struggle over beliefs and ideas as well as over concrete conditions—i.e., disrupting the cultural logics of scarcity, merit and deficit with countervailing logics. Instead of these logics, Americans could presume that the nation’s great wealth can make opportunities abundant, not scarce. They could adopt as common sense that high quality and equitable education is a right for all students, not something that students should have to compete for. They could take as given that social priorities and not social wealth determine whether society can afford to educate all children well and provide them with decent housing, healthcare, and economic stability. They could believe that schools are absolutely capable of providing high-quality education to low-income children and children of color if there is enough public will to provide the necessary opportunities to schools in all communities.

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³⁵ David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, “Mapping the Terrain,” in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, p. 11.

³⁶ David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, “Mapping the Terrain,” in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, p. 11.

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In the language of many social movement scholars, such alternative logics must take the form of “mobilizing ideas” that, not only change thinking, but compel action by a variety of audiences and participants—from grassroots “actors” to middle class and elite observers and reactors. The phenomenon whereby these “mobilizing ideas” take shape is commonly known as “framing.” Framing is not simply finding the right “turn of phrase” to motivate individuals; rather it poses a new conception of an existing social problem that moves it from being seen as regrettable and inevitable to being considered an injustice that can and should be remedied. Scholars of framing see this process as being a deliberate effort of social movement actors to assign meanings to events and conditions that will mobilize supporters and allies. Such meanings are generally referred to as “collective action frames.”³⁷

David Snow and his colleagues argued, for example, in 1986 that “frame alignment processes” were crucial to social movement organizations.³⁸ Fourteen years later two of the authors wrote of the “almost meteoric increase” in research on “the framing/movement link.”³⁹ In this literature, the essential collective action frame reflects

a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change.⁴⁰

Snow and others also argue that frames are linked with the development and maintenance of collective identity—the strong sense of being a member of a group—particularly as social movement coalitions become heterogeneous.⁴¹ In turn, collective

³⁷ David A. Snow, “Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields,” in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, p. 380.

³⁸ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” 26 (2000), p. 611.

³⁹ David A. Snow, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, p. 51.

⁴⁰ Snow and Benford, “Framing Processes,” 2000, p. 615.

⁴¹ Snow, “Frame Alignment Processes,” 2004; Scott A. Hunt and Robert D. Benford, “Collective Identity, Solidarity, and Commitment, in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule,

identity is thought to be a primary motivation for individuals' in movements—such as feminism, environmentalism, and civil rights—from which they don't expect benefit to one's own class or material interests.⁴²

However, not all frames are alike. Theorists differentiate (a) diagnostic framing, which defines important causes of the problem; (b) prognostic framing, the articulation of possible solutions or a plan of attack; and (c) motivational framing, which helps construct the vocabularies of motive and a rationale for action.⁴³

In the case of educational justice, there are contending and to some extent incompatible frames, some more likely than others to define problems and solutions in ways that develop a sense of injustice and a collective identity among a wide array of activists required to generate broad-based public support. None of the frames is wholly satisfactory, and much framing work remains. Two of the prevailing frames, *inequality* (lack of fundamental fairness or justice) and *quality* (lack of adequacy or excellence) have both strengths and deficits. An *inequality* frame, shaped in the more general struggles for civil rights and social equality, diagnoses the problem as one of unequal access to educational opportunity, and calls for redistribution and leveling, accepted in *Serrano*⁴⁴ but rejected in *Rodriguez*.⁴⁵ The *inequality* frame draws motivational force from the still powerful images and themes of the civil rights movement. At the same time, the *inequality* frame is self-limiting in its reach. Appealing to those who have the least, along with their allies driven by justice concerns, it has the potential to frame potential allies as competitors. To the degree that it fails to challenge the logic of scarcity, it seems to call for redistribution within a “zero sum” arena of high-quality education.

The *quality* diagnostic frame reflected in adequacy litigation and other efforts at increasing school funding around the country lacks some of these problems. Notably it does not bring forth the explicit specter of averaging or leveling resources to the detriment of those who are relatively advantaged. The *quality* frame in education has the benefit, perhaps, of being more inclusive of middle-class communities, because it seeks to increase material resources for all, even as it redistributes the more abstract quality of relative “advantage.” Consider that in California, 94 percent of students go to schools in districts that spend less per pupil than the national average, and that this under-spending has brought unfavorable student/teacher and student/counselor ratios to both middle-class and low-income schools. Consider also that California schools' comparatively low academic achievement is not simply a function of its large proportion of low-income students and students of color. State comparisons of scores on the National Assessment

and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, pp., 433-457.

⁴² Hunt and Benford, “Collective Identity,” 2004.

⁴³ Snow and Benford, “Framing Processes,” 2000, p. 617.

⁴⁴ *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) 5 C3d 584.

⁴⁵ *San Antonio School District V. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973)

of Educational Progress reveal that California's white and non-poor students lag behind their peers in most other states.⁴⁶

Given this overall inadequacy in California education, a *quality* frame could help shape a social movement in which both middle class white parents and poor parents of color can align demands. And yet, given the competition for scarce opportunities, admission to elite colleges, for example, it is awfully difficult to disengage the attraction of relative advantage from absolute levels of material resources. Indeed, some of our own research reveals that advantages are more salient than high (or low) levels of material resources.⁴⁷

Further, the prognostic power of the *quality* frame is as weak as that of the *inequality* frame. Neither suggests a solution or plan of attack that does not easily offend those who are relatively better served by schools. Thus, the equality and quality frames share two characteristics: Both (in the abstract) are rhetorically inviolable; and neither is credible in the face of scarcity. The typical "solution" for many who hold on to the logics of scarcity, merit, and deficit is to construct narratives that explain scarcity in a way that does not impugn the motives of the powerful. Thus we have explanations for *inequality* and lack of quality that blame bureaucratic efficiency (mostly middle managers), union greed (teachers), delinquent behavior (students who do not take care of facilities) and so forth. Finally, both the *quality* and *inequality* frames are limiting in their exclusive focus on education. Both invite competition between education and other critical needs, including the other needs of the very same children and families.

We detect in current collaborations the potential emergence for a broader *social justice* frame that would see education dependent upon, rather than competitive with, resources essential to the health and well being of communities and families, and integrally connected to health care, housing, income security, public safety, environmental protection, and so on. For example, we have recently begun working with the "Justice for Janitors" union in California (SEIU Local 1877) in a program aimed at building the capacity of the union's thousands of parent members to improve the educational circumstances of their children, and of the other children in the same schools. Other groups have linked the failings of schools serving poor children of color to failings in our criminal justice system and the great overrepresentation of the students from these schools in the prison population.⁴⁸

⁴⁶See, for example, David W. Grissmer, Ann Flanagan, Jennifer H. Kawata, Stephanie Williamson, *Improving Student Achievement: What State NAEP Test Scores Tell Us*, Santa Monica: RAND, 2000; see also U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1990, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2003 Mathematics Assessments, summary online at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/stt2003/2004457CA8.pdf>.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*, New Haven, CT: 1985/2005).

⁴⁸ See, for example, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Inc, *Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline* (undated), available at

A *social justice* frame could recognize the vast disparities across racial and class lines in these areas as well, but look beyond conventional comparisons to focus on the relative circumstances of "truly advantaged" elites, including but not limited to the educational opportunities available to their children. Such a frame could encourage a collective identity among all of those on the "wrong side" of the ever increasing gap between the very wealthy and the rest of society. Middle class people, for example, could recognize that improving education and the quality of life, generally, for their own children is bound up with creating sufficient education and life chances for all. Moreover, people across race and class lines can act on their conviction that "winning" more equitable schools and life chances for low-income students is a moral and ideological good, rather than one from which they only stand to benefit materially. At this moment, however, no clear, coherent social justice frame has taken shape.

Resources. Just as one group of social movement theorists has emphasized the criticality of *framing*, others have emphasized the importance of *resources* and *resource mobilization*, although they do not always agree on how to best categorize or specify what is included within the term.⁴⁹ Cress and Snow identified as important to social movement formation moral, material, informational and human resources.⁵⁰ Others, drawing on Bourdieu's elaboration of three forms of capital (economic, cultural, and social), have developed a somewhat different typology: moral, cultural, socio-organizational, human, and material resources.⁵¹ Still other theorists separate the issues of resources from those of leadership and organization, as we explain below.

Independent of the debates within social movement scholarship, it is not difficult to recognize that a social movement for educational justice requires more than mobilizing ideas, creative framings, and collective identity. Social movements do draw power from the notion that they are on the right side of justice and morality. In some cases, such framings, as *moral resources*, may predominate, as in the "right to life" and anti-death penalty movements, but moral concerns animate every social movement. Particularly in its *inequality* framing, educational justice work taps into the concerns that have animated movements from the French Revolution to the American abolitionists and civil rights movement to the ongoing struggle for gay rights. And, in the case of educational justice work, it is notable that some of most successful local movements have drawn on the

http://www.naacpldf.org/content/pdf/pipeline/Dismantling_the_School_to_Prison_Pipeline.pdf

⁴⁹ John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (1977), pp. 1212-1241; See also, Mayer N. Zald and John McCarthy, "Social Movements in an Organizational Society, 1987.

⁵⁰ Daniel M. Cress & David A. Snow, *Mobilization at the Margins: Resources, Benefactors, and the Viability of Homeless Social Movement Organizations*, 61 AM. SOC. REV. 1089 (1996).

⁵¹ Bob Edwards and John D. McCarthy, "Resources and Social Movement Mobilization" in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, p. 125-128.

moral force of organized religion as well as the organizational infrastructure of local churches.

In other movements, *material* and *human resources* are critical. For example, it is difficult to conceive how the “property rights movement” would have flourished without the material resources contributed by wealthy interests, even as its advocates point to its moral foundations.⁵² In the case of educational justice, the material resources available are limited, but growing. In California, for example, the Hewlett Foundation and Gates Foundation have made significant grants to grassroots groups and organizations engaged in collective work at the state level, including the Education Justice Collaborative discussed in the previous section. These material resources pale in comparison to those available to business organizations with an interest in education or the California Teachers Association.

The millions of parents and older students most directly affected by inadequate and unequal education constitute a huge potential human resource for a social movement, but tapping this potential also requires material resources, organization, and leadership. Based on our work in California, we estimate that there are not many more than one hundred full time organizers working with parents or students in a public school system with more than six million students in the K-12 public education system.⁵³

The availability of these other movement resources is related to framing. An *inequality* frame may tap greater moral resources but cut off cultural and material resources middle class parents might bring. How that frame develops may determine how the resources of teachers unions are deployed. A *quality* frame limited to education may tap resources from a wider constituency, including teachers unions and some forward-looking business interests, but it will not as readily connect to the resources of potential allies in low wage labor unions, racial justice groups, and so on. This is particularly likely, if a quality frame fails to change the prevailing logics of merit and deficit that rationalize differential “quality” for different groups of students. Plainly, the interaction between framing and resources is complex, dynamic, and situational.

Leadership and Organization. Social movement theorists emphasizing resource mobilization recognize that “the simple availability of resources is not sufficient,” and that “coordination and strategic effort is required to convert available pools of individually held resources into collective resources and to utilize those resources in collective action.”⁵⁴ For some theorists, the gap is filled by leaders, who “inspire commitment, mobilize resources, create and recognize opportunities, devise strategies,

⁵² Steven J. Eagle, *The Birth of the Property Rights Movement*, available on the website of the well-funded Cato Institute, <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa404.pdf>, visited February 8, 2006.

⁵³ Michelle Renee, *Using Research to Make a Difference: How Community Organizations Use Research as a Tool for Advancing Equity-Focused Education Policy*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, forthcoming.

⁵⁴ Edward and McCarthy, “Resources and Social Movement Mobilization” 2004, *supra* note **, at 116.

frame demands, and influence outcomes.”⁵⁵ Certainly, our conventional histories of the civil rights movement or the farm workers movement in California are unimaginable without Martin Luther King, Jr. or Cesar Chavez. Other scholars recognize that leadership can inspire commitment and action, but that organization is required to make that action coherent and effective over time.⁵⁶

We have met in our work some extraordinary leaders, both in local communities and on the statewide stage. And there is no shortage of organizations nominally focused on education. We have done significant work with about two dozen California organizations, ranging from Parent-U-Turn, a parent advocacy group in South Gate and Lynwood, California to much larger organizations like California ACORN and PICO California.⁵⁷ There are at least two statewide networks of independent organizations although neither could be truly said to be an “organization” in the conventional sense. In addition to the Education Justice Collaborative, a Campaign for Quality Organization, led by the Californians for Justice group, discussed above, has mobilized locally based grassroots organization and allies in advocacy groups.⁵⁸ We detect in these efforts the beginnings of a social movement for educational justice, and perhaps more broadly, for social justice.

Conclusions and Implications

We began our exploration of the potential contribution of grassroots organizing to securing a fundamental right to high-quality education with four questions: Does establishing education as a fundamental right require social movement activism? What might this approach add to the conventional reform strategies of lawyers, policy elites and professional educators? What role might current grassroots organizing for education equity play? Under what conditions might grassroots activity lead to a social movement powerful enough to secure a meaningful right to high-quality schooling for all children? We have argued, based on our reading of social science and legal scholarship and our own experience, that such organizing is probably essential for equitable education in California.

⁵⁵ Aldon D. Morris and Suzanne Staggenborg, “Leadership in Social Movements,” in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 171-196. This article provides a recent summary of the extensive literature on the subject.

⁵⁶ Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, 2002; Clemens and Minkoff, “Beyond the Iron Law,” 2004.

⁵⁷ ACORN and PICO came together for an Education Leadership Institute in February, 2006. For more details on each organization, see “Good Schools” page on PICO California website, <http://www.picocalifornia.org/goodschools.html>, visited February 18, 2006 for a summary of PICO’s work and the page devoted to “Great Schools Now” on ACORN’s website at <http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=9352>. Both organizations are multi-issue grassroots organizations, but educational justice is playing an increasingly prominent role in the work of both groups.

⁵⁸ See http://www.caljustice.org/takeaction_campaign.shtml, last visited February 18, 2006.

Grassroots organizing may be a prerequisite to the framing, resource mobilization, and organizational and leadership capacity required by a social movement for the right to high-quality education. The construction of knowledge and understandings that grassroots groups engage in can generate mobilizing ideas, framing educational justice to motivate widespread participation and broad public support. Successful coalitions among grassroots groups, mainstream groups, and elected officials could mobilize many more activists along with the “mass” public support and the material and organizational resources needed to advance a broader movement. The considerable capacity of these groups to create and execute imaginative forms of collective action provides compelling models for the interaction of inspiring leadership and an organized base.

We recommend that lawyers and other advocates, education reformers, and philanthropies who seek a right to high-quality education support grassroots organizing and, to the degree possible, the evolution of grassroots organizing into a broader social movement. Such support can take the form of strategic relationships, resources, and legitimacy.

One model for this is our work at UCLA’s IDEA and, in particular with the Education Justice Collaborative. The joint participation of grassroots groups, policy advocates, lawyers, and researchers brings research support, translation and dissemination about ongoing developments in education reform. The relationships also provide capacity-building through focused working groups that design, lead, and implement various public education and media strategies; and coordinated “exchanges” that bring together academics, policymakers and grassroots organizers to better understand key educational issues and each others’ perspectives. Regional convenings and strategy sessions foster organization and continuity among the various groups’ actions. Finally, affiliation with such a collective enterprise opens doors to funding sources that might not otherwise support small groups working in isolation. All of these activities could be supported and scaffolded by policy makers and lawyers.

However, although there are multiple ways for policymakers, lawyers, and researchers to engage, these “allies” must adopt new relational roles--most significantly is that their comfortable elite status cannot productively place them in charge of the organizing or framing around a movement for a right to high-quality education. Rather, they must see themselves as tools to be leveraged to effectuate the goals of more organic social movements. All of us are potential resources -- human, material, and moral—for those young people, parents and community members who would form the heart of such a social movement because they are the ones most negatively affected by the inadequacies and inequality in today’s schools.

As important, determining how best to engage is likely to be iterative, developmental, opportunistic, and in the end, an empirical process. In other words, lawyers and policymakers, like organizers and grassroots themselves, will always have to act within the limits of their own resources and capacity and within an ever-changing landscape. For example, a *Williams* suit would be very different if brought today—

simply because the organizing landscape has changed.

In the end, law and the rhetoric of rights will no doubt play a significant role in the process. But rights without power to compel their realization are an illusion. Law and the recognition of education as a fundamental right, together with the social mobilization and political power sufficient to make those rights real, however, could materially transform public education. And possibly much more.