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## A HISTORY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

*The First Century, 1837–1942*

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History can be a great teacher and motivator. As an academic discipline, history has traditionally been about the interpretation of known facts rather than a debate over the facts themselves. For every event, there are multiple interpretations as to meanings, causes, and effects, and it falls to the historian to make the case explaining why his or her particular interpretation should be accepted. According to Jackie Blount (2008),

Thoughtfully interpreted histories can show us with unparalleled depth and fullness how our social relations have come to exist as they do, to understand more deeply our social conditions, and to enhance our ability to ask the kinds of questions that might provoke social justice work in the future. Though historical analysis cannot offer specific answers regarding how conditions will play out, it can assist us in moving into the future with thoughtfulness and awareness. And it can inspire us to action. (p. 19)

The history of school leadership is largely based on three recognized masterpieces: *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Callahan, 1962), *The One Best System* (Tyack, 1974), and *The Managerial Imperative and the Practice of Leadership in Schools* (Cuban, 1988). Based on original and secondary sources, Raymond Callahan (1962) tested and confirmed his hypothesis that public school leaders have been vulnerable to powerful business and governmental forces throughout history. His conclusion, however, was that business was “an inadequate and inappropriate basis for establishing . . . educational policy” (p. viii). David Tyack (1974) also used original and secondary sources to support his exploratory and interpretative history of urban education, describing the continuous pursuit for the one best system in terms of educational policies and practices. He was aware, however, that the historical and sociological methods he used “[did] violence to the kaleidoscopic surface and hidden dynamics of everyday life” (p. 4) and urged others to engage in historical research. In his book, Larry Cuban (1988) offered readers a persuasive argument that teachers and administrators have more in common—in terms of instruction, management, and politics—than is acknowledged by their different

roles and images. He held out hope that our profession's future could be different.

All three of these scholars offered original, exploratory, and controversial interpretations of the facts. Once published, however, these histories were no longer read as exploratory or tentative. The ideas and conclusions became fixed and uncontested. The modest claims actually made by each of the authors were ignored. Instead, their conclusions were repeated, synthesized, and appropriated into taxonomies of historical eras. Decades of school leadership practices were categorized by a single phrase or metaphor, while the complexities of daily life, the material realities and struggles faced by earlier school leaders, have largely been ignored.

It is not a sign of good health for any academic field or discipline to have an uncontested and unexamined history, especially when that field is education. Discussion and debate, as well as actions, invigorate the policies and practices of school leadership. Practically every contemporary problem has had a long and rich history of discussion and debate. Yet, many of us today will not even consider consulting the hard-earned experiences of our predecessors when faced with a problem, whether it be adopting a new reading curriculum or deciding on the role of classroom testing or the scheduling of classes. Our own history seems to have no place at the school leadership and policy tables.

This chapter is merely a tentative step in this new direction. It is neither a complete nor an original history; as such, it does not attempt to compete with the classic texts. What it offers to readers, however, is a series of individual narratives of several very successful school leaders who lived and worked during the first century of public education in the United States. Individually and collectively, these narratives directly challenge the depiction of school leaders as dependent and vulnerable. The school leaders portrayed here demonstrated practices that are worthy of consideration today, particularly in linking schools to communities and school leadership to public service. The narratives describe school leaders who are knowledgeable educators; social, political, and community activists; system builders; and democrats with a small "d." During the first century of public education,

they saw the future of education and society as differing from existing practices and from reforms originating outside education. As their schools and school systems grew, they incorporated the increasing demands of fiscal and managerial duties into educational frameworks and challenged the dominant industrial models promoting centralization and standardization. As civic as well as educational leaders, their primary objectives were to educate children while promoting the social, political, and economic welfare of their neighborhoods and society as a whole. To a person, their actions were attacked by powerful elites and tradition-bound authorities, and these men and women suffered considerable personal and professional stress as a result. More times than not, however, they emerged victorious.

Some of these school leaders are well known: Horace Mann and Ella Flagg Young; others you may be meeting for the first time: Cyrus Peirce, Angelo Patri, William Maxwell, and T. H. Harris. Their lives come to us from biographies, autobiographies, and their own journal writings and speeches, as well as from other histories, including the classics mentioned above. I have presented these school leaders in terms of their personal narratives, following the advice of noted historians Barbara Tuchman and Joseph Ellis. In her book of essays, *Practicing History* (1981), Tuchman argued against beginning any study of history with a preconceived theory. Rather, she urged both authors and readers to come to their own conclusions, independent of what other historians had written. She was wary of academic historians who often began their research with a theory already in mind. Her concern was that the theory itself might influence, intentionally or not, the selection of facts or the telling of the history to fit the facts. I have tried to follow her advice on both of these counts: The historical data are first presented within the personal narratives, and the tentative theories of educational leadership that emerge are presented at the end of the chapter. I also followed the advice of a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, Joseph Ellis (2007):

My approach . . . was to assume that narrative is the highest form of historical analysis, that by inhabiting certain propitious moments and telling their stories, I stood the greatest chance of encountering and hunting down my quarry. (p. x)

As I learned more about these individuals, I found it impossible to ignore the material conditions they faced or their daily struggles. However, as an author, I had to choose the particular stories and events to include in this chapter. In making my selections, I relied heavily on these leaders' own words first, those closest in time to the school leaders second, historical observations third, and my own conclusions last. I followed the advice of both Larry Cuban (1988) and Roland Barth (1990), who described the distance and difference between educational researchers and school practitioners. Both indicated that only practitioners who are active participants can "put practice into prose." Even as skilled a researcher as Cuban observed that "leadership occurs more frequently than believed [and] is largely unexamined by researchers" (p. 224). Logically, it is the struggles of school leaders, not the interpretations of researchers who seek to understand practice, that matter most here.

Although chronology helps us organize the historical facts, history is not governed solely by the order of events. By focusing on the first century of public education, 1837 to 1942, it is relatively easy to distinguish school leadership actions that have continued into the present from those actions that have been displaced in current practices. In examining earlier debates and practices, we may come to rediscover political strategies that successfully disrupted the status quo and allowed these school leaders to advance their diverse goals for public education. Every generation of school leaders must confront the dominant forces of tradition to move schools and school systems in new directions. This is especially relevant for today's school leaders working in the era of accountability. To accomplish this objective of rediscovery, the French historian Michel Foucault (1972) offers a method of historical analysis that can help us question the apparent inevitability and common sense of current practices.

Perhaps the most significant of all current practices has been the managerial trend toward business values that has dominated educational administration for some time. A search of historical records shows that from the outset, school leaders and university professors of educational leadership questioned the claims made

by efficiency experts who were touting data-driven decision making and scientific management. During the first decades of the 20th century, New York City School Superintendent William Maxwell expressed fears that the new approach would turn teachers and administrators into mere record keepers. His views on education, and especially accountability, were pragmatic; if the information, including test data, was of no use to an experienced teacher, then why collect the data in the first place? Many of the educators you will meet in this chapter debated the merits of standardized teaching methods and testing regimes—recurring reforms throughout the history of education. These issues have been at the forefront of educational reform from the beginning. It is safe to say that today's emphasis on prescriptive pedagogical methods, standardized testing, and data-driven decision making would not have been favored by the school leaders you will meet here. We must ask ourselves why. What were their responses to similar situations? Would their strategies work today? Were they right? Have we lost our courage? I will provide some of the historical evidence in this chapter; you, as educational leaders, will have to decide whether or not their actions will influence your future actions.

While the leadership-management debate has occupied the forefront of discussion and debate, what is also obvious about yesterday's school leaders is their intellectual mastery of curriculum and instruction. These individuals were first and foremost educators who used management as a tool in the service of teaching and learning. Their knowledge base was not centered on the latest business practices. They were articulate spokespeople for curricular reform across all subject areas and instructional methods. Toward the end of the first century of public schooling, however, they were beginning to deal with the emerging trends of business and management. Many fought back. In 1929, Clarence Stone, a disciple of Professor Ellwood Cubberley, wrote:

In the midst of a multiplicity of managerial and professional duties the easiest road for one lacking in professional training and large vision is to give first attention to the managerial duties, and to the routine, the imperative, and the emergency duties. (p. 28)

The distinction Stone made between professional training and large vision on one hand and managerial duties on the other was not uncommon among principals and superintendents at the time. Even the most vocal advocate for applying the principles of scientific management to education, Franklin Bobbitt (1913), argued that to keep the profession of teaching fresh, teachers needed to become active participants in community affairs. The main purpose of scientific management, in his judgment, was to free up time during the day for teachers to visit other teachers, explore school neighborhoods, and learn about the outside lives of their students.

The writings of leaders such as Stone and Bobbitt indicate why it does not serve education well to limit ourselves to a fixed history based on unitary concepts (Foucault, 1972) or to see school leadership as having one definitive history (Zinn, 1998). In rejecting an ordered view of history, however, the academic discipline of history itself becomes more complex, making it difficult for readers to extract clear and exact lessons from past practices. That complexity is revealed in the multiple realities of school leaders' lives. It also may explain why school leaders within the same school or same school system may come to different conclusions when presented with the same evidence and why some support current practices, routines, and procedural rules while others do not. The essence of leadership always resides within the strategic and contextual choices made by individual school leaders. Without continual discussions and debates, policies and decisions fall victim to tradition and authority—the two sources of power challenged by first-century school leaders.

What is at stake here is more than a chapter on school leadership history. When a field of study believes that it already has a complete picture of itself, its members tend to justify their ideas and actions in relation to that fixed history. There is no pressing need to seek out alternative explanations or to ask questions critical of current practices so long as connections to the past are affirmed. Right actions and progress are thus understood in terms of past practices, traditions, and authority. Those in charge may become complacent, if not with details or technical improvement issues, then with the overall direction of the school or school system. Fewer questions are permitted; problems are seen as bumps in the road to be

overcome, rather than as evidence of a need to consider new directions. These static dispositions are neither educational nor leaderlike.

In contrast, one self-reflective public school leader you will meet in this chapter characterized his own leadership journey in the following self-reflective monologue:

“How did you begin?”

I don't know exactly how I began. I began as so many others did without realizing that I was beginning anything unusual. I began slowly, hesitatingly making many mistakes as I went.

“How did you begin?”

Does not the very question try to force a tabulated, logically arranged answer that may be applied like a formula to any situation? Is it not more important to know why the school began, and how the work grew, and the value of what the school learned while it was growing? (Patri, 1917, p. 85)

Here, then, are the lives of six very different public school leaders who built and rebuilt systems of education and understood the need to make educational changes and master politics. They embraced their social contexts and cultures and the importance of communities to children and schooling. For each of them, there could be no real school improvement without educating teachers, children, and their communities—all of society. These school leaders did not let tradition for the sake of tradition or school system structures constrain their actions. They refused to be “helpless in opposition,” to quote T. H. Harris of Louisiana (1963, p. 169.). Each of these school leaders experienced political pressure, personal vendettas, and public ridicule. They fought back as educators, but when necessary they were prepared to walk away from a conflict when there was no room left to grow. Their lives were not studies in vulnerability, nor were they supplicants of a nameless, faceless system.

### **A SYSTEM OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THE FIRST CENTURY, 1837–1942**

The first century, 1837 to 1942, was a century of dramatic growth and change for both schools and school leadership.<sup>1</sup> There were public schools in the United States prior to the 1830s,

but they functioned locally and autonomously across the country. Towns and municipalities were responsible for hiring and firing teachers and for securing funds to build and support their own schools. It was common in towns and villages throughout the United States to see schoolteachers come and go every 10 months, sometimes more often (Butts & Cremins, 1962; Johnson, 1907). In the 1904 novel, *Jean Mitchell's School*, we read about 45 to 50 students, boys and girls of all ages and sizes, in a one-room schoolhouse.<sup>2</sup> “The windows were barricaded with heavy shutters. Through the open door glimpses of the dingy room within could be plainly seen from the road” (Wray, 1904, p. 18). Describing the same period, Harris (1963) reported that country schools were in a deplorable condition, “cheap and crude,” with ignorant teachers using “barbarous methods of teaching” (p. 158).

Newell Gilbert (1904), a professor at the DeKalb, Illinois, Normal School, wrote in his commentary to Wray's novel:

The low ideals of the villagers and their failure to comprehend the teaching of children finds striking expression in the school premises. Barren and uninteresting without, dingy and forbidding within, the schoolhouse spoke of ignorance, of lack of thought, of abandonment to untoward conditions, that found reflection in the pupils' attitude. Rude, hostile, indifferent, disorganized, these children are altogether too sophisticated in the art of guile and deceit, in evasion and resistance, in disobedience and successful rebellion. Anarchy names correctly the condition which essentially exists. But this is not a condition native to these boys and girls; they are not innately bad. They are the inevitable product of the education to which they have been given over. (p. 8)

Even though public sentiment varied over the level of support for public schools, the principles of free schools, citizen education, and equitable taxation had been addressed in the framing of state constitutions, as well as in the U.S. Congress. The voices were contentious, however, especially when it came to taxes. In 1809, De Witt Clinton “argued against local taxation for the support of public schools on the ground that such taxation would set the people against education” (Maxwell, 1912, p. 306).

In 1820, statesman and orator Daniel Webster argued that public schools serve all the people, not just those with children who benefit from public schools. “We hold every man subject to taxation in proportion to his property, and we look not to the question whether he himself have or have not children to be benefited by the education for which he pays” (Webster, cited in Butler, 1915, p. 338).

This politically contentious environment is where the story of school leadership began and continues to this day.

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## THE LIVES OF SCHOOL LEADERS

### The Stories of Horace Mann and Cyrus Peirce

Like Thomas Jefferson before him, Horace Mann dreamed of something more than abstract principles of education. He left a career in law and politics to build a *system* of public schools, becoming the first Secretary of the State Board of Education in Massachusetts in June 1837. Most of his friends thought him a fool for taking up the cause of education, but to Mann, “The interests of a client are small compared to the interests of the next generation. Let the next generation be my client” (Tharp, 1953, p. 136). His earlier training, however, served him well, for as soon as he took up the cause of the *common schools*, Mann became the target of vicious personal and professional attacks that would continue as long as he remained in public education.

The first wave of controversy surrounded the doctrine of separation between church and state in public schools. Ten years before he took office, Massachusetts had passed such a law. Mann was a strong supporter and saw to it that the normal school curriculum and books in the first school libraries followed that doctrine. As a result, both he and his budding school system were attacked as being antireligious. According to educational historians Butts and Cremins (1962), “He was accused of conducting godless, immoral schools which bred delinquency and vice” (p. 273). Mann was savagely attacked by extreme orthodox religious leaders, who saw the future of secular schools as a threat to traditional ideas that equated morality with religion. Other attacks came from legislators, who believed that the entire common school experiment was too costly

for the public to finance, and even from the Association of Masters of the Boston Public Schools, who vehemently disagreed with Mann's views on teaching, curriculum, and student discipline. Butts and Cremins (1962) wrote that the educational opposition believed that "authority . . . not love, must be the backbone of the teacher-student tie" (p. 220). As if this three-pronged attack was not enough, in an ironic turnabout, the very strata of society Mann hoped to serve, the poor immigrant groups, also opposed public education. Their opposition focused on the laws of compulsory attendance, which prevented their children from earning the extra money that these immigrant families so desperately needed.

In the face of all opposition, Mann persevered and continued to build a system of public education in Massachusetts. Structurally, it began with the building of the first normal school, that is, a school designed to board and train aspiring teachers. He found a vacant building in the village of Lexington that needed "carpentering, painting and whitewashing, all tasks to be completed by the first principal" (Tharp, 1953, p. 152). However, that was just the beginning. Mann not only had to lobby the state for public funding, but also had to raise additional private funds. In fact, throughout his career in public education, both he and his colleague, Cyrus Peirce, had to use their personal funds to keep various educational projects moving forward. Parenthetically, both men started (and ended) their careers earning the same state salary of \$1,500 a year.

Mann hired Cyrus Peirce to be the first principal of the Lexington Normal School. Mann initially offered the position to several individuals with religious backgrounds. Although that might seem odd given his views on the separation of church and state, the candidates were highly esteemed educators who would be able to buffer the extreme orthodox attacks on public education. Mann first approached Thomas Gallaudet, a prominent educator and founder of a successful school for the deaf, but Gallaudet declined. Mann then offered the position to the Reverend Jacob Abbott, who also said no. Mann went on to offer the position to three other religious men, with the same negative responses, before turning to his longtime supporter and the principal of the Nantucket High School, Cyrus Peirce—his sixth choice—to become the first

normal-school principal in the nation. Peirce agreed to become not only the principal but also the sole lecturer, director of the model school, and janitor (Tharp, 1953, p. 152). As the date of the new school's opening approached, there were delays in the delivery of books, maps, and globes, along with a new innovation called a blackboard. Thus, instead of opening on April 19, the anniversary of the Battle of Lexington, the first normal school opened 2½ months late on July 2, 1839.

From Peirce's 1839 journal entries, his work-day combined teaching and teacher training. Peirce would teach at the normal school from 8 to 9 a.m., then go to the model school with his normal-school students and teach there from 9 to 11 a.m. At 11, the model school recessed until 1 p.m. The afternoon session went from 1 to 3 p.m. Normal school recessed from 11 a.m. until noon and then continued until 5 p.m.

As for Cyrus Peirce, he recessed never. He rose before dawn to set the fires going in the cast-iron stoves in his little school building, and in winter he arose at intervals all night to keep the stoves going. He sat late over his desk, writing down the events of the day, and the progress of the great experiment. (Tharp, 1953, p. 156)

In another entry, Peirce described his students: "The school now consists of twelve scholars [all young ladies]. They seem industrious and interested; and nearly every one of *fair* [original emphasis] capacity. But many of them are yet backward . . . they want [i.e., lack] language—they want the power of generalization and communication" (Peirce's diary, quoted in Tharp, 1953, p. 154). The students were neither good readers nor good spellers, nor did they know much arithmetic and grammar. Still, it was Peirce's goal to educate them into becoming outstanding teachers.

In addition to opening the Lexington Normal School and two others in the state, Horace Mann started a publication called the *Common School Journal*. Much of what we know about these first years of public schooling comes from Mann's writings and speeches, which were printed in the journal. However, the journal served a more immediate and important leadership function: Mann used communications and the media to fight back against his opponents, specifically through

“public meetings, county institutes of teachers, annual reports to the legislature, and a biweekly publication” (Butts & Cremins, 1962, p. 256).

In the first issue (in November 1838), Mann wrote:

None of you is so high as not to need the education of the people as a safeguard; none of you is so low to be beneath its lifting power. . . . There is a certainty about their [i.e., immigrants'] political and social powers—while there is a contingency depending upon the education they receive—whether these powers will be exercised for weal or woe. (quoted in Tharp, 1953, pp. 159–160)

In this journal issue, Mann referred specifically to the Irish railroad workers, people who, along with other hard-working but poor immigrants, helped build the country. “It is impossible for us to pay them in kind; but there is a compensation . . . which we have the ability to bestow. We can confer the blessing of education upon their children” (Tharp, 1953, pp. 159–160).

When it came to the topic of the common school, Horace Mann spoke with the same passion, if not religious fervor, as his opponents. In a speech in Boston on the Fourth of July, 1842, he said, “Select schools for select children should be discarded. Instead of the old order of nobility, a new order should be created—an order of Teachers, wise, benevolent, filled with Christian enthusiasm and rewarded and honored by all” (cited in Tharp, 1953, pp. 177–178). Mann did not remain in public education until his retirement. He returned to politics and later became the president of Antioch College.

### The Story of Ella Flagg Young

Ella Flagg Young began teaching in 1862 at the age of 17. The physical conditions of Chicago schools were not unlike those described for the rural schools of the period: poor equipment, lack of ventilation, and overcrowding.<sup>3</sup> Young’s rise into administration, however, was rapid. By her second year, she was named head assistant and 2 years later became principal of a new “practice school” of the City Normal School. Like Peirce, Young took her duties in teacher training very seriously. Not every student was fit to become a teacher, she thought.

Her actions eventually led to a conflict with a member of the school board, one of whose constituents objected to a student’s dismissal from the practice school. In 1871, after 6 years as principal, Young requested a transfer back into teaching, this time at the high school level.

Her next opportunity as principal came in 1876. The leadership of her school, and later her district, focused on teaching methods and democratic decision making, aiming to raise teaching standards and build a broad, flexible curriculum. Based on her own experience, Young was convinced that teaching and testing could not be made into mechanical processes. “Many methods were like the mechanics in military drills but wholly unsuited to the play of thought” (Young, cited in McManis, 1916, p. 21). “Instead of having a ‘method’ of solving problems, a common practice among principals, in teaching this subject, [Young] had as many methods as there were teachers in her school” (McManis, p. 60). As for classroom noise, “it never troubled her in a room if by it children were getting something done” (p. 68). “In faculty meetings, Mrs. Young insisted on discussions giving free play to ideas of each person, and never attempted to dominate minds and independence of the teacher” (pp. 60–61). She consulted, but did not direct:

[She] championed the cause of the teachers and democracy as opposed to methods which administered schools from the top, regardless of the ideas of the teachers. She refused to work under a regime which reduced school work to the lines of a business corporation and made mere tools and clerks of teachers and principals and assistant superintendents. (p. 96)

As principal, Young supported “newer” subjects, such as singing, drawing, clay modeling, and gymnastics, and she insisted that her teachers participate in community activities; to Young, it was not enough that teachers knew their books if they “didn’t know life outside” (McManis, 1916, p. 157). She herself was active in the surrounding neighborhoods promoting the benefits of elementary education and vocational guidance. Like Mann and John Dewey, she believed that schools had a larger role in society, and that meant she had to learn about political methods and engage in local city politics (McManis, 1916).

In 1887, Ella Flagg Young was promoted to assistant superintendent in the Chicago school system. That year, she also gave an address, the first of many, at the conference of the National Education Association (NEA), an organization that brought together superintendents, professors, and college presidents to discuss the significant educational issues of the day. Young admired William T. Harris, school superintendent of St. Louis, and read his annual *Superintendent Reports* as her professional literature. In fact, ever since the days of Horace Mann, annual reports of superintendents had been referred to as the most scholarly discussions on education in the country. Young's own NEA addresses, monographs, and reports were no exception. Intellectually, she was the peer of Dewey and William James, both of whom she invited to speak to the teachers of the Chicago school district.

Just as some teaching methods had reduced the independent thinking of teachers, so, too, the centralization and business management practices reduced the independent thinking of public school administrators. These reforms came to Chicago in 1897. Two years later, Young once again resigned from a position "which hampered her and gave her no freedom for growth" (McManis, 1916, p. 51). Her critique of education was not limited to its mechanistic teaching methods and centralized business practices. Young recognized that public schools faced other obstacles: from parents, who wanted the same education for their children that they had received long ago; from taxpayers, who wanted the least expensive curriculum to ease their tax burdens; and from educators themselves, who wanted to keep schools "aloof from the life of society" (p. 82). Implicit in this criticism, however, was an understanding that schools were bound to past traditions and culture.

#### *The Practitioner and the Professor: Two Scholars*

Young's resignation from the Chicago school system in 1899 allowed her to accept an offer from Dewey to become both a student and instructor at the University of Chicago. She took courses in philosophy while at the same time advising Dewey on the development and operation of the university's laboratory school. Working together, these two great educators

wrote six monographs. When Dewey left the University of Chicago because of a conflict with its president over the running of the laboratory school, so did Young. She returned to the Chicago school system to head the City Normal School. Once again, Young emphasized the free and independent judgment of faculty and students. That said, she had a reputation for being outspoken and would "not hesitate to tell the individual or the faculty what she thought on a question or issue" (McManis, 1916, p. 142).

#### *Controversy as Superintendent*

Her tenure as superintendent began in 1909 and ended in 1916. The last 3 years were stormy due to controversies ranging from textbook selection to teacher unions to the selection and purchase of building sites. Young actually resigned in 1913 but agreed to stay on when the school board refused to accept her resignation. In later years, she openly regretted that decision because as she wrote, "I violated one of my pet theories. . . . [W]hen a person resigns he should never go back to the position" (cited in McManis, 1916, p. 166). In her last few superintendent reports, she returned to the most significant themes of her career: democracy, teachers, and a diverse curriculum. Young never would accept a

school system [that] lacked confidence in the ability of the teachers to be active participants in planning its aims and methods. . . . Why talk about the public schools as an indispensable requisite of a democracy and then conduct it as a prop of an aristocracy? (p. 198)

At every level, Ella Flagg Young was a democratic leader. On her retirement, the *American School Board Journal* praised her leadership while acknowledging the prejudices she had encountered throughout her career as a woman:

Mrs. Young was easily equal, if not superior, to the able men who preceded her in the Chicago Superintendency. She endured "personal political" conflicts. Beneath and behind many of the "school troubles" which arose, particularly during the past three years, there was a silent opposition and resentment that can only be explained as the basis of an unconscious assumption of male superiority. (1916, p. 26)



## The Story of William Maxwell

For a quarter of a century, beginning in the 1890s, William H. Maxwell was a big-city district superintendent in Brooklyn and New York City. Like Mann and Young, he was of the generation of educators who combined leadership with both scholarship and public service. He wrote about all aspects of school and district leadership. Of one reformer who was advocating high-stakes standardized testing—the latest educational reform of that era—Maxwell wrote (in 1916): “One flash of Horace Mann’s insight would be worth a thousand miles of your statistics” (cited in Callahan, 1962, p. 122). Like Young before him, Maxwell argued vigorously that scientific management (i.e., the cult of efficiency) and its excessive demands for data-driven decisions would turn teachers into bookkeepers. It was not that Maxwell opposed testing, accountability, and efficiency, but rather he opposed wasting teachers’ time and importing the latest fashions in business practice into education. He believed that tests should be pragmatic; that is, he judged a test’s value by whether or not it provided new information to experienced teachers. As for efficiency, Maxwell argued that the ultimate end or measure of a successful education was what a student went on to do in her or his adult life. T. H. Harris in Louisiana would later come to the same conclusion. However, according to Callahan (1962), few educational leaders at the time dared to speak out as vociferously as Maxwell did against big business and the direction being taken by school leadership. Maxwell wrote of the great problems facing education and the duties of school principals in an 1892 report (included in Maxwell, 1912) and his conclusions are summarized in the next section.

### *Problems Facing Education*

Every solution proposed involved an increased expenditure of money. Immeasurably more effective, however, than money—vital though money is—to uplift the school, are the love and skill of the devoted teacher (Maxwell, 1912, p. 345). Love for children and teaching skill, to his mind, are the greatest things in a school.

Maxwell (1912) argued that it was a school leader’s responsibility to communicate the

function of public schooling to the general public. The responsibilities included

- providing educational opportunities for all citizens to enable them to make a living (p. 321);
- providing an education of the highest quality, by which he meant not an equal education, but rather an education appropriate to the differences in intellect among all children (p. 322);
- providing an education that reflects the spiritual inheritances of the different races and cultures, including the scientific, literary, artistic, institutional, and religious contributions that diverse communities make to our society. “As education is the work of the school, it is obviously, then, its function to introduce the child to his spiritual inheritances,” Maxwell said (p. 333), both in mind and body.

As the school superintendent in New York City, Maxwell described the difficulties of providing adequate physical education where there is a lack of space. He related the problems of play and athletics to the lack of after-school activities, citing the crowded tenement house as an evil that “must be eradicated” (Maxwell, 1912, p. 326). As an educational leader, he argued passionately for better housing for the poor:

The school should and must at all waking hours do all that its resources permit. To supply what the home, even under the most favorable conditions, loses by moving from agricultural to urban life; but if the home and its whole influences are not to be obliterated among the city poor, the city must see to it that the so-called working classes are enabled to live in homes where homely virtues have a chance to flourish and where children have space to play. (Maxwell, 1912, p. 328)

Although Maxwell may not have succeeded with every aspect of this ambitious agenda, he was successful in changing the physical structures of schools. The new schools in New York were “the finest in this or any other land—great, light, and airy structures, with playgrounds on the roof—all over the city . . . never one [school]

shall be built without its playground (Riis, 1899/1957, p. 240). Maxwell's (1912) broad social agenda was open to the charge of paternalism. He responded, "It is justified when private initiative fails to root out an evil that is sapping the vitality of the nation at its root, the home life of the people" (p. 327). Of the many in-school programs he initiated, one was to feed schoolchildren: "What a farce it is to talk of the schools providing equal opportunities for all when there are hundreds of thousands of children in our city schools who cannot learn because they are always hungry!" (p. 328). In an era of extreme poverty, the policy should be to feed children "well-cooked food at cost price" (p. 402).

Maxwell (1912) attributed weaknesses in curriculum and instruction to two facts:

first, that teachers were not as well educated or trained as they are today; and second, that in the absence of interesting subject matter, they required pupils to commit to memory dry and useless details in order to fill up the prescribed time. (p. 333)

He proposed a curriculum based on children having "a progressive knowledge of the outside world" (p. 333). From algebra to geometry, he thought the emphasis should be on solving problems and invention; from language and literature, art to manual training and physical exercises, the emphasis should be on real-life experiences, not ordinary reading, writing, and drawing exercises. He also pushed for subject areas to be taught thematically.

But always, it was the lack of an adequate budget that created educational problems. Maxwell approached the budget from two perspectives: cost-effectiveness and educational value. Given his educational arguments that schools needed to function inside of society, he embraced the idea of keeping schools open longer hours. At first, he uncritically accepted the analogy of a factory: the longer the hours a factory is in operation, the higher the productivity. Why not schools? After implementing this reform in New York City, however, Maxwell found that this was not cost-effective. Factories could show a definite increase in productivity for the added costs of staying open longer, but schools could not. In education, the costs

resided always on the inputs, not outcomes. Thus, he reversed his position on this reform.<sup>4</sup>

During his tenure, Maxwell found himself in a serious budget controversy with the New York City comptroller. The issue was music education. Maxwell (1912) argued:

In a school that has good music are almost certain to be found good discipline, good results in other studies, and an inspiring school spirit. These statements are elementary. To abolish its teaching in the New York school, or even to reduce the small amount of time now devoted to it, would be a disgrace to our city. Perhaps, however, Comptroller Grout would not abolish it, but would simply discharge the special teachers of music. But experience has amply demonstrated that music cannot be successfully taught without the aid of specially trained music teachers. (p. 59)

Maxwell compared the costs of music instruction in New York (15 cents per pupil) with those in Boston (22 cents per pupil) and Providence (30 cents per pupil). He concluded:

Under these circumstances, your committee cannot recommend either the abolition of the teaching of music or a reduction in the corps of music teachers. Comptroller Grout made no opposition last summer to the spending of \$48,663.50 for music in the parks to entertain the public; why does he begrudge \$72,000 to teach six hundred thousand children to sing? (p. 59)

A generation later, T. H. Harris of Louisiana would face a similar dilemma regarding the importance of teaching of music (and art) without receiving adequate funding.

#### *Duties of the Principal*

The roles of superintendents and principals are continuously changing, especially with respect to supervising instruction. Maxwell (1912) complained that "our schools are suffering from the presence of too many supervisors that are relieved from the work of teaching. And yet in many of our schools the supervision is neither of the right quality nor sufficient in quantity" (p. 16). By supervision, Maxwell meant:

[The principal] should know the plan of work in every class. He should know exactly what every teacher is teaching and how she is teaching it. These two things he may find out by inspection and examinations; not stated examinations, but sporadic tests used as elements in teaching. The principal who has to wait until the end of a month or the end of a year to determine by a written examination whether a given stint of work has been accomplished, is lazy and inefficient. The stated monthly examination by the principal is probably responsible for more machine teaching, more injurious cramming, than all other causes combined. . . . The principal's inspection should be hourly, daily. In it, or in allied work, he should spend his entire time during school hours. . . . [T]he keeping of records and the like should be done outside of the regular school hours. (pp. 19–20)

The objective in every principal-teacher interaction was to instill in every teacher the ability to “think for herself and to discover truth for herself” (Maxwell, 1912, p. 22); otherwise, Maxwell asked, how can the teacher teach pupils to think for themselves?. The greatest danger and the one Maxwell saw most frequently in principals' practice was when they turned teachers into “mere machines” by demanding that teachers do everything exactly as it is prescribed. Maxwell announced “the first duty of the superintendent,” that is, to “step in and secure to the class teacher that reasonable liberty of thought and action, without which no teaching can be effective” (p. 24).

Although the managerial duties of the principal could not be ignored, especially school safety and sanitation, Maxwell saw human relationships and educational judgments as the primary duties of the principal. Principals must ensure that the children with special needs, physical or otherwise, were properly diagnosed and placed in appropriate classes.

He should endeavor, with the aid of his teachers, to discover particular aptitudes and talents in his pupils and should advise with pupils and their parents as to the most fruitful course of education work. . . . There is no man in the community who can do so much to insure the right distribution of talent as the schoolmaster, if he will but study his pupils and give honest advice to parents. (Maxwell, 1912, pp. 17–18)

For Maxwell, educational accountability was a daily—if not hourly—school leadership responsibility, whose success could only be judged in terms of a productive citizen's life.

### The Story of Angelo Patri

For most of his career, which covered the first half of the 20th century, Angelo Patri was an elementary and middle school principal in District 99 in New York City. Throughout his long, distinguished career, he demonstrated the ability to continuously learn on the job, to adapt to the changing dynamics inside and outside of his school, and to begin again.<sup>5</sup> His is a story of leadership as service as he worked to transform his school into the community's school.

#### *Patri the Teacher*

Patri's (1917) account of his first day as a teacher is chilling. His principal led him to a classroom:

He opened the door and pushed me in saying, “This is your class.” Then he vanished. There were sixty-six children in that room. Their ages ran from eight to fifteen. They had been sitting there daily annoying the substitutes who were sent to the room and driving them out of school. The cordial reception I had been given by the principal held more of a relief for himself than of kindness for me. That first day passed.

“Coming back tomorrow?” a student asked.

“Yes, of course I am coming back. Why do you ask?” (p. 6)

Patri (1917) admitted that he was not strong in subject matter knowledge, pedagogy, or psychology. What he was strong in was discipline, which he had learned from his own experiences as a pupil, being disciplined “all the ten years of my life in school” (p. 7). Fortunately, that was (and often still is):

the standard for judging my work as a teacher. My continuance in the profession depended upon discipline. . . . At the end of my first month I was an assured success. My discipline of the class and the promptness with which I followed up the absentees gained recognition. I was promoted from teaching a fourth-year class to a

fifth-year class. The new class was made for me especially because I was efficient. It was composed of all the children that the other teachers in approximate grades did not want. They were fifty misfits. (pp. 7–8)

Patri (1917) soon found that discipline, at least his methods of discipline, did not work with “those who defied discipline. . . . What was I to do?” (p. 9). He began, not unlike the fictional Miss Jean Mitchell (Wray, 1904), to tell the children stories of his childhood in the mountains of Italy. The pupils listened, and each day, Patri would end “so that more could be expected” (p. 10). Thus, he would bargain and trade: a story for a subject that the school said had to be taught.

“Then a new trouble arose,” Patri (1917) said. It was the imposition of a “method book.” The principal and supervisors would inspect and unless the class was taught in a specific way—that is, “Class, open books to page 37. . . . Two minutes later, ‘Close books. Tell me what you learned’” (p. 11), the teacher would be criticized. Instead of teaching, the game became one of pleasing the supervisor.

After 2 years, Patri became depressed and left. Like Young, he turned to higher education, but all he received his first year were “words, words, words . . . so far away, so ineffectual, so dead” (Patri, 1917, p. 14). Then he took a course with Professor Frank McMurry, who used a text titled *Ethical Principles*,<sup>6</sup> by John Dewey (1909). For the first time in Patri’s life, he saw words that implied action, not the passivity defined by school learning. To him, action meant freedom, not compliance. Moreover,

The knowledge gained had to be used immediately and the worth of the knowledge judged by its fitness to the immediate needs of the child. . . . I realized then that the child must move and not sit still: that he must make mistakes and not merely repeat perfect forms: that he must be himself and not a miniature reproduction of the teacher. The sacredness of the child’s individuality must be the moving passion of the teacher. . . . Under this leadership I came in touch with vital ideas and I began to work not in the spirit of passive obedience, but in one of mental emancipation. (Patri, 1917, pp. 14–16)

When Patri (1917) returned to the classroom, his supervisors objected. “You’ll find those

things may be all right in theory but they will not do in practice” (p. 16), they told him. Once again, Patri left. At his next school, his principal was the exact opposite—he “actually loved school children” (p. 18). Patri took inspiration from this principal, but he was quickly promoted to a high school where the teachers—not the students—moved from class to class for fear of noise and confusion. Within 2 months, Patri transferred schools again. On meeting Patri, his new principal said,

Why, this won’t do, you don’t want to come here. You are only a boy. You are not old enough nor strong enough! The boys in that corner room broke the teacher’s eyeglasses and he was a bigger man than you are.”<sup>7</sup> (p. 21)

The school was a failing school, where

the children were afraid of the teachers, and the teachers feared the children. . . . The antagonism between the school and the neighborhood was intense. Both came from mutual distrust found on mutual misunderstanding. . . . There was no attempt on the part of the school to understand the problem and to direct the lives of the pupils. In fact, teaching the curriculum was the routine business of the day—no more. There was apparently little affection for the children, and no interest in the parents as co-workers in their education. (pp. 21–23)

Fortunately, the principal put Patri in charge of assembly exercises and school discipline. Here, at last, was an opportunity to put his knowledge to practice and test himself as an educator. Patri set up student discipline councils and gradually shifted the responsibility of school discipline to the students themselves. In so doing, he regained his confidence in children, in the power of the school, and in himself. His next promotion was to the position of principal.

#### *A Schoolmaster of the Great City*<sup>8</sup>

The reality was not what Patri (1917) expected:

From six entrances the children surged through the halls and into their classrooms. I had a blurred impression of sound, and color and

motion and many, many children and teachers all going swiftly by. I saw no individual faces, no distinct forms, just the great mass surging past. Stunned and bewildered I stood where I was until I realized that a great silence had settled over the building. The big school had begun its day's work and begun it without me. I sat down at my desk because I didn't know what else to do. . . . The next day was the same—and the next! (pp. 25–26)

Patri (1917) found a uniformity of instruction as he moved from classroom to classroom. Student drawings were all alike (p. 45) as were their compositions—all with the same topic and the same number of paragraphs (p. 43). All the subjects—the three R's—were aligned and sequenced, formalized and logical. It was not what Patri had envisioned. Nor did he find any difference among the parents. “Parents have been trained as [have] the teachers, to think of school as a place where the children are made to obey, to memorize, made to repeat lessons” (p. 50).

As Patri (1917) became more accustomed to being principal, he became aware of other serious problems: the horrific living conditions inside the tenement buildings, the abject poverty of the families and children, the lack of jobs, truancy, gang violence in the neighborhood, convoluted feeder patterns and school boundaries, little parental involvement, overcrowding, student discipline, student mobility,<sup>9</sup> special classes,<sup>10</sup> and the regular fixed school curriculum that never stayed “with a beautiful idea long enough to have it become part of the children's lives” (p. 162). He divided the problems into two categories: the community and the school. In many instances, he saw that neither the community nor the school would own the problem (p. 67), and if only one addressed a problem, it could not solve it (pp. 83–84).

At first, Patri (1917) looked to the local school board and central school officials for help. He later recalled the advice of the school's kindly old janitor: “Don't stir them up. . . . I've been in this business for thirty years and I have found stirring them up won't do. If they say it is raining, put up your umbrella, but don't stir them up” (p. 61). When Patri told a member of the school board how the school boundaries were causing hardships to many families with multiple children, he was rebuked.

What's the matter with you anyway? You're not playing the game. You knew this was a six-year school when you came to it. Then as soon as you get here you begin stirring up trouble. You're only a beginner, you'll get your full school when your turn comes. (pp. 61–62)

### *The First Parent Association*

The next steps were political. Patri (1917) asked teachers and parents to form an association. He would organize a constituency and “get a reputation” (p. 104). But even that step was not enough. According to school law, an outside group could meet only four times a year at a school. To the parents, school issues demanded more frequent meetings. To persuade the board to change the rules, the association decided to put someone from the school on the board. Up until then, no member of the board had a child attending the school. Once that was accomplished, the association held their meetings monthly.

At first, Patri allowed the parents and the teachers to decide the agenda of the association. They set up committees according to individuals' interests. But soon, each committee came to him for his support, arguing that their particular issue was the most important one for the school. Because of the parent-community association, the school was now in danger of being pulled apart by competing interests. Patri's leadership lay in his ability to find a unifying answer that fit the demands of the moment—but then when conditions changed, he could begin again with a different unifying answer to meet the new conditions.

At the same time, other schools took notice of what was happening at Patri's school.

This is getting to be a big thing, the President of the association said. A parent's association in every school! That's a big idea. I have been thinking of it for some time. What do you think of making a statement of policies? (Patri, 1917, p. 113)

The idea of parent associations had caught on in New York City.

### *Community Welfare*

Perhaps the most far-reaching of the many standing committees of the association was one

that “investigated cases of parental neglect, cases of need, [and] cases of truancy” (Patri, 1917, p. 108). It was called the relief committee, and its mandate ranged from providing parents with information on hygiene, clothes, medicine, groceries, and money (in the form of loans) to looking for jobs. The committee announcement read:

Charity is not the primary object of the association. We are not here to make parents careless and dependent. Our object is to help children and this we try to do, though helping them we bring pressure to bear upon the parents to help their own. (p. 111)

Over time, the relief committee joined forces with a local branch of the settlement house. In a statement that summarizes Patri’s educational philosophy, he wrote:

We looked upon the settlement as a moving living force whose idea was one of service and not of power. Free from tradition, we felt that it would be the neighborhood social experimentation station, finding out, working out, and then beginning again, never stopping long enough to standardize. (p. 134)

As ever, Patri (1917) fought to release schools from “the grip of tradition, rules, records, and endless routine” (p. 196). His leadership was a dynamic and constant struggle to “vitalize the curriculum by means of first hand experiences or to push the classroom out into the world” (p. 157), constantly asking “Would the school be equal to the task of keeping the social forces working together, the children always as the center of the effort?” (p. 153).

### The Story of T. H. Harris

T. H. Harris completed his memoirs in 1941, a year after his retirement as state superintendent of Louisiana, although they were not published until 1963 because it was not his intention to wound or embarrass anyone. He kept that part of his promise. For, whatever incident led to his resigning the Baton Rouge principalship and leaving education for the one and only time in his long and distinguished career goes unmentioned in these memoirs.

Education was not just his career. Harris was born into a family of educators and, aside from fishing and hunting, education was his life. Whereas many of his friends used teaching as a way to earn enough money to go on to study law, business, or medicine, Harris did not see those paths as realistic options for himself. Instead, he followed the traditional career path from teacher to principal-teacher to principal to superintendent, finally becoming the Louisiana state superintendent.

### *As Teacher and Principal*

Looking back at the turn of the last century, Harris (1963) said, “Public officials in those pioneer days . . . had never seen any fine buildings and demanded none. They were accustomed to cheap wooden structures that cost only a few hundred dollars” (p. 66). Generally one or two teachers taught ungraded classes under primitive conditions, with uncomfortable furniture and no libraries. Teaching in the elementary field was barbarous, elementary textbooks were thoroughly bad, and library books for small children did not exist:

[The] *McGuffey’s Readers* were excellent from the standpoints of morals and literature. From the standpoint of child-interest they were very poor. There was little in them that appealed to the children who had to use them. They were, however, much better than the old *Blue Book Speller*, but they were not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with the readers of today. (Harris, 1963, p. 43)

Harris (1963) considered the content and methods of teaching of science to be a waste of time:

The time devoted to science was wasted. We studied physiology; but did not learn how to play, keep vermin out of the house, the importance of personal cleanliness, ventilation, taking care of teeth, watching for bad tonsils, and what to do in case of bad cuts and broken bones. Instead we learned the names of the organs of the body, their functions, the names and functions of the bones, muscles and teeth—information of no value whatever to us. . . . The general science was more sensible than the physiology, but we

gathered no specimens to make it real and interesting, as we could and should have done. (pp. 76–77)

Of a book on astronomy used in one high school where he worked, Harris (1963) wrote, “My deliberate judgment is that Professor Steele wasted his time writing the book, took money under false pretenses selling it, . . . and I should have been playing marbles or fishing instead of studying his book” (p. 77).

### *Professionalizing School Leadership*

Up until the 20th century, public school leaders needed to have careers outside education in order to earn enough money to live. The low salaries (about \$200 per year) prohibited a teacher from moving into administration. Therefore, school district superintendents were laymen. Generally speaking, they were honest, capable gentlemen; but they were ignorant of schools. The same was true for the position of state superintendent, Harris (1963) said:

[The] office was a sinecure and the occupant of it a figurehead. He was selected by politicians for rounding out the ticket geographically and for his ability to make a noise in the campaign. He was not expected to do anything after election, and he proceeded faithfully to do nothing. (p. 94)

Teachers and principals could not look to the state for assistance in improving schools:

I made my own course of study and selected the textbooks I desired to use. Of course, the children paid for them. The course of study was the result of bits of information picked up at [my previous teaching positions]. The State Board of Education accepted it without question and placed its stamp of approval upon it. (p. 76)

When another principal asked Harris how his school had received high school accreditation:

I replied that all he had to do was to put down on paper a lot of junk about courses of study, textbooks, and teachers, and send it to Baton Rouge. I told him the State Superintendent reported at the office once a month to collect his salary; and that if he got to it on one of these

visits, he'd open the application for approval and present it to the State Board of Education. (p. 91)

State school support was negligible; there was no state supervision, and no advice or suggestions for improvement came from state school authorities.

Principals had to both teach and supervise teachers, Harris (1963) said: “Time for supervision had to be stolen from my classes” (p. 89). In Baton Rouge, “I taught two or three classes and devoted the rest of the day to supervision, though the term was not in my vocabulary at the time. I made it a rule to visit every classroom in the system every day (not a good plan of supervision) and to have a few words with each teacher” (p. 106). The average educational level of public school teachers was probably not beyond the seventh grade.

Under Harris's state leadership (1908 to 1940) Louisiana established and enforced educational standards for school leaders: a bachelor's degree and 5 years of teaching experience for all superintendents. The State Board of Education passed a resolution requiring parish superintendents of education to earn certificates in examinations based on certain professional subjects and calling for full-time service on the part of these local officials, with a minimum salary of \$600 per year. The purpose was to place local leadership in the hands of teachers. “One of the arguments advanced in favor of the employment of successful teachers as parish superintendents of schools,” Harris (1963) said, “was that these trained and experienced school men would be able to aid teachers in planning and executing their teaching routine in a successful manner” (p. 161).

### *Leadership and Management*

Classroom supervision may not have been in Harris's vocabulary when he was a principal, but as state superintendent, he secured passage in 1914 of the Burke Act, which authorized the hiring of supervisors of instruction. Prior to this authorization, the practice was for parish/district superintendents to visit schools, observe classes, teach demonstration lessons, and hold clinics, teacher institutes, and staff development workshops. The superintendents, Harris (1963) said, “soon realized that there was a business side

which demanded attention” (p. 161). Other duties involving finances, school tax elections, drafting school laws and regulations, transportation, discipline cases, misunderstandings, and correspondence were

too important to be neglected. . . . The parish superintendents, especially of the larger parishes, soon saw that they would have to choose between the professional and the business sides of their offices. They lacked the time to do both. And they naturally, and wisely, selected the business side. (pp. 161–162)

Concurrently, a decision was made that the high school principal “should be an executive, administrator, and supervisor instead of a teacher,” Harris (1963) said. “Gradually, the principals of the large schools gave up teaching and devoted their time to administration and supervision” (p. 163). The new supervisory role in education was described as follows:

Usually a highly successful lady teacher would be employed as parish supervisor of classroom activities in the white schools.<sup>11</sup> The supervisor would visit schools and observe the teaching. She would point out to the faculty the important things she had seen in the teaching, especially the valuable things. She would aid the principal and teachers in developing a teaching program for the school. In cooperation with the teachers she would prepare desirable objectives to be attained in the various subjects and the out-of-class activities. In short, the supervisor was a *helping teacher* [emphasis in original]. Nagging and fault-finding were from the first taboo, and my impression is that these pernicious faults found but small place in the system of supervision. (p. 162)

### *School Improvement*

Harris (1963) laid out an ambitious vision for his state superintendency. It was to establish a system of high schools; improve the physical plants of all schools; strengthen the courses of study; raise the standards and training for teachers, principals, and parish superintendents, as well as their salaries; improve vocational departments; consolidate several thousand one-teacher country schools; establish a state equalization

formula for school financing; and create a state support system “to respond to the demands of public sentiment” (p. 114). His accomplishments were many, for both White and Black schools, but Harris was also not afraid to admit his own mistakes. In perhaps the only first-person account we have of Louisiana’s provision of free textbooks for schoolchildren, Harris opposed Governor Huey P. Long. Here is his account:

A few days after Governor Huey P. Long took over the office of Governor in May, 1928, he called me to his office and said he wished me to hear him dictate the free school book act. He proposed to furnish textbooks free to children attending elementary and high schools, both public and private, and to pay for the books out of the proceeds of a tax on natural products severed from the soil, such as oil, gas, salt, sulphur, sand, gravel, and lumber. I advised the Governor not to include children attending private schools, reminding him that practically all private schools were affiliated with the Catholic Church and that the Constitution prohibited the use of public funds to aid religious institutions. Governor Long took the position that my viewpoint was unsound, that he was proposing to help *children* and not *schools* [emphases in the original]. I told him I was in sympathy with his purpose, but I believed the insertion of such a provision would destroy the act. He replied, “I am satisfied. I am a better lawyer than you are, and books for children attending private schools go in the act.” And they did. (p. 159)

When parents and local school districts challenged the law, the appeal went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In mid argument, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes stopped the opposing counsel, “asked a few questions and then stated that further arguments were unnecessary” (Harris, 1963, p. 160). The court upheld the Louisiana act. Harris, however, found one justification for his position. Taxes had not been collected prior to the opening of the school year, and thus, the state did not have the money to purchase or store the textbooks. Governor Long put pressure on the banks and had them loan the state \$500,000 to purchase the books. Some of the local parishes still refused to accept the books, so Harris rented a warehouse to store them, figuring that people would choose a free book



rather than pay for one. To smooth over relations with local parishes, the state agreed to buy back useable textbooks that parents had bought with their own money for one third the price. Politically the policy worked, but Harris called this an “economic mistake on our part” (p. 161).

Looking back on his state tenure, Harris (1963) would recall other mistakes. The curriculum issue was music and art education:

We decreed that *every* high school should employ music and art supervisors. We were too much on a bread and butter basis; we were neglecting the finer things in the nature of children. The scheme was ridiculous on its face, and I am surprised that I ever agreed to do it. In the first place, we did not have the specialists for these new fields of instruction. Usually only *one* specialist could be employed, and only in rare cases was one found who could handle both music and art. Generally speaking, she could not handle either. But she was required to look after both. In the second place, neither field was organized and our office was not prepared to set up standards and direct the work. We had made a blunder, but we were averse to admit it, and hung on till most of the superintendents and school boards asked us to lay off. The result of this experiment was to create a public sentiment against two important subjects and to postpone their introduction into the school system. (pp. 135–136)

In 1935, Harris (1963) had decided to retire. Huey Long, now a U.S. senator, called him and offered his support if he would run for office. Harris declined. Long persisted, asking for specific reasons for Harris’s decision. Harris explained that while he was out of state attending the National Education Association conference, Long had persuaded the state legislature to pass a law turning over the public school budget to the Governor’s office, effectively making the state superintendency “helpless in opposition” (p. 169). Harris, who had fought to professionalize education, saw this move as relinquishing all employment decisions to partisan politics. Long argued the opposite view. He believed his budget act prevented local parish school boards from playing politics with principalship appointments. The two men talked and listened. At the conclusion of this Friday night telephone conversation, Long admitted that Harris was right and

promised to help change the law in the next legislative session. For the last time, Harris agreed to run for the state superintendency. The decision was announced immediately. Two days later, on the following Sunday, Huey P. Long was assassinated. But in the next legislative session, the school budget law *was* changed.

### THE HISTORICAL LESSONS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The history presented here challenges much of the thinking and practices that characterize today’s 21st-century school leaders, as well as many of us involved in both the preparation of administrators and K–12 policy making. Previous histories may have left readers with the impression that past school leaders were more talk than action. Contemporary descriptions of leaders in the first century of public education label them *scholars*, *philosophers*, and *statesmen*. The personal narratives included here offer far richer perspectives of their lives. During that first century, school leaders’ use of rhetoric was a significant aspect of their leadership roles, yet none of them remained aloof from any strata of society or above the political fray. Even when they argued to keep partisan politics out of their schools, their goals included building constituencies that would support their visions for public education.

Their use of rhetoric was not only political, however, but also intellectual and educational. They spoke continually of curricular concepts and instructional methods, and they advocated the need to revitalize the professions of teaching and administration. They publicly articulated the purposes of public education, emphasizing democratic ideals and practices along with community involvement, uniting concepts and actions. However, unlike rational philosophers, who seek universal meanings for their ideas, the concepts and actions of these school leaders differed according to the context: era, geography, and administrative role. In a material sense, their school leadership was unique, contextual, and in the process of being re-created.

The French historian Foucault (1972) reminds us that concepts—and especially the words used to describe them—change with time, relationships, and contexts. For example,

the term *democracy* held a different meaning for each school leader. To Mann, democracy meant participating in public discourse through town meetings, newspapers, and professional journals as he attempted to educate the public on the responsibilities and benefits of public education. He viewed the intersection between democracy and public schools from a societal perspective. To Young, democracy was an essential process in teaching and curriculum development, as well as in educational decision making. She opposed organizational arrangements, such as centralization and standardization, that took power away from teachers and administrators. Maxwell and Harris used democratic forums to fight to keep education in the hands of educators rather than turning it over to businessmen or government officials. These two men relished their political exchanges with some of the most powerful business and government officials of their era. Angelo Patri's notion of democracy centered on building community support around his school and on giving teachers and parents voices in schoolwide decision making. The retelling of history underscores the uniqueness of their concept and actions, which Foucault dubbed discursive practices.

Foucault (1972) described discursive practices in terms of strategic choices, which range from technical improvements, new notions, and conceptual transformations to discoveries. Each strategic choice is an autonomous event that reflects both the continuities and discontinuities found throughout history. This conceptual framework operates within, not apart from or above, the level of material conditions. Unfortunately, many of the material conditions revealed in these personal narratives are still problems today. A partial list of these continuities include: poorly prepared teacher candidates, inadequate funding and public support, overcrowded schools and classrooms, low salaries, low status, the predominance of women as teachers, a narrow "bread and butter" curriculum, authoritarian practices in teaching and administration, prescribed and mechanical methods of teaching, and the necessity of managing facilities and finances while still attending to curricular and instructional issues. Despite enormous investments of time, energy, and dollars in trying to make technical improvements, these material realities persisted then, as they do today.

The school leaders we met in this chapter had to adjust to these realities. For instance, Cyrus Peirce had hoped to teach higher-order thinking and educational theory to the young female candidates at our nation's first normal school. Instead, he had to revise his curriculum and teaching to focus on basic arithmetic and grammar. Yet, in so doing, neither he nor Horace Mann ever gave up on turning these "young scholars" into outstanding teachers. Likewise, Ella Flagg Young set high standards for those entering the teaching profession. She continuously nurtured teachers' judgments rather than imposing her own methods on them. She spoke of the long silences at faculty meetings as she waited for teachers to come up with their own ideas. At the same time, she had to confront the hierarchical pressures to impose required teaching methods and programs that had been adopted by the district. Although she later expressed regret over her own compliance, she did not regret either her trust in teachers or her rigorous approach to teacher training—even after one such decision to weed out a candidate with political connections cost her her job. What that event taught her was that she needed to learn more about local city and school board politics.

Similar adjustments were evident in the other narratives. Both Young and William Maxwell continuously sought to minimize the impact that business practices and centralization had on their teachers and students. They became prolific writers and used professional forums, including the National Education Association, to win support for their ideas on curriculum and leadership. Maxwell and Harris worked to establish legal structures to support professional cultures by raising certification standards for both teachers and administrators. Although such restrictions today have been attacked, these school leaders witnessed far worse political abuses prior to certification requirements, especially in the area of personnel. When Angelo Patri was told to be patient and not stir up controversies, he began to organize student disciplinary councils, parent-teacher associations, and community welfare committees to provide both political and social support on behalf of his school's community. In each narrative, we saw how specific circumstances and contexts led school leaders to make their own strategic choices.

All of these school leaders encountered individuals bound by tradition,<sup>12</sup> from students, teachers, and administrators to parents and power elites. Yet, they persisted in working with these groups to create new structures, new curricula, unique teaching methods, and a new professional culture in education. Their leadership extended beyond making technical improvements and reforms; their practices challenged both tradition and externally imposed reforms. These school leaders recognized how important it was to build strong community-school relationships that respected the gifts that students and teachers brought to school.

When strategic choices are seen as autonomous events rather than a progressive evolution of ideas, then the concept of leadership shifts from the role of system maintenance to one of system building and rebuilding. Within this educational framework, every act is, in a sense, a creation and a discovery. Even re-creations are intentionally different and original, depending on the given material conditions of the specific era. These school leaders were efficient system builders, not loyal, obedient, and efficient system managers. They used their knowledge and skills concerning education and society to develop and implement new curricula and instructional methods. As advocates, they communicated the purposes of public education to constituents and engaged in politics. As civic leaders, they worked on behalf of their students, their families, and their local communities. Collectively, their strategic actions may be characterized by eight historical dimensions of school leadership, detailed below.

### **1. School Leadership That Is Democratic With a Small “d”**

Their democratic leadership was not just an espoused ideal but rather the necessary practices in and out of the school building. Each of the leaders brought democracy to classroom teaching and administration out of a “love for children” and an understanding that teachers need a democratic environment to grow, to learn, and, ultimately, to teach. The leaders built structures around their ideals including student councils, teacher councils, and parent committees that distributed decision-making powers. They fought against supervisory practices that promoted a single method of teaching

or a test-driven or standardized curriculum. They opposed scientific management as a whole school/district/state reform. In contemporary terms, their democratic leadership incorporated knowledge, performance, and a disposition. It was *the* leadership standard.

### **2. In-Depth Knowledge of Curriculum and Instruction**

Their knowledge of curriculum and instruction extended to the what (i.e., subject matter content) and the how (i.e., methods) of teaching and learning. In their various roles as teacher trainers, supervisors, principals, superintendents, or state superintendents, this knowledge was at the center of their fiscal decision making. Even the strongest proponent for modern business practices among the personal narratives, T. H. Harris, understood the importance of educators being able to make educational and management decisions about pupil progression, budgets, and personnel matters in schools and school systems.

Each of these school leaders worked to build trust among teachers so that they could think independently and bring interesting real-world social issues to their students. This trust in teachers’ judgments was the basis for classroom and school accountability and the criteria for measuring student learning. Their views of school accountability rested on teachers’ professional judgments and the quality of their students’ adult lives after graduation<sup>13</sup>—which was intended to raise the level of society as a whole.

These school leaders believed that curriculum at every grade level should go beyond the three Rs, enriched by courses in music, art, physical education, singing, literature, storytelling, science, and social studies. They certainly did not agree on any of the details regarding the grade-level configurations or subjects to be taught, or even the content of subjects; what they did agree on was that teachers, principals, and superintendents needed to experiment with ideas so as to engage students in learning. Thus, they developed and implemented diverse, flexible curricula and promoted differentiated instruction among teachers. They also argued for coursework that incorporated what Maxwell referred to as the “spiritual inheritances” among the races.<sup>14</sup> To accomplish this egalitarian mission, they sought to transform schools and those

who taught in them into instruments of community activism and social change. Teachers and administrators needed more than book knowledge. Here, too, knowledge, performance, and dispositions converged around teaching and learning.

### 3. System Builders

Before Mann and Peirce, there were no normal schools to train teachers, no practice schools to experiment with teaching methods and curriculum, no organized political efforts to secure legislative votes for taxes and funding, and no forums to influence popular sentiment on behalf of public education. Other state-level educational leaders, such as James G. Carter in Massachusetts, Henry Barnard in Connecticut, and later T. H. Harris in Louisiana recognized the need for a system, long before systems thinking took hold as a theory of educational leadership. For Young, Maxwell, and Patri, the challenges came as they transformed their schools and the systems within which they worked. As leaders, they could not accept the system as complete, finished, and just needing to be managed.

Running schools has always meant long hours and hard work; management was nothing new to these school leaders. Historically, a school leader

bought the water pail, the dipper, and the broom; and he saw that the woodhouse was properly filled and the premises kept in repair. His position was not what the poet calls “a downy bed of ease,” for he was the subject of much comment and criticism. (Johnson, 1907, p. 48)

The leaders described here learned organizational and management skills through doing the job. Management and administrative routines were the virtues of necessity, to be attended to on top of and outside of what has been depicted here as public school leadership. Harris wrote of this managerial turn with respect to the responsibilities of high school principals, school district superintendents, and his own role at the state level. But even in his advocacy of the “inevitability” of management, there was never the suggestion that management should replace education at the center of

leadership and decision making. He may not have been the lawyer or politician that Huey P. Long was, but he was a strong educational leader who won Long’s respect.

### 4. Community and Social Activism

Patri (1917) wrote, “The school alone could do nothing . . . the home alone could do nothing” (pp. 83–84). He told parents that by “acting together as a moral force in the neighborhood, you are more vital to the education of the children than is the school” (p. 100) and noted, “moral education meant group reaction” (p. 84). From Mann to Patri, these leaders understood the importance of schools being directly involved in community affairs: Teachers needed to become active participants in community life. This was not a philosophical position. During the first century of public schooling, teachers and administrators alike were involved with social issues such as housing, jobs, food, clothing, and hygiene, all of which impacted their students directly. Maxwell argued that the mission of the urban public school was to eradicate poverty in the tenement houses of New York City. He and Patri both described teachers and principals walking the streets of their communities, interacting with parents, students, and families. This practice was so deeply ingrained in the concepts of public school leadership during its early years that even the most vocal proponent of scientific management and business practices, Franklin Bobbitt (1913), called for teachers to be engaged in community work as it was essential to their professional development. He argued:

It is becoming more and more apparent that the teacher of today, who is able to bear social responsibilities that the world is laying more and more upon our profession, must be a man or a woman of the world. . . . This is accomplished only by participation in the full, active life of the world of affairs. (p. 80)

Bobbitt encouraged teachers to leave their classroom, to visit other classes in their schools, in other cities, and states, and to attend concerts, theater productions, and lectures, declaring all to be “absolutely necessary” for sustaining the vitality of the profession.<sup>15</sup>

## 5. Politics

Beyond the borders of the school building, public school leaders practiced politics at the local, district, and state levels. Mann crisscrossed the state of Massachusetts on behalf of public schools, speaking at town meetings to everyone who would listen. He and Young used the print media and met with business and religious leaders, as well as state legislators, who were not always cordial. Mann faced constant political opposition to his ideas and programs. Later, as a U.S. senator, he fought voraciously against slavery.<sup>16</sup> Young and Maxwell were the targets of both personal and professional attacks from opponents. As a matter of principle, Young refused to remain in a position that hampered her and “gave her no freedom for growth” (McManis, 1916, p. 51). Patri transferred to a different school on a number of occasions after getting into conflicts with teachers, principals, and school board members. As a principal, he encouraged teachers and parents to engage in local school board politics. Harris also experienced his share of private and public conflicts. On one occasion, he resigned his principalship of the Baton Rouge High School, never revealing the specific details. What he did write about were his pivotal meetings with Governor and later U.S. Senator Huey P. Long, particularly with regard to the historic textbook decision and the control of the education budget.

Whether the issues were the separation of church and state, free and reduced-cost lunches, free textbooks, or the budget to save music and art, these leaders engaged in political battles that were controversial—often at some considerable cost to their health and careers. Without exaggeration, these men and women are profiles in political courage. What sustained them was their belief in education, teachers, and children.

## 6. Communicators

Roland Barth (1990) devoted a chapter in *Improving Schools From Within* to the idea that practitioners should put their practice into prose. During the first century of public education, many of our school leaders did so. Today, their words are our window into the history of leadership practice. With the exception of Harris, they wrote not so much for history,

but rather to influence their colleagues, policymakers, and the public. Their willingness to share ideas created the professional literature of their day. The best of the annual superintendent reports were not self-promoting summaries of accomplishments but rather in-depth discussions on subject-matter teaching, innovations in curriculum, and managerial advice. What they did was to educate their own generation about the purposes of public schools. That responsibility resides with every generation of school leaders. By putting practice into prose, the leaders described did not leave this task to academicians, policymakers, consultants, or politicians.

## 7. Connections With Higher Education: Professional Community

During this first century of public education, educational leaders from public schools to higher educational institutions met regularly as fellow members of the National Education Association or the National Society for the Study of Education. Today, however, every role has its own sphere of influence. Education has become fragmented. Professors of education have separated from practitioners. The field of educational leadership has separated from curriculum and instruction and from community educators.

Even as early as 1920, K–12 education was fragmented. According to a report published that year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching on the subject of professional preparation, the school system had become

an elaborate hierarchical device that undertakes through successive gradations of textbook makers, superintendents, principals, and supervisors to isolate and prepare each modicum of knowledge and skill so that it may safely be entrusted to the humble teacher at the bottom. (Report quoted by Rickover, 1963, pp. 16–17)

In contrast, Horace Mann ended his career as the president of Antioch College; Young joined Dewey for a time of study and teaching at the University of Chicago; Maxwell invited President and Professor Nicolas Murray Butler (1912) to

write the introduction to his collected papers; Patri studied Dewey's work at Teachers College under Professor Frank McMurry; and Harris was offered the LSU presidency on three different occasions. If their writing had elevated the field of education as a whole, then their connections with higher education elevated these school leaders as individuals who valued learning for themselves. Then, as now, higher education provides a source of research ideas, a place to reflect on ideas and to experiment, and a respite from political strife and stress. That said, the connections of these leaders to higher education did not solve the persistent problems of K–12 schooling.

### 8. Radicalism as a Disposition

To many educators today, the term *radicalism* is unpopular. However, the word had a distinct meaning during the first century of public education. James Harvey Robinson (1921), a contemporary of these school leaders, described it as a disposition to believe that the future will look far different from the past (p. 229). When it comes to leadership, it is one thing to espouse a reform and quite another to take action and bring about change. The public school leaders in this chapter were activists who worked against the grain, distinguishing good practices from bad practices. At the same time, they understood that schools serve an important conservative function for society by transmitting knowledge, values, and culture from one generation to the next. They knew as practitioners that parents, taxpayers, lawmakers, and even other educators were essentially conservative individuals who based their ideas of good education on their own past experiences. However, all these public school leaders held their ground, opposing tradition for tradition's sake. To quote from Angelo Patri (1917), "I thought in terms of service, they thought in terms of tradition" (p. 62).

The public school leaders described in this chapter did not win over their opponents in each and every conflict, but they nevertheless made their educational and democratic positions clear to constituents and worked tirelessly on behalf of public schools and our profession. They left us their legacies for us to rediscover and re-create.

### BACK TO THE FUTURE?

Toward the end of the first century of public education, educational leadership completed the managerial turn, whereby business values eclipsed the values of democracy in education. Governments, too, shifted their roles vis-à-vis public education from that of protecting the constitutional rights of all citizens to becoming the central authorities, dictating structural, curricular, and accountability policies for public schools. To a person, the school leaders you have met in this chapter would be opposed to today's 21st-century reforms—from vouchers, to prescriptive, drill-focused reading and writing programs, to the high-stakes role of standardized tests—because of what they believed to be fundamentally sound public education logic. Their opposition, however, would not have been limited to a debate of management versus instructional leadership; rather, first-century school leadership defined itself more broadly, encompassing democratic leadership, community education (Decker, 1975), and social justice (Furman & Shields, 2003). Mann, Peirce, Young, Maxwell, Patri, and Harris all saw public schools as essential to social change.

My reading of these school leaders' accounts optimistically suggests that today's narrow reforms are more temporal and expedient than inevitable. But for change to occur, the field of educational leadership will have to travel back to the future. This chapter outlined *how* school leaders in the first century accomplished their goals, politically as well as educationally. The personal and professional stakes were as high for them as they are for us now.<sup>17</sup> Yet, yesterday's school leaders found the time to reflect on education and write down their ideas. While we, generations later, are all in debt to them for their writings, they saw this intellectual activity as something more than providing a historical record; they understood how their words, written and spoken, were essential to their success as public school leaders.

### NOTES

1. Outside of the school building, the century experienced a civil war, the end of slavery, the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, a massive wave of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe,

World War I, the economic depression, and the rise of fascism in Europe and the Pacific leading up to World War II.

2. Teacher:student ratios mentioned in the various texts ranged from 1:77 in Chicago to 1:50 in a class of discipline problems in New York City.

3. According to the Superintendent's Report of 1860, the teacher:student ratio in Chicago was 1:77.

4. Later New York City superintendents implemented variations of the community school model, seeking to build closer relationships among the schools, civic groups, and public agencies (Seay & Wilkinson, 1953). By 1910, 55 cities "provided recreation through the use of schools and playgrounds" (Naslund, 1953, p. 261). The full story of community schools needs to be told, especially the school leadership of Elsie Clapp. Ms. Clapp's relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt and John Dewey spanned the first decade of the 20th century to the mid-1930s. Her work in Kentucky and West Virginia building "community schools" is a unique American narrative (see Stack, 2004).

5. I have written about Angelo Patri's leadership before (Bogotch, 2002).

6. My 1909 edition is titled *Moral Principles in Education*.

7. According to Anthony Vihotti (n.d.), Angelo Patri was slightly taller than 5 feet and weighed about 100 pounds.

8. This is the title of his 1917 autobiography.

9. "Some years our transfer figures are larger than our register" (Patri, 1917, p. 135).

10. Special classes included: the atypical class, the anaemic class, the backward class, the posture class, the speech class, and the discipline class. At one point, Patri (1917) became so frustrated with the proliferation of special classes that he wrote, "We're simply turning out more candidates for specials instead of making the specials useless" (p. 187).

11. It would be at least 10 years before the Black schools had their own system of teacher supervision (Harris, 1963).

12. Throughout this chapter, I have tried to distinguish between two meanings of the term *tradition*. In the history of public education in the United States, democratic ideals and practices are part of our tradition and characteristic of U.S. school leadership in its first century. The word was also used, often by the school leaders themselves, to depict what they perceived to be unreflective existing practices that persist without educators critically questioning their effectiveness.

13. "I would judge the school by its product and dismiss questions of courses of study and methods" (Maxwell, 1912, p. 35). Harris stated similar beliefs.

14. That is, among European immigrants of different nationalities and ethnic and religious background. Throughout this century, American Blacks

were educated, if at all, in a number of public and private systems separate and not at all equal to the public schools described in this chapter.

15. In his 1955 Horace Mann lecture, "The education of free men," Ernest Melby described a proposal whereby "teachers divide their day or week between teaching children and youth in school and work with adults in the community. Think how vital and interesting the teacher would be were she to come to her schoolroom direct from facing community problems" (p. 56).

16. On a personal level, Mann opened his house to the first Negro applicant to the West Newton Normal School, Chloe Lee.

17. This one sentence elicited strong comments from practicing and aspiring school leaders. The sentiment I heard was that, in today's times, the role and pressures on public school leaders is much greater. Readers listed issues such as pay for performance trends, NCLB (the accountability movement), alternative certification, the rise of women leaders, single-parent/dual-income families, SES gaps, achievement gaps by race, charter schools, and so on. In this context, one school administrator who also teaches a graduate principal preparation course in New York City wrote me the following email. "[My graduate students are] very much perplexed about the sense of social action in education—not because of the idea, but because of the political ramifications (bills to pay, pensions, loss of position). It seems that the climate for the folks mentioned in the book was different for them than it is now for us. Interesting that the 'self preservation' mode taken by us is not dissimilar to what is going on around the world—me first! This very idea of being courageous is the starting point of my [class] discussion: Why is it that few people have the courage to take on issues that were discussed in your chapter? Is it due to job security? Is it due to a lack of in-depth knowledge of curriculum and instruction? Is it due, as you stated in your chapter, to a bowing to tradition and power? Or is it, as is the case in NYC, that the system is too big and any change submitted by one individual will be swallowed up by the *educrats* downtown? To me, Dr. Bogotch, the argument always seems to come down to what education is for an individual. If education is practiced based on 'hand me down' prescriptions/practices without questioning it, then the system permeates. If we question what education is and build a theory of action behind it from teacher on up, practice it without fear or retribution, then we might begin to see a surge in activity from the position you are advancing. This is where I am currently in my career. I'm beginning to answer what education is and building a theory of action behind it while continuing in my work. Thank you for raising the issues" (a New York City school leader).

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