BOOK REVIEWS

Kelly L. Patterson and Robert Mark Silverman (Eds.), *Schools and Urban Revitalization: Rethinking Institutions and Community Development* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

*Schools and Urban Revitalization* is Volume One of a series, adapted from a recent issue of *Community Development*, geared toward empowerment through community engagement and an increase in grassroots leadership capacity. Published through a partnership between Routledge and the Community Development Society, the series seeks to provide timely research which can inform policy making and practice in the rapidly changing environment in which community development professionals operate. Patterson and Silverman ask us to reconsider the role of public schools in inner-city revitalization through a two-step process, first looking at the role of institutions, then at the role of schools in community planning.

*Schools and Urban Revitalization* includes contributions from 18 scholars from various disciplines. Part I (Chapters 1 to 6) looks at the history of older, dying industrial cities and attempts to reincarnate them as centers for higher education and medicine; that is, the *eds and meds* model of anchoring development around large universities, hospitals, and other place-based institutions. As industry and other private businesses have weakened in declining cities, anchor institutions have replaced commerce and manufacturing as drivers of urban renewal. Kelly L. Patterson and Robert Mark Silverman argue that public schools should bridge the gap between the anchor institutions and the grassroots community organizations. Part II (Chapters 7 to 11) consists of case studies from five cities where public schools were involved in the community development process, and elaborates on how those efforts resulted in grassroots participation. The various contributors explore the potential for public schools to emerge as anchor institutions in their own right.

In Chapter 1, Silverman and Patterson express their concern about the inequalities inherent in the relationship between urban social institutions and grassroots organizations of inner-city residents. Black, Latino and other disenfranchised groups have often suffered from a disadvantage in the development process, losing out to anchor institutions as they carry out expansion plans. The question is: How will it be possible to promote community control of the neighborhood revitalization process?

Chapters 2 through 6 provide the history of anchor-based development. In Chapter 2 Silverman reviews revitalization driven by large public, private, and nonprofit organizations, and calls for a move from “institutional rape” to grassroots control. Silverman sees an opportunity to create a more meaningful grassroots voice in the development process by encouraging larger anchor institutions to participate in the improvement of the quality of public schools. This would help the anchor to attract a high-quality workforce.

Janice Brockmeyer (Chapter 3) discusses the constraints affecting neighborhood revitalization in “shrinking cities.” Rapid shrinkage in population threatens to diminish the role of community nonprofit organizations (CNPOs) as cities spatially and politically reconfigure themselves. In the current environment, CNPOs are at a distinct disadvantage when their interests conflict with a large anchor institution. Succeeding chapters are case studies of the efforts of anchor institutions to pursue urban revitalization.

In Chapter 4, Avis C. Vidal examines the case of midtown Detroit, a very weak market, where the Woodward Corridor Initiative sought to align the strategies of three eds & meds institutions, the Henry Ford Health System, Wayne State University, and the Detroit Medical Center. Bethany Welch (Chapter 5) focuses on the Roman Catholic Church, another type of anchor institution, which faced
challenges balancing resident interests in its neighborhood revitalization efforts in Philadelphia’s inner city. And in Chapter 6 Margaret Cowell and Heike Mayer discuss how the opening of the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) new headquarters in Washington DC’s Ward 8, formerly a psychiatric hospital, can possibly be used as a revitalization device.

Part II of *Schools and Urban Revitalization* provides examples of community organizing efforts in a variety of cities. Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., Linda McGlynn, and D. Gavin Luter (Chapter 7) evaluate “The Choice Neighborhood Initiative and Promise Neighborhood in Buffalo” and recommend reconnecting public schools to their surrounding neighborhoods so that they can serve as anchor institutions offering supportive social services.

John Wallace and Samantha Teixeira (Chapter 8) describe the Homewood Children’s Village (HCV), a partnership with the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Social Work. HCV/Pitt created the State of the Village assessment tool, a multimethod, multilevel, community-based participatory data collection and reporting system, which may be used in other communities where it is difficult to engage citizens directly.

Chapter 9 (Brian D. Christens, Jessica J. Collura, Michael A. Kopish, and Matea Varvodić) includes case studies of two Chicago youth organizing initiatives for school and neighborhood improvement: Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) and Youth United for Change (YUC). The authors argue that youth organizing can act as a catalyst for changes in local policy and practice while providing additional benefits such as improved attendance and higher achievement and graduation rates. They provide some empirical evidence of these positive outcomes, but only in the case of YUC.

A case study of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) in Chicago (Chapter 10) by Mark R. Warren asserts that public schools can be the sites for social capital building in low-income communities. LSNA created a parent mentor program where it forged bonds amongst Latina parents, built their leadership capacity, and then challenged them to lead action efforts in both the school and the broader neighborhood. The evidence the contributors present to support their conclusions is more qualitative than quantitative, and, while the data seem to support leadership capacity building among the parent mentors, there is little discussion of the impact on student performance.

Finally, in Chapter 11, Greta Kirschenbaum Brownlow examines community involvement in the public school construction program implemented over the last 15 years by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Brownlow lauds LAUSD’s outreach and community activism around the construction program. Dozens of new schools were built, but now that construction is complete the question is: Will changes in district politics and governance structures allow community outreach activities to continue? Prior to the school construction project, LAUSD was notoriously reticent to engage the community.

*Schools and Urban Revitalization* convinced me that anchor institutions pose a threat to inner-city residents unless the community development strategies discussed in this book are followed—that is, organizing youths and parents and engaging residents of surrounding neighborhoods in planning and coalition building.

The book could have benefitted from (1) a concluding chapter tying all the chapters together, and (2) a section raising questions for future research. Furthermore, *Schools and Urban Revitalization* is to a large degree an advocacy document for grassroots community involvement and many of the authors’ assertions are not well supported by empirical data. Nevertheless, I think that overall the book does a good job of showing how public schools can play an important role in connecting residents to neighborhood development. Hopefully it will stimulate more debate and research on schools as actors in the development process.

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