uls by creating community, mutual self-sufficiency, and cooperative relations with one another.

Living at the margins of the postindustrial capitalist order, we in Detroit are faced with a stark choice of how to devote ourselves to struggle. Should we strain to squeeze the last drops of life out of a failing, deteriorating, and unjust system? Or should we instead devote our creative and collective energies toward envisioning and building a radically different form of living?

That is what revolutions are about. They are about creating a new society in the places and spaces left vacant by the disintegration of the old; about evolving to a higher Humanity, not higher buildings; about Love of one another and of the Earth, not Hate; about Hope, not Despair; about saying YES to Life and NO to War; about becoming the change we want to see in the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Paradigm Shift in Our Concept of Education

In the spring of 2006 Oprah Winfrey devoted two full shows to our failing schools. On both shows she was joined by Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates and his wife, Melinda, who have pledged millions of dollars to address the problems of education.

"It is going to take activism," Oprah insisted. "We can't just sit passively by and act like it's OK."

She began by exposing the glaring inequities in our public schools, contrasting an inner-city Chicago school that lacks even minimal toilet facilities with a suburban school that enjoys an Olympic-size swimming pool. Again and again she cited dropout figures. One million teenagers drop out every year—not only in the inner city but also across the nation. And she pointed out that the ranks of dropouts include scores of whites. A citizen in Shelbyville, Indiana, described the local, mostly white, state-of-the-art high school as a "dropout factory."

The main reason for our failing schools, Oprah said, is that in 2006 we are still stuck with a 1956 model. Bill Gates called our school system "obsolete."
I agree. But we need a lot more dialogue on what we mean by “obsolete.”

By “obsolete” Oprah and the Gateses apparently mean that our schools are falling behind those of other nations in providing the high-level skills needed to compete in today’s global economy. For example, Oprah pointed out, inner-city high school seniors study eighth-grade math.

By “obsolete” I mean that the teaching and learning methods created for the age of industrialization and entrenched in our public schools no longer work in our postindustrial society.

We need much more than “reform.” We need a paradigm shift in our concept of education. We must view the movement to transform our schools as just as vital to our twenty-first-century humanity as the civil rights movement was to our twentieth-century humanity. That is how we must approach our investment in the future. That is how we must demonstrate our love for young people and their creative capacities.

BEYOND THE FACTORY MODEL OF EDUCATION

Our failing schools have been troubling me for decades.

In the early to mid-1960s I taught in the Detroit public schools and was heavily involved in the Black Power movement and the campaign for community control of schools. But after the 1967 rebellion, I decided that the problem was not one of power and control. Rather, the time had come for a profound change in our whole concept of education. So, in 1969 I made a speech on education that has been widely reprinted, including within a collection of the Harvard Educational Review and also as a pamphlet titled Education to Govern that went through three printings.¹

In that speech I warned that the youth rebellions breaking out all over the country were challenging us to go beyond community control of schools and begin grappling with fundamental questions about the purpose of education and how children learn.

At the core of the problem is an obsolete factory model of schooling that sorts, tracks, tests, and rejects or certifies working-class children as if they were products on an assembly line. The purpose of education, I said, cannot be only to increase the earning power of the individual or to supply workers for the ever-changing slots of the corporate machine. Children need to be given a sense of the “unique capacity of human beings to shape and create reality in accordance with conscious purposes and plans.”

Especially in this age of rapid social and technical change, education “is not something you can make people do in their heads” with the perspective that years from now, eventually, they will be able to get a good job and make a lot of money. Some children may accept this regimen. But in a world where kids and adults watch and hear the same devastating news on TV and radio hour after hour, we can no longer treat children and young people like cogs whose “job” is to ingest basics to fit into the economic machine as workers and consumers. Those who feel most acutely the contradiction between the need for change in their daily lives and the abstractness of school subjects will create so much turmoil inside and outside the school that teachers can’t teach and no one can learn.

That is why I said four decades ago that our schools must be transformed to provide children with ongoing opportunities to exercise their resourcefulness to solve the real problems of their communities. With younger children emulating older ones and
older children teaching younger ones, they can learn to work together rather than competitively and experience the intrinsic consequences of their own actions. Children will be motivated to learn because their hearts, hands, and heads are engaged in improving their daily lives.

Since 1969 our neighborhoods in Detroit and other Rust Belt cities have deteriorated far beyond anything that I could possibly have imagined because our schools have continued to operate on the model created over a century ago to prepare the great majority of working-class kids for jobs on the assembly line. There was a time when young people could drop out of school in the ninth grade and get a job in the factory, making enough money to get married and raise a family. But as robots have replaced workers on assembly lines and global corporations have been exporting jobs overseas, school dropouts have become participants in a drug economy that has turned our communities into war zones, where we live behind barred windows and triple-locked doors. Metal detectors and security guards may be able to keep guns and knives out of school buildings, but they cannot keep the chaos that disrupts our communities and the lives of our children out of our classrooms.

In cities all over the country, politicians, school boards, and administrators have come up with all sorts of palliatives masked as "reform." Their mind-set is that of controllers and enforcers. Every couple of years, school superintendents have been replaced with new more military-minded ones deemed efficiency experts. Privatization has been tried in some cities. In other cities like Detroit, the state appointed school boards to replace elected ones.

With the advent of Bush's No Child Left Behind, testing has become more frequent and more punitive, forcing teachers to teach to a sterile and often meaningless test, suppressing the creativity of committed teachers. A lot of parents have gone along because they see no alternative. Their hope is that the enforcers will at least provide an orderly school environment so that their children can get a "quality education," by which they mean the kind of education that will enable them to get a good job in the corporate structure and escape from our deteriorating neighborhoods. But as the chaos spreads, an increasing number of these parents are sending their children to magnet, charter, and private schools, thus guaranteeing that those left behind will be treated little better than prisoners with their teachers serving as little better than wardens.

President Obama has sought to prioritize educational reform by making it a focus of his economic stimulus funding. However, the selection of Arne Duncan as secretary of education means that real change, as Obama said repeatedly during the campaign, will most likely have to come from below. As CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Duncan succeeded in raising test scores slightly, but his approach to education is essentially that of the factory manager.

We need to understand that the "command and control" model has become obsolete in the wake of the information revolution, as Alvin Toffler wrote convincingly in his widely discussed 1980 book, *The Third Wave.* The industrial culture of Standardization, Specialization, Centralization, Concentration, and Maximization, Toffler said, has exhausted itself. Therefore, in every area of our lives we now have the opportunity and necessity to create new decentralized institutions based on the possibilities opened up by the information revolution, for smaller work units, closer ties between producers and consumers, and greater participation in community life.
These conditions of postindustrial society especially challenge educators to reexamine conventional assumptions and to create a new community-based, person-centered model of education. Schools need to leave behind present methods geared to producing workers for highly repetitive work. They should instead seek to incorporate learning into work, political organizing, community service, and recreation. More learning needs to occur outside the classroom. Education should involve real problem solving. Instead of rigid age segregation, young and old should mingle. The years of compulsory education should grow shorter, not longer. Education should be spread out over a lifetime.

But most educators, especially the career bureaucrats of the Bush administration who forced No Child Left Behind down the throats of communities across the nation, are unwilling or unable to accept this challenge. Instead, in the name of "strict accountability," they propose punitive measures to take funds away from low-testing public schools and give them in the form of vouchers to untested private schools. Most Democrats oppose vouchers, but they are just as stuck in the dinosaur factory model.

In recent years, Toffler's views have been confirmed by educators such as Renate and Geoffrey Caine, who project a new paradigm based on the complex, creative, and self-correcting potential of the human brain. Every parent, teacher, and administrator could benefit from reading their two books, Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain (1991) and Education on the Edge of Possibility (1997), both published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. They believe that an education that gives children the freedom to exercise their powers creates the kind of socially responsible, visionary, and creative young people that we urgently need as change agents in the daily lives of our communities.

Today's schools fail, the Caines explain, because they concentrate only on memorization instead of building on the multiple and complex powers of the human brain. Among these are the capacity to function on many levels simultaneously, to change in response to others, to keep searching for meaning, to create patterns, to enrich ideas by linking them to emotions and all the senses, to perceive and create at the same time, to be uninhibited by threats (like rewards and punishment), and to be enhanced by challenges and opportunities to make a difference.

The Caines deplore the way that factory-type schools waste this human potential because they ignore the inner and community life of students and deprive learning of meaningful context. Just as factories have been structured to produce identical/measurable parts, the Caines write, schools are organized to produce graduates who can feed back information on tests—as if the most crucial aspect of education is informational content. They are highly critical of the way schools fragment learning into subject areas while implementing measures of control—measures that repress the natural desires of children to learn and constrict naturally active young people within a confined assembly-line environment.

Schooling that denies children and young people the right to exercise these capacities produces individuals who are in a constant state of rebellion. At the same time, the Caines point out that the formal education system widens the gulf between the generations by destroying opportunities for students to learn from their elders, from their peers, and from younger children. These rebellious youth are perceived by the adult world (especially the police) as threats to an orderly society.
We all know kids who are as smart as a whip but who do poorly in school and drop out as soon as they can because they refuse to accept this violence to their humanity. I view the struggle against this obsolete, hierarchical model of education as a struggle for democracy by and for young people. The factory-type school is based on the profoundly antidemocratic belief that only experts are capable of creating knowledge, which teachers then deliver in the form of information and students give back on tests. Like workers in the factory, children and young people are denied their full humanity by a system that trains them to survive, consume, and produce.

Why do educators still practice the "command and control" model? Because in large measure it became synonymous with education in the United States. The factory model worked fairly well in the first half of the twentieth century when this country was pioneering mass production. Its limitations did not become glaring until the 1960s when we began to move toward a postindustrial society at the same time that young people, through rebellions on campus and in the streets, proclaimed their right to be full participants in deciding this country's direction.

Since then, our schools have been in continuing crisis because so few educators are able or willing to take the risk of leaving behind the old factory model and creating a new one that meets the human and social needs of young people to be creators of knowledge and of social change. Parents have not been much help because their fears for their children's survival have led them to stress staying in school to get a job. So millions of young people, coming of age in a new world where information is everywhere and industrial work is disappearing, experience schooling as senseless, a denial of their humanity and a kind of incarceration. It is because our schools are so wasteful of the creativity of our children that we have become so dependent on Ritalin and are assigning so many children to Special Ed.

Nevertheless, to keep the multibillion-dollar educational-industrial complex of publishers, administrators, teachers, construction workers, and custodians operating, we try to keep young people warehoused in schools for twelve years and more. So half of our inner-city youth routinely drop out or walk out of schools because they are no longer willing to sit passively in classrooms for twelve or more years, receiving and regurgitating information, when all around them the need for change and for creative thinking is so obvious. Having dropped out of school, most of them have no positive social role to play. So, by the hundreds of thousands, they become trapped in petty crime and the drug economy, turning our communities into hoods and ending up in prison, not only breaking up families but creating the largest prison-industrial complex in the world.

At the same time, because of a continuing decline in public school enrollments, each of which represents in Michigan the loss of approximately seven thousand dollars in state funding, our schools are in desperate financial straits. In Detroit, the dropout rate has been steadily increasing. Between 2001 and 2003, we lost about 3,000 students per year. Between 2003 and 2004, the number doubled to 6,600. Recently, the decline in Detroit public schools enrollment surpassed 9,000 students a year. As a result, our school system and our city have confronted rising, intractable budget deficits. Roughly two hundred schools have been closed in the past decade, devastating communities as well as students.
COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION

We are not going to solve the crisis of public education with more money, more computers, new buildings, or new CEOs. To begin with, we need the incentive that comes from recognizing how many of our children have already left it behind. We also need to go beyond struggling about who’s in charge or who’s to blame and recognize how the economic crisis, the urban crisis, and the education crisis are all interconnected. At this point, to develop the minds of our children we need to provide them with opportunities to discover the intrinsic relationship between effort and results through constructive participation in the life of the community along the lines projected by John Dewey.

I cannot understand why so many undergraduate students preparing to become teachers have never read or even heard of John Dewey (1859–1952)—the American pragmatist whose writings on philosophy led me from the ivory tower to the world of grassroots activism. Dewey was a pioneering educational theorist/activist whose name is still largely synonymous with progressive education. “The tragic weakness of the present school,” Dewey said, “is that it endeavors to prepare future members of the social order in a medium in which the conditions of the social spirit are eminently wanting.” He condemned teaching that focuses on “the mere absorption of facts and truths” done as such “an exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness.” By contrast, Dewey argued that “where active work is going on, all this is changed” and “a spirit of free communication, of interchange of ideas, [and] of suggestions results.”

Because Dewey insisted that education is “a process of living and not a preparation for future living,” he called for the school to “represent present life—life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood or on the playground.” “Our present education,” he said, “is highly specialized, one-sided and narrow. It is an education dominated almost entirely by the medieval conception of learning. It is something which appeals for the most part simply to the intellectual aspects of our natures, our desire to learn, to accumulate information, and to get control of the symbols of learning; not to our impulses and tendencies to make, to do, to create, to produce, whether in the form of utility or of art.”

Even the way we organize our classrooms robs children of creativity and initiative. “Rows of ugly desks placed in geometrical order, crowded together so that there shall be as little moving room as possible . . . are all made ‘for listening’—for simply studying lessons out of a book is only another kind of listening; it marks the dependency of one mind over another.” This “attitude of listening”—guided by the expectation that the child will take in “certain ready-made materials” that have been prepared by his or her superiors—ultimately promotes “passivity.”

“From the standpoint of the child,” Dewey concluded, “the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experience he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school—its isolation from life.”

While Dewey was challenging the U.S. model of education, Mahatma Gandhi was forced to address the colonial mind-set that developed under British rule in India. During the struggle for independence, Gandhi recognized that the educational system was “meant for strengthening and perpetuating the imperialist power in India.” It had been designed to supply the next generation of clerks to sign, stamp, and file the paperwork to run
the British Empire. As a result, most elite Indian students found manual work "irksome." However, he retorted, the development of a true intellect necessitated the balanced and "harmonious growth of body, mind and soul." "That is why we give manual labour the central place in our curriculum of training here," Gandhi remarked in a teachers' training camp. "An intellect that is developed through the medium of socially useful labour will be an instrument for service and will not easily be led astray or fall into devious paths."

Against the system of education set up to serve British interests, Gandhi proposed a system of popular education to serve the Indian people. He especially focused on the villages, where the vast majority of the people lived and were left untouched, seen only as suppliers of cheap raw materials for the British or as potential markets for the finished goods the British wanted to sell them. Teach people what will truly help them, he said, not to become servants and bureaucrats for the Empire but to aid them in all the little things of village life. Education, he said, should be of the Heart, the Hand, and the Head. It should give people an understanding of themselves and where they stand in the world and, from there, their obligations toward their neighbor. The three main resources for this popular education, he said, are the community, the natural environment, and the world environment.

Although Dewey and Gandhi were two of the great thinkers of their time, their passings in the mid-twentieth century precluded their witnessing the new social movements of the 1960s and developing a response to the intensified crises of our inner cities. That is why I was fortunate to come into contact with Paulo Freire's ideas in 1979, when my late husband, Jimmy Boggs, and I were struggling to clarify the distinction between rebellion and revolution in the wake of the urban explosions of 1967 and 1968.

Freire was born in 1921 and died in 1997, before the dawn of the new millennium. His ideas and actions have reverberated with teachers and grassroots organizers around the world and have particularly helped to reshape the political landscape of his native Brazil. The power of Freire's ideas is always with me. Whenever I am evaluating a revolutionary strategy or trying to devise one, I find myself recalling his insights, for example, people "cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become human beings" or "The future isn't something hidden in a corner. The future is something we build in the present."

I first encountered Freire's writings through a little pamphlet called Cultural Action for Freedom. In this pamphlet, he used the phrase "naive transitivity" to describe what we and other movement activists in the 1960s were calling "rebellion." For Freire, it was the stage when the masses, conscious that their oppression is rooted in objective conditions, "become anxious for freedom, anxious to overcome the silence in which they have always existed." Freire was very clear, as were we, that this breaking of silence was not just a riot. Indeed, the masses were seeking to make their historical presence felt. He was equally clear, as were we, that it was not yet revolution because revolutions are made by people (as distinguished from masses) who have assumed "the role of subject in the precarious adventure of transforming and re-creating the world. They are not just denouncing but also announcing a new positive."

Or as we put it in Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century, "a rebellion disrupts the society," but "a revolution ... begins with projecting the notion of a more human, human being," one "who is more advanced in the qualities which only human beings have—creativity,
consciousness and self-consciousness, a sense of political and social responsibility.99

Soon thereafter, I read Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and was delighted to discover that his ideas of Education for Freedom, as education that not only makes the masses conscious of their oppression but engages them in struggles to transform themselves and their world, were very close to those that I had been putting forward.10 In this landmark work, Freire critiqued the bourgeois “banking method” of education, in which students are expected to memorize the “truths” of the dominant society—that is, “deposit” information in their head then “withdraw” it when required for tests, jobs, and other demands by overseers. Instead, Freire argued that critical thinking can develop only when questions are posed as problems. This problem-posing method provides no automatic “correct” answer. By contrast, students must discover their own understanding of the truth by developing a heightened awareness of their situation.

Freire's revolutionary method of education has also transformed the way we approach political organizing and struggle, for as he maintained, we must view making revolution as an inherently educational process. Freire argued that revolutionary work must transform the oppressed from passive victims to agents of history, seeking “the pursuit of fuller humanity.” Thus, the emphasis is on people taking control of their own destiny—"self-determination" in the truest sense of the word. Transforming relations means that revolution is not about the oppressed switching places with the oppressors, nor is it about the “have-nots” acquiring the material possessions of the “haves.” It is about overcoming the “dehumanization” that has been fostered by the commodification of everything under capitalism and building more democratic, just, and nourishing modes of relating to people. Critical of the Marxist-Leninist and nationalist parties that had led most of the anticapitalist and anticolonial movements around the world, Freire insisted that what was needed to revolutionize society was not a narrow focus on seizing state power but a cultural revolution in the form of a continuous struggle to transform human relations.

Today, in the United States, if we substitute our cities for the villages of Gandhi's India or the favelas of Freire's Brazil, we are at a similar crossroads. Our educational system has been set up to supply the next generation of technicians and bureaucrats for the global economy, an economy that is fundamentally undemocratic because it destroys our communities, robs us of control over our daily lives, and reduces us to passive consumers. Instead of viewing the purpose of education as giving students the means for upward mobility or helping the United States to compete on the world market, we need to recognize that the aptitudes and attitudes of people with BAs, BSs, MBAs, and PhDs bear a lot of the responsibility for our planetary and social problems. Formal education bears a large part of the responsibility for our present crisis because it produces morally sterile technicians who have more know-how than know-why. At a time when we desperately need to heal the Earth and build durable economies and healthy communities, too many of our schools and universities are stuck in the processes and practices used to industrialize the Earth in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

We can't change the whole system overnight. But we need to know what we would put in its place, and we can take advantage of the present crisis to begin working to create new models with the teachers, principals, and parents all over the city who have given themselves permission to think differently from the powers-that-be. To achieve the miracle that is now needed to
transform our schools into places of learning, we need to tap into the creative energies of our children and our teachers.

In this connection, we have much to learn from the struggles in Alabama and Mississippi in the early 1960s.

In the spring of 1963 the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led by Dr. King launched a “fill the jails” campaign to desegregate downtown department stores and schools in Birmingham. But few local blacks were coming forward. Black adults were afraid of losing their jobs, local black preachers were reluctant to accept the leadership of an “Outsider,” and city police commissioner Bull Connor had everyone intimidated. Facing a major defeat, King was persuaded by his aide, James Bevel, to allow any child old enough to belong to a church to march. So on D-day, May 2, before the eyes of the whole nation, thousands of schoolchildren, many of them first graders, joined the movement and were beaten, fire-hosed, attacked by police dogs, and herded off to jail in paddy wagons and school buses. The result was what has been called the “Children’s Miracle.” Inspired and shamed into action, thousands of adults rushed to join the movement. All over the country rallies were called to express outrage against Bull Connor’s brutality. Locally, the power structure was forced to desegregate lunch counters and dressing rooms in downtown stores, hire blacks to work downtown, and begin desegregating the schools. Nationally, the Kennedy administration, which had been trying not to alienate white Dixiecrat voters, was forced to begin drafting civil rights legislation as the only way to forestall more Birminghams.

The next year as part of Mississippi Freedom Summer, activists created Freedom Schools because the existing school system (like ours today) had been organized to produce subjects, not citizens. People in the community, both children and adults, needed to be empowered to exercise their civil and voting rights. A mental revolution was needed. To bring it about, reading, writing, and speaking skills were taught through discussions of black history, the power structure, and building a movement. Everyone took this revolutionary civics course, then chose from more academic subjects such as algebra and chemistry. All over Mississippi, in church basements and parish halls, on shady lawns and in abandoned buildings, volunteer teachers empowered thousands of children and adults through this community curriculum.

The Freedom Schools of 1964 demonstrated that when Education involves young people in making community changes that matter to them, when it gives meaning to their lives in the present instead of preparing them only to make a living in the future, young people begin to believe in themselves and to dream of the future. As they engage in these meaningful activities, they also begin expressing themselves in meaningful language that is appropriate to the activities in which they are engaged. Thus, the most popular subjects among Mississippi Freedom Schoolers were foreign languages, poetry, and drama. Thus, also, Detroit Summer has given birth to some remarkable young poets who have created year-round poetry workshops for social change and a media center, where young people are exploring new ways of creating community through new ways of meaningful communication.

THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

Just as in 1963 and 1964, when the creative energies of children and young people were tapped to win the battle for desegregation and voting rights, today they need to be tapped to rebuild
our communities and to create a vibrant society and a democratic citizenry.

To understand the current crisis of education and project a better future for our children, we need to begin thinking about how our culture is shaped by the means through which we communicate: the spoken word, the printed word, and the images of the electronic media. No one understood this better than the late Neil Postman, the New York University professor who wrote more than a dozen fascinating books on education and communication. At the end of the 1960s I read his first book, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, coauthored with Charles Weingartner.\textsuperscript{11} It had a big influence on me when I was writing Education to Govern.

In The Disappearance of Childhood, first published in 1982, Postman explained that childhood is a cultural artifact that did not exist before the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century. In the medieval world, when people communicated mainly through the spoken word, children participated in adult activities and became part of the adult world at the age of seven when they were able to follow adult conversations. However, the printing press ushered in an explosion of books and of individualism because reading is a private activity. Individuals reading the Bible on their own gave birth to the Protestant Reformation. Widespread reading also gave birth to the idea of childhood as a period of preparation for adulthood, a period during which the child acquires literacy through a rigorous step-by-step process, at the same time developing beyond immediate gratification and toward self-control and the ability to analyze.

The school emerged as the place within which this civilizing process takes place under the tutelage of adults. Thus, the concepts of childhood and schooling were essentially hierarchi-
cal. Originally schools were mainly for the middle classes. Poor children and children of color worked in the fields, mines, and mills and gained access to public schooling only through heroic struggles. The hundred years between 1850 and 1950 were preoccupied with these struggles. In 1899 these concepts of childhood and schooling were challenged in two landmark books: Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents and John Dewey’s The School and Society. Freud warned that society could not afford to ignore the natural instincts of children. Dewey argued against schooling only as a preparation for life in the future. During their school years, he insisted, children need to be constructive participants in the social life of the community.\textsuperscript{12}

Meanwhile, a new method of communication, the telegraph, had been invented. The telegraph made it possible to send and receive an unlimited amount of decontextualized information from everywhere, 24/7, thus changing the character of information from the personal and regional to the impersonal and global. Since then, the electronic media have wrested control of information from the home and from the school, reaching its peak in TV, a form of communication as different from the printed word as the printed word was from the spoken word. TV is a present-centered medium that cannot give a sense of past or future. Because it involves perception, not conception, it makes no complex demands on and requires no skills of viewers.\textsuperscript{13}

By the time the average American child goes to school, s/he has watched thousands of hours of television. As a result, most children from nonintellectual homes resist the rigorous, linear, hierarchical kind of schooling that was created during the centuries when the main means of communication was the printed word. As Ruby Dee put it, “Their minds have been sucked out through their eyeballs.”
We cannot restore their minds by trying to restore the kinds of schools that were an outgrowth of the print culture. Instead, we need to appreciate that today’s youth have been born and raised with the new information technology of the Web. George Siemens, the Canadian educator, argues that this new information technology has already transformed the way that young people communicate and learn: horizontally rather than vertically, collectively and collaboratively rather than individually and competitively. Siemens recommends that educators celebrate local excellence and innovations, let people teach each other, and allow students to organize themselves. Education, in other words, serves as a model democracy.\(^{14}\)

Through Detroit Summer, a new generation of youth activists is using the new information technology to engage students in grappling with the deepening crisis in our schools. Detroit Summer Collective members Ilana Weaver (an independent artist/rapper who performs as “Invincible”) and Jenny Lee describe how the Live Arts Media Project serves as a democratic model of Freedom Schooling:

In the summer of 2006, Detroit Summer launched a campaign to transform the entire education system in Detroit, inspired by several young people we worked with who had dropped out, or were considering dropping out, as well as some who were organizing in their schools for a change but were suspended or arrested as a result. After attending several community forums on the issue we noticed a glaring piece was missing; no one was asking youth, the people most impacted by the schools crisis, what they thought. There were fingers pointed but no long-term sustainable solutions proposed. We realized that we needed to evolve the whole concept of what it meant to campaign for social change. What would happen if we explored the question of why people drop out as a community, in order to generate solutions as a community, while prioritizing the voices of youth? And what if, instead of a standard campaign 12-point platform, we created a Hip-Hop audio documentary to express our demands? And what if we didn’t just critique the outdated teaching methods that are in place, but also modeled the process of hands-on real life learning? We launched the Live Arts Media Project (LAMP) as an answer to all those questions and an experiment in a different type of community organizing.

We’ve found that the model of Hip-Hop–based community organizing, developed through the Live Arts Media Project, is useful to people in many different places, facing similar crises as Detroit. Since the completion of our first Hip-Hop audio documentary, entitled \textit{Rising Up from the Ashes: Chronicles of a Dropout}, LAMP youth and artist mentors have traveled around the Midwest, California, and as far as Debeishe Refugee Camp in the West Bank, Palestine, exchanging models with other youth leadership projects.

Last year I witnessed a demonstration of the effectiveness of this horizontal teaching/learning process at a workshop conducted for about forty high school students by Starlet and Kendra, two high school members of the Detroit Summer Collective. They handed out sheets of paper and asked participants to fold them into four boxes. In the upper left-hand box they were asked to write “school crisis”; in the upper right-hand box, “individual solution”; in the lower left-hand box, “community solution”; and in the lower right-hand box, “national solution.” Each participant then handed the sheet to the person on the right to fill in. The general discussion that followed was both moving and enlightening, and the forty young participants agreed to take the process back to their high schools.

We need more schools and programs that place a horizontal teaching/learning process at the center of a community-building model of education. One example created by public schools in the deindustrialized cities of New England is a program
called KIDS: Kids Involved in Doing Service. Students at the Moretown Elementary School in Vermont, for example, researched the feasibility of planting trees along the banks of the Mad River to decrease thermal impact on the river, absorb runoff, and enhance animal habitats. Middle school students in Bath, Maine, mapped a historical walking tour of downtown Bath for distribution by the chamber of commerce, local restaurants, and information centers. Lewiston Middle School students restored the interior and exterior appearance of their historic building.

Over a decade ago, the Pew Charitable Trust, recognizing the overwhelming desire of young people to act on behalf of the environment and to help their communities through voluntary service, created Earth Force, a program that helps schoolchildren monitor water quality and solve other environmental problems in their communities.

In Ypsilanti, Michigan, there is a nonprofit organization calling itself Creative Change Educational Solutions (CCES), which provides teachers with training and curricula designed to make connections among the environment, society, and the economy. The lessons are aligned with national and state standards and can be easily integrated into economics, civics, language, or science classes. Teachers who have been trained by CCES talk about how exciting it is to teach in this way. Test scores rise because the kids see themselves in the hands-on projects. For example, clean air really means something to them because many use inhalers. Instead of depending on teachers to choose the lessons, the kids bring lessons to the teachers based on their own experiences.

There may be similar models in other parts of the country. But the importance of programs such as Detroit Summer, KIDS, Earth Force, and CCES is that, by enlisting the energies and creativity of schoolchildren in addressing the urban crisis, they provide children and young people with opportunities to take ownership of problems or issues affecting their school and their town. Thereby, they give meaning to the lives of our children in the present while preparing them to become active citizens in a democratic society. At the same time, they foster the culture of hope and change in the community, which is something we all need, whether we live in the inner city or the suburbs.

In the last two years of his life, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was anticipating this kind of Freedom Schooling when he deplored the way educators were trying to instill white, middle-class values in black youth. King called for programs to involve young people in direct actions “in our dying cities” that would be “self-transforming and structure-transforming.”

This is the kind of Freedom Schooling we need today. Schools and colleges dedicated to this new approach—one far more visionary than the generic call for access to “quality education”—would look and act differently from today’s educational institutions. That is why we must go beyond slogans like “Education, Not Incarceration” and begin exploring new forms of community-based, person-centered Freedom Schooling. What we urgently need are school boards, school superintendents and college presidents, teachers and parents with the imagination and courage to introduce innovative curriculums and structures. We need to create a much more intimate connection between intellectual development and practical activity, to root students and faculty in their communities and natural habitats, and to engage them in the kind of real problem solving in their localities that nurtures a love of place and provides practice in creating the sustainable economies, equality, and community that are the responsibilities of citizenship.
Just imagine what our neighborhoods would be like if, instead of keeping our children isolated in classrooms for twelve years and more, we engaged them in community-building activities with the same audacity with which the civil rights movement engaged them in desegregation activities fifty years ago! Just imagine how safe and lively our streets would be if, as a natural and normal part of the curriculum from K–12, schoolchildren were taking responsibility for maintaining neighborhood streets, planting community gardens, recycling waste, rehabbing houses, creating healthier school lunches, visiting and doing errands for the elderly, organizing neighborhood festivals, and painting public murals!

The possibilities are endless. Our children will be absorbing naturally and normally the values of social responsibility and cooperation at the same time that they are being inspired to learn the skills and acquire the information necessary to solve real problems. This is the fastest way to motivate all our children to learn and at the same time turn our communities, almost overnight, into lively neighborhoods where crime is going down because hope is going up. It is something needed not only by children in cities such as Detroit but in suburbs and exurbs like Littleton, Colorado—site of the Columbine High School massacre.

CHAPTER SIX

We Are the Leaders We’ve Been Looking For

Several years ago I received a poster of a twenty-something me designed by New Mexico artist Amy Gerber, whom I’ve never met. Amy created the poster after she heard me say on *Bill Moyers Journal* in June 2007 that “we need to embrace the idea that we are the leaders we’ve been looking for.”

The phrase comes from the story that Zoharah Simmons, now a University of Florida professor of religion, tells of her experience four decades ago. As a very young and somewhat nervous Mississippi Freedom Summer volunteer going door to door with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, she was reassured when Mrs. Euberta Sphinx answered her knock and said, “Girl, I’ve been waiting for you all my life.”

I am reminded of Zoharah whenever I’m asked, “Where are the leaders for today’s movement coming from?” It seems to me that just as most people are still thinking of revolution as the seizure of state power and instituting wholesale changes from above, our ideas of leadership have been stuck in the concept of the vanguard party created by Lenin over a century ago in a
A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say: “This is not just.” The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just. A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: “This way of settling differences is not just.” This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation’s homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.


CHAPTER 4: DETROIT, PLACE AND SPACE TO BEGIN A NEW


4. Ibid.

7. For more on ICUE, see Kyong Park, ed., *Urban Ecology: Detroit and Beyond* (Hong Kong: Map Book, 2005).

CHAPTER 5. A PARADIGM SHIFT IN OUR CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

5. Ibid., 22, 47.
6. Ibid., 50–51, 76–78.
14. George Siemens writes with a focus on education and learning in the digital age. Most of his writing is distributed digitally on the Internet. See his Web site at www.elearnspace.org/.

CHAPTER 6. WE ARE THE LEADERS WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR

9. Information on new economic institutions' locations and advice on how to organize and learn from their experiences can be found on the Web site of the Democracy Collaborative, www.community-wealth.org/.