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“Community Aware” Education Policy: Enhancing Individual and Community Vitality

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Abstract: This paper advances the theoretical and applied connection between education policy and community development. We call this community-aware education policy, and it is based on Dean’s (2012) conception of human need that is thick (i.e., accounts for a relational context), rather than relying solely on a thin conception (i.e., instrumental view with an individualistic focus). It is our contention that contemporary policy initiatives can be better designed and implemented so that individual and professional goals are attained while family and community well-being are enhanced. Using literature from the field of community development highlighting social support concepts, we “thicken” the concept of social policy to arrive at our theory of community-aware education policy. This theory is then applied to two cases in different national policy contexts: universal pre-kindergarten in New York State (US) and full-service schools in England (UK). Ultimately, we argue for a thick approach to need that results in the provision of a range of services and activities to serve children in schools better, and also the communities in which they reside.

Keywords: community development; policy; rural education; social support; schools; extended schools; pre-kindergarten; ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ need

Política educativa de “Consciencia Comunitaria”: Aumentando la vitalidad individual y comunitaria

Resumen: En este trabajo explora las conexiones teóricas y aplicadas entre la políticas educativas y desarrollo comunitario. Llamamos esta propuesta política educativa de consciencia comunitaria basados en la idea de Dean (2012) sobre necesidades humana que son “densas” (es decir, en relación con un contexto relacional), en lugar de concepciones “leves” (visiones instrumentales con enfoques individuales). Sostenemos que los esfuerzos políticos contemporáneos pueden ser mejor diseñados e implementados de manera que los objetivos individuales y profesionales se obtengan mientras que el bienestar familiar y comunitario mejoren. Basados en la literatura sobre desarrollo comunitario y resaltando conceptos sociales, que agregan “densidad” al concepto de la política social para llegar a nuestra teoría política educativa de consciencia comunitaria Esta teoría se aplica luego a dos casos en diferentes contextos de política nacional: educación inicial universal en el Estado de Nueva York (EE.UU.) y escuelas de servicio completo en Inglaterra (Reino Unido). En última instancia, argumentamos a favor de un enfoque “denso” sobre las necesidades que resulte en la prestación de una amplia gama de servicios y actividades para servir mejor a los niños en las escuelas y las comunidades en las que residen.

Palabras clave: desarrollo comunitario; política; educación rural; apoyo social; escuelas de tiempo completo; educación inicial

Política educativa de “Consciência Comunitária”: Aumentando a vitalidade do indivíduo e da comunidade

Resumo: Este trabalho acadêmico da suporte às conexões teóricas e aplicadas entre política educativa e desenvolvimento da comunidade (em termos de teoria e aplicação). Chamamos esta política educativa de comunidade-consciente, e é baseada na concepção de Dean (2012) da necessidade humana que é “denso” (ou seja, visão em um contexto relacional), em vez de depender somente de uma concepção “leve” (ou seja, visão instrumental com um foco individual). Defendemos que esforços políticos contemporáneos podem ser melhor projetados e implementados para que metas individuais e profissionais sejam alcançadas enquanto o bem estar da família e da

comunidade sejam melhorados. Usando literatura do campo de desenvolvimento de comunidades e destacando os conceitos de apoio social, nós “densidade” o conceito de política social para chegar à nossa teoria de política educativa de consciência comunitária. Esta teoria é então aplicada a dois casos em diferentes contextos políticos nacionais: pré-primário universal no estado de Nova York (EUA) e escolas de serviço completo na Inglaterra (Reino Unido). Por fim, argumentamos por uma abordagem “desno” que necessita de resultados na provisão de uma gama de serviços e atividades para atender melhor crianças nas escolas, e também as comunidades em que residem.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento comunitário; política; apoio social; escolas; actividades extra-curriculares; ensino pré-primário; apoio na adversidade

Introduction

The objective of this paper¹ is to further the theoretical and applied connection between education policy and community development. We do this by promoting community development and social support principles within education policy design and implementation. We label this linking of education policy and community development as community-aware education policy, and it is based on a conception of human need that is thick (i.e., accounts for a relational context), rather than relying solely on a thin conception (i.e., narrowly targets an instrumental view with an individualistic focus). Knowing that social service interventions (including schools) have limited success when located in communities facing isolation, fiscal constraint, and population loss (e.g., Atterton, 2008; Gfroerer, Larson, & Colliver, 2008; McElwee & Whittam, 2012; McGettigan & Gray, 2012; Patarchanova, 2012; Smalley et al., 2010), we describe how existing resources and policies targeted at schools can be re-envisioned to link children, schools, and communities in ways that are beneficial to individuals and their communities. It is our contention that contemporary policy initiatives can be better designed and implemented so that individual and professional goals are attained while family and community well-being are enhanced. In other words, we can address the needs of families and communities while addressing individual needs. If we do not, then each successive cohort of young children may enter school with greater needs than the one before.

This goal of linking education policy and community development is not new. The most visible of these initiatives, the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ), has been very expensive, politically challenging, and ambitiously complicated, hence difficult to replicate. The HCZ by any measure is an extraordinary venture and has exhibited success on a wide range of measures in a 97-block “neighborhood” in Harlem, New York (Tough, 2008). The cost to achieve this success, however, is very high and has been covered in large part by the deep and private resources of friends of Geoffrey Canada, the founder. Recognizing the enormous complications and cost of replicating the HCZ, the United States Department of Education has conducted grant competitions on the concept of Promise Neighbourhoods (USDOE, 2011; Whitehurst & Croft, 2010). The ultimate goal of these grants, however, is to identify strategies to provide “access to effective schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and career” (USDOE, 2010, cited in Miller, Wills, & Scanlan, 2013). The community-aware education policy described here makes the goals of the Promise Neighbourhood accessible to more communities by situating it within existing

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Transatlantic Rural Research Network, Newcastle, UK, April 3, 2014.

initiatives. We also emphasize that the outcomes of community-aware education policy will include benefits to individual children as well as enhancement of the broader community in which the children are growing up.

A community-aware education policy can be implemented within established policies and programs, but only if reconceptualized with a thicker conception of children’s needs and a broader interpretation of policy implementation. We highlight the relationship between a number of dimensions of policy design and implementation: (a) how the individual needs of children are conceptualized, (b) how this relates to community and professional motivations, and (c) what this implies for the community development context. Dean (2010) describes a thick conception of individual need that highlights how social context shapes individual opportunities and identities. It is our contention that current motivations for and perspectives of social policy inadequately reflect Dean’s contextually-based understanding of individual need. We argue the more common form of social policy is characterized by what Dean (2010) would describe as a thin version of need, where the individual is largely perceived as an autonomous actor devoid of local context. Most education policy, we argue, is now premised on this thin conception of individual need. Even the Promise Neighbourhood program sponsored by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) ultimately focuses on the college and career readiness of individuals. Substantially less attention is paid to the enhancement of community vitality and benefit, which would enhance the educational opportunities and outcomes of individual students (e.g., Rothstein, 2004; Schorr, 1997; Warren, 2005). Hence, much current policy design and implementation pays insufficient attention to the social supports, networks, and community context of the individual (McGrath, Brennan, Dolan & Barnett, 2014), while promoting professional knowledge of non-local experts and professionals (Horsford & Sampson, 2014). In fact, a study of a community with a Promise Neighbourhood planning grant finds insufficient community capacity for successful implementation of school improvement (Horsford & Sampson, 2014). It is in this light that we highlight the value of a community-aware education policy approach. It is our thesis that when policy is motivated by a thin conception of need, neither the individual nor the community in which the individual resides are well-served. Attention to a thick conception of need incorporates a better understanding of the significance and synergy between individuals and communities in terms of relationships and support.

The first section of our paper sets out to problematize the wider policy context driving a thin version of need. We argue that education policy paradigms in both the United States (US) and England are increasingly driven by instrumental relationships and neo-liberal priorities. We refer specifically to England, rather than to the United Kingdom (UK) as a whole, because with the increasing devolution of power to the Scottish government, and to a lesser degree that of Wales and Northern Ireland, has come increasing national control in each of these countries over domestic policy, such as education. Indeed, education policy is completely devolved to the separate countries of the UK. Next, we outline a conceptualization of need, building on Dean’s (2010) definitions. Using literature from the field of community development highlighting social support concepts, we “thicken” the concept of social policy to arrive at our theory of community-aware education policy. This theory is then applied to educational examples from two different national policy contexts: universal pre-kindergarten in New York State (US) and full-service schools in England (UK). Ultimately, we argue for a thick approach to need that results in the provision of a range of services and activities to serve children in schools better, and also the communities in which they reside. To be clear, we are not calling for an abandonment of efforts leading to the thin

instrumental needs of children, but rather to complement those service provisions with a thicker conception and policy implementation.

“Thickening” the Conceptualization of Educational Policy and Service Delivery

Thin and Thick Conceptions of Human Need

As one of the most contested moral claims within understandings of welfare, defining need is far from straightforward and, as Dean (2010) notes, it is a “concept that is interpreted in a mind-boggling variety of ways” (p. 1). According to Stone (2012), while need at its most intuitive and appealing level can be taken to mean “what is necessary for sheer physical survival” (p. 85), arriving at objectively definable needs is greatly challenged when we start to unpack some of the things that people value and generally consider to be vital to their sense of well-being. For example, Stone (2012) outlines six dimensions of need: (a) material versus symbolic, (b) intrinsic versus instrumental, (c) volatility versus security, (d) quantity versus quality, (e) individual versus relational, and (f) absolute versus relative.

A brief exploration of a few of these dimensions helps to understand need more deeply in connection to the theoretical framework of community-aware education policy. For example, people have symbolic needs that are more important than their apparent material value. In the case of schools in rural communities, these institutions hold symbolic and economic value in creating community connectedness (e.g., Lyson, 2002; Peshkin, 1978; Sipple, Francis & Li, 2014). Furthermore, Stone (2012) suggests, for example, that arguments for why governments provide education revolve around instrumental needs of enabling people to be more productive workers, to be economic and intellectual contributors to their communities or to be informed and skilled leaders. This tends to detract from the intrinsic value that individuals often seek in the things they may need which, in the case of education, may have more to do with the “sheer enjoyment of learning” (Stone, 2012, p. 91). In connection to quantity versus quality, while policy makers argue the need for formulaic, measurable performance-related criteria in making decisions, welfare is dependent on people’s qualitative experience. Stone (2012) writes that while standardized testing might measure the knowledge of facts, it is not so good at measuring a major consensus on the goal of education—“creative and critical thinking” (p. 94). Finally, the dimension of absolute and relative need is connected to our theoretical frame because there is a strong subjective component to well-being and we cannot discount how people see their needs against what others have—in their communities or in other communities—and perhaps take for granted. The absence or inaccessibility of services means that people are unable to participate in activities which others elsewhere normally can.

In short, these dimensions help to distinguish between what Dean (2010) might describe as thin and thick versions of need. This distinction reflects different understandings of the human subject and how to provide for people’s welfare or well-being. A thick version of need places considerable emphasis on the relational and deeper contexts through which personal identity and being are experienced and ethically constituted, rather than the immediate and instrumental needs that a thin conception offers. If we discount these more complex dimensions, we then adopt what Dean (2010) describes as a thin version of needs that largely sees the human subject in more instrumental and individualist terms. Needs, in this sense, are those that are “minimally defined but which include the things that are

necessary for a person, with dignity, to achieve pleasure and avoid pain” (Dean, 2010, p. xvii). This position can be located within a utilitarian understanding of human welfare that decontextualizes how identities are shaped. Historically, thin versions of need revolve around a series of incentives and disincentives, the purpose of which is to induce individual behaviours in the interests of the wider society. Economic-inspired social policy is also judged in terms of its ability to achieve efficiencies rather than focus on distributive justice, fairness, or community well-being. In this deficit model, “some people will fail because they are less able or less hard working than others, others because they are denied the opportunity to develop their unique skills or abilities” (Dean, 2010, p. 127). Dean argues that thin versions of need are evident within human capital policies, where education, motivational training, and other support are viewed as instrumental in competing in a global economy. Increasingly, we see this thin approach to education whereby schools, educators, and pupils are judged and assessed on their performance in realizing individual academic attainment outcomes (Reay, 2006).

A thick conception of need draws on psychosocial as well as sociological/social anthropological accounts to offer a wider perspective on how humans attain satisfaction and well-being (Scott, 2012). This version of need is critical of individualistic analyses and policy prescriptions that are devoid of social perspectives in how people live their lives. Thick needs “are optimally defined and that includes the things that may be necessary for a person truly to flourish and to share a good life” (Dean, 2010, p. xvii; see also Scott, 2012).

It will be evident from this discussion that adopting a thick approach to need brings us necessarily to the question of choices in the distribution of resources. As Stone (2012) also reminds us, we have to bear in mind how distribution affects those things we hold in common. Education, for instance, can be viewed from either a “traditional goods” view where, as individuals, everyone should receive equal access and should receive equal shares (irrespective of how that happens—through vouchers, home schooling, etc.) or from a “commons view”, where the merit of education provision also lies in how well it contributes towards a sense of shared learning and “cohesive community” (Stone, 2012, p. 60). As an institution that distributes both individual and collective benefits, education can either exacerbate inequalities or strive to build resilience against its wider effects; therefore, choices exist about what kind of educational provision children should receive. Against the backdrop of deepening structural inequalities within society and their deeply corrosive effects on the nature of social relations and outcomes—in terms of disengagement, ill health, declining trust, and so forth (e.g., Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010)—we argue that both prevention and early intervention, through targeted and universal supports, become all the more necessary to educational provision.

Thin and Thick Conceptions of Need in Education Policy

We argue that a thin version of education policy, while capable of achieving targeted outcomes, is detached from the multidimensional realities and interdependencies impacting on people’s needs. Thin approaches do provide benefit, given the expertise and knowledge we can expect from specialization and professionalization of services in education, psychology, medicine, social work, and so on. For instance, if a child is poor and hungry the school can provide a free lunch; if the child is struggling to read, specialists can apply their knowledge to assist. Note that both of these examples have a thin conception of need and are instrumental in their approach to a solution. Moreover, these examples are increasingly being driven by outcomes of individual academic performance and attainment, which are

largely a preoccupation with personal utility and individual human capital gains, economically motivated and leading to highly standardized approaches by school leaders (Eppley, 2009). What these two examples do not include are any attention or connection to the underlying source of the need, being the family or broader community. The social configuration and consequences of education and childhood well-being are highly relational, as we know from studies that identify the influence of social class, gender, and ethnic inequalities (e.g., Reay, 2006). Education is shaped through unequal access to and deployment of resources, forms of capital and available supports. Family and community socioeconomic environments and social capital both influence and are influenced by educational processes (Israel et al., 2001).

A thicker perspective argues that educational provision is far more relational in terms of its opportunities and consequences for young people, parents, and communities. A ‘thicker’ relational view also recognizes that schools are institutions with a degree of agency and capacity at the local level that can provide leadership in forging community development objectives (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). This agency and capacity will be evident in the degree to which schools are both outward-looking and concerned with the future regarding the family and community support systems in which their work is embedded. Thought about more broadly, schools can be the means through which wider community development and social support objectives might be accomplished. Both community and social support literatures can “thicken” the perspective of the potential impact of education provision for individuals, families, and communities. It is our contention that contemporary policy initiatives can be better designed and implemented, such that individual and professional goals are attained (based on a thin conception of need), but also that family and community functions are enhanced (based on a thick conception of need).

The Social Support Framework—Linking Services and Communities

It is well recognized within the broad literature on social support that there is a range of ecological factors in child and family well-being, including family, community, professional, and institutional/policy dimensions (e.g., Dolan et al., 2006; McGrath et al., 2014). Social support provision is generally recognized as significant for coping, resilience, enabling opportunities, and attaining general well-being. While there are a number of ways to define social support, Cutrona (2000) describes it as acts that show responsiveness to another’s needs (see also Dolan, Pinkerton, & Canavan, 2006). Support can take a variety of forms, but a number of distinct categories have been identified: esteem (e.g., encouragement), emotional (e.g., listening and talking), advisory, and concrete (e.g., help with school work; McGrath et al., 2014; Dolan, Pinkerton & Canavan, 2006; Howard & Johnson, 2000). The social support literature also distinguishes between the significance of informal networks—family, friends, and neighbors—in accessing support, over formal support services, i.e., professionals with a responsibility around child protection, namely social services, the police, schools, and health visitors. There is also the semi-formal sphere (Holland, 2012), which includes a range of community and voluntary groups and organizations, that organizes education, childcare and play provision, youth work, parenting programmes, training and employment initiatives, and other ‘developmental’ and ‘compensatory’ forms of support (Gilligan, 2000).² At the more formal (statutory) level, both early childhood intervention/care and primary schools are recognized as key universal services.

²“Development” support is that available to all to strengthen coping capacities, not necessarily because any “problems” present themselves, e.g., generic youth programmes. “Compensatory” are those which address the disabling effects that disadvantage or exclusion can cause, e.g., literacy

While informal support (typically family and friends) is preferred to formal support, the availability of home and friend support cannot be assumed and intervention is required from a range of actors involved in a child’s life, including the school. A focus on the role of agencies, professionals, and the wider community is reflected in child and family support policy development in the US (HeadStart, full-service schools, Promise Neighbourhoods) and England (extended schools, extended services, Sure Start). Those actors working with children or involved in their lives are being directed to act in a more integrative way in preventing risks and promoting more positive outcomes for children. A stronger onus is being placed on a range of statutory, community, and voluntary agencies and professionals to work together at local level in providing outcome-focused support services and to identify and respond effectively to a range of needs. There is also particular emphasis placed on the importance of prevention and early intervention, the rationale being that if problems are identified as early as possible, it prevents escalation into more serious cases (Frost & Dolan, 2012; Parton, 2011).

While there is a need to prevent risks to children and families leading to negative outcomes, the other side to this is the need to increase protective factors, which enhance resilience (Howard & Johnson, 2000). Based on international research on strengths-based approaches and resilience, the approach widens the concept of protection beyond merely preventing harm or abuse (Frost & Dolan, 2012; Parton, 2011). The strength of universally available services, institutions, and activities is viewed as an essential feature in both preventing risks and promoting positive outcomes. Greater levels of need, through socio-economic disadvantage as well as other adversities (e.g., disability), increase the importance of being able to access services and support locally. Indeed, many studies show that people can derive social support from communities of place or communities of interest (Day, 2006). Here, community refers to the network of relations in which people interact and to which they have an affinity, which may coincide with the places they live in or be thought of in terms of their common interests or identities (through, for example, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, etc.). Community can also derive from informal or semi-formal associations and interventions that give people a feeling of connection and security (Neal & Walters, 2008). While compositional factors in the make-up and circumstances of local communities of place matter to well-being, particularly in terms of the balance of risk and protective factors, it is recognized that there are processes and mechanisms through which places have functions—namely, interactions, social supports, and social capital—that influence resilience (Chaskin, 2008; Howard & Johnson, 2000). For instance, lack of amenities and social engagement opportunities may result in social isolation or social containment; a problematic feature for many poor children and families, particularly rural children and youth (Tieken, 2014). Lack of local community resources also limits opportunities for self-expression, social identification, and status recognition that can create stronger feelings of belonging. Community interventions, where they exist, have been particularly important in developing a wide range of positive outcomes for children, youth, and families. In rural communities such as those featured in the following section, where there are distinct social exclusion and service delivery challenges, community organizations and initiatives help to countervail the costs of social and economic participation. In this context, schools can be key to enabling more direct community engagement, interventions, and partnerships as part of a wider and thicker responsiveness to need.

programmes. A third category, “protective”, aims to strengthen coping and resilience in those where there is an identified risk or threat, e.g., domestic violence support.

In summary, a thick conceptualization of need is one that recognizes community context, not just individual utility. The needs of individual learners and communities are multi-dimensional and inter-related, and this recognition can be articulated in how we think about educational policy and its implementation. Young people require support and wider recognition, not only for educational purposes but also as part of a broader attentiveness to well-being. This extends thin conceptualizations of need that are more likely to signal individualized and professionalized agendas than those focused on community interests. We now turn attention to how educational policy in both England and the US can be characterized in terms of orientation to thin or thick conceptions of need.

Education Policy in England and the US: A Consideration of Human Need

The links between social and economic disadvantage, educational failure, and policy activities are long established in the US and England (Benn & Simon, 1972; DES, Central Advisory Council for Education [England], 1967; Jencks, 1973, 1992). Likewise, policy has been advanced to ameliorate the problems associated with poverty and disadvantage in each context, but commonly has focused narrowly on the enhancement of individual-level student achievement. Exceptions exist, notably with the Plowden Report in England calling for attention to the family and community environments in which children are raised (DES, Central Advisory Council for Education [England], 1967). In the US, Geoffrey Canada (Tough, 2008), Richard Rothstein (2004), and Joy Dryfoos (1994) have loudly argued for a much tighter integration (if not blurring) of the full range of services offered to families in neighborhoods while the children attend enhanced schools. It is possible to motivate and conceptualize policy with centralizing influences, perhaps through national policy directives, or more de-centralized, encouraging enhanced delegation for local decision-making. Educational policy may also require school personnel to be focused more or less solely on educational achievement or on a wide range of aspects of well-being. The former may be seen to align with a thin conceptualization of need.

We now briefly illustrate the aforementioned issues and arguments in two contexts (England and the US) that at one time emphasized public policy with a noticeably thick conception of need, yet in more recent decades transitioned to a much thinner conception of need and policy design. We follow each of these overviews of policy with descriptions of specific policies that we will use as cases to explore the ways in which existing policy initiatives can be reflective of and enact community responsive education policy.

The case studies from England and the US are data drawn from previous research. The extended schools case study from England comes from a 3-year evaluation of the full-service extended schools (FSES) evaluation funded by the Department for Education and Skills. The research was multi-strand mixed methods design. The main components of this were: detailed case studies of 17 schools; a statistical analysis of the National Pupil Database to look for effects of FSES on a number of variables; a cost benefit analysis of FSES provision in a sample of 10 projects; brief case studies of nine comparator schools not participating in the FSES initiative; a questionnaire survey of pupils, parents, and staff in case study FSESs and their comparators, repeated across two years; and a final questionnaire survey of all 150 FSESs. Four of the 17 case study schools were rural. The case study presented in this paper is drawn from one of four rural schools. The case studies were detailed and involved repeated visits with interviews of key staff, young people, partner organizations, and parents to analyse activities and process issues in greater detail, but to

focus particularly on identifying outcomes. The case study in this paper reports details that were gathered as part of the data collection, selected to be relevant to the analysis in this paper. However, it does not report in any detail the data from the FSES study. Knowledge of Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) in New York State (NYS) as a case comes from extensive prior research including qualitative (five case studies) and quantitative data (statewide NYS Education Department and Office of Child and Family Services) collection and analysis. These five studies of rural schools, four of which were high-need rural districts, were conducted as part of the Rural Early Education Project in NYS. This project worked at the behest of the state to understand better the uneven implementation of UPK based on geographic variations resulting in rural areas with fewer school districts that provided UPK. Parallel to this qualitative data collection, the team assembled a database merging data from the state education department (NSYSED) and the Office of Children and Family Services. These data in combination allow for an understanding not only of UPK provision but the connection to the surrounding community and the provision of early care, broadly envisioned as both birth to 5 years and beyond the scope of the school building. However, none of those data are actually reported in this case.

England, UK: A Recent History of Education Policy

For a 13-year period from in 1997 in England, educational policy under the New Labour government was characterized by a broad focus (not just a narrow focus on individual academic attainment), the requirement of local stakeholders to implement central government initiatives, and an increasing frequency of reforms (see Cummings, Dyson & Todd, 2012). The twin goals of the policies were raising educational achievement and enabling social inclusion for those most disadvantaged. A diverse range of policy initiatives was devised to encourage enhanced work across agencies (e.g., health and education). Their aim was to link educational and care services (i.e., schools, early years centers, and health and social services) and their respective professionals to raise educational achievement and enable social inclusion for those most disadvantaged. Examples of such policy initiatives include Excellence in Cities, Extended Schools, Extended Services, Every Child Matters, and Sure Start. At the same time a high stakes school inspection regime, informed largely by school exam results, maintained a focus on individual attainment in schools. It seems therefore that policy from 1997–2010 was characterized by a combination of a thin and a thick conception of need, which meant that there was a focus on the individual as an autonomous actor, and also on relationality and the social context of the individual. This combination of thick and thin is explained by New Labour’s attempt to reconcile right-wing and left-wing politics in order to build an ideological foundation. We focus solely on England, since education is devolved to the various legislative bodies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (Northern Irish and Welsh assemblies and the Scottish Parliament). The UK coalition government in 2010 brought about a change to this policy focus. Still centralized (although claiming the opposite), policy on educational disadvantage has narrowed to particular individual and instrumental educational attainments. The previous range of multi-agency initiatives is absent from policy. Instead, the single Pupil Premium is the main instrument that gives a sum of money to schools for each child classified as economically disadvantaged to spend on raising educational attainment. Educational policy based on a thick understanding of need has largely been dropped, to be replaced by an even stronger focus on thin conceptualizations of need, specifically individual-level academic performance. This analysis of English policy is based on data collected over a period of 15

years from a number of government-funded evaluations, including extended schools. Other evaluations were carried out on extended services (Carpenter, Cummings, & Dyson, 2007) and Pupil Premium (Carpenter, Bragg, & Dyson, 2013).

A key aspect of the political context for this policy is a concern with closing the gap between the average educational attainments of high-income and low-income students. By the time young people take their GCSEs (a key national exam in England for 15/16 year olds), the gap between rich and poor is very wide. For example, drawing on UK cohort study data 2003–2007, only 21% of the poorest fifth (measured by parental socioeconomic position; SEP) manage to gain five good GCSEs (A*–C, including English and Mathematics), compared to 75% of the top quintile—a gap of 54% (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). The use of Pupil Premium (e.g., on additional teaching) is likely to enhance some individual competencies in the area of educational attainments. However, this focus on thin approaches ignores the shaping of life chances in the social context. For example, the health and social needs of children themselves and the wider family circumstances can impact adversely on educational needs. Such wider needs of the child are largely ignored by thin approaches. The focus is primarily on schools rather than linking schools with other agencies, and on students rather than children nested in families and communities. In the language of social services literature, this demonstrates a shift to the formal services from a combination of services provided by semi-formal and formal sectors.

Case 1: Extended Schooling in England

Inequalities. Although there had been extended or community schools in some areas since the 1920s, there was significant policy impetus and funding between 1997 and 2010 for extended schools and the organizations to support them (i.e., local education authorities; Cummings, Dyson & Todd, 2012). Typically, extended schools provided childcare before and after school, support for parents, activities for children out of school hours, educational classes for parents, and emotional and educational support for students. What characterized these schools was the complexity of partnerships with the semi-formal sector (with other agencies, with private organizations, etc.) to support this range of provisions. An example is an extended primary school providing education for 5–11 year olds and served a small village in rural Wiltshire. The nearest town of any size is 10 miles away, which requires all teaching staff to assist in the delivery of a wide range of activities including out of school hours activities (KS1 dance, music lessons, netball club, golf club, rugby club, football festival, and cluster cook-a-thon), adult learning (wreath-making workshop, family learning, parent workshop, and ‘the reading rocket’ competition), and parenting support. These were only a small number of the activities provided from the school.

There was a shift in the later 2000s to provision centered on a number of schools in an area rather than offered by just one school. Provision was context-driven, dependent on the particular needs and qualities of an area, and focused on multiple outcomes. The English Sure Start initiative had purpose-built centers that aimed to meet the needs of disadvantaged families of pre-school children. Activities aimed to focus on multiple outcomes. Like extended schools, this was another provision designed to improve individual life chances and, at the same time, to take account of the broader social context and be oriented to the needs and motivations of the local community.

Thick versus thin conceptions of need. There have been multiple initiatives in England since 1997 that may be conceptualized in terms of a goal of improving

outcomes in a range of areas (education, health, and social care), not focusing just on individualized academic attainment for economically disadvantaged children and families. These initiatives have been provided within a universal framework of mainstream services for all. There has been recognition that improving educational attainment entails a focus not just on classroom learning but on pupils’ environment and life chances. Although the rationale of extended schools may be understood as broadly consistent with the neo-liberal project and the achievement of individualized goals based on thin understandings of need, there are many aspects that nudge in the direction of a greater concern for equality and a wider conceptualization of what schools do and are for. Neoliberalism is associated with the increasing marketization of social and educational provision, the individual seen as an autonomous taking care of his or her own needs, and the reduction in both the role of the state and welfare as a concern of public interest (Hursh, 2007). By playing a role in the development of the communities they serve, extended schools may also be understood in terms of a thick conceptualization of need. Extended schools can be understood as a civic project, aiming to play a role in the building of vibrant democratic communities.

Long-term community development and sustainability. Whilst there was no specific model of extended schools for rural areas and funding was the same as for urban areas, an analysis of data collected for the national evaluation of full-service extended schools in the England from 2003–7 (Carpenter et al., 2010; Cummings et al., 2012) suggests the important role of extended schools in rural areas. Even more than for urban communities, perhaps, the homogeneity of the rural community and its needs cannot be assumed. Rural extended schools served a wide diversity of population composition, history of growth/deprivation, and resources (i.e., the particular geography, organizations, and businesses based in the locality, etc.). Extended schools provided opportunities for parents and young people, and also other community members, that otherwise might not be available (adult education, sports, and arts). For example, one extended school (for children aged 11–18 years) served a self-contained community in a rural area of southern England and provided leadership in forging community relationships and developing agencies in different parts of the semi-formal sector. For example, the school delivered its extended offer through eight core areas that included: bringing together professionals from various agencies to provide swift referral of young people and families to expert support (i.e., psychological help); the provision of parenting courses and family learning events; a transition process from primary to secondary school; a continuing professional development strategy across agencies; a group organized by parents to provide information and advice for other parents (including issues to do with employment); a youth council with real input into the school strategy; and childcare and extra-curricular activities before and after school. Examples of activities organized by the parent group include: planning an activities and hobbies family day; writing an activities directory for the town; providing peer support work; producing a parents’ guide to healthy packed lunches; and an allotment/vegetable garden project. In other words, this school was playing a strategic role to enhance the ability of the community to socially and economically develop and educate its children. Research on the impact of the full-service extended schools initiative suggested that early intervention in just one child’s life could save the public purse thousands of UK pounds in terms of future benefits, early pregnancies, mental health interventions, and so forth (Cumings, Dyson, & Todd, 2012). For example, the FSES evaluation found that the economic benefit of just one young person achieving 5 A*-C GCSE grades or equivalent

as a result of the extended school provision (the sought-after qualification at age 16) when they had been predicted A*-G is estimated at £144,000 (Cummings et al., 2007).

Over the decade in which extended schools evolved, the dominant solution to educational disadvantage (i.e., 'educating to leave') changed. Whereas the schools had given some young people an attainment ticket out of deprivation, others were left behind and the communities were worse off than when they started. The rationale for extended schools was now to enrich the community, and provide a sense of pride and belonging in the community. As such the goal of extended schools was perhaps over-ambitious in terms of achievement of community change, unless enacted as part of a wider regeneration strategy. However, data from the national evaluation of extended schools suggest that the individual and community needs of rural community are likely to be better met through attention being paid to a coupled view of schools and communities, with a reintroduction of the role of the semi-formal sector within the formal educational provision. Whilst this model, extended schools, is easily recognizable in terms of meeting thick needs, there is also evidence of its meeting of thin or individual needs. Individual and professional goals can be met, and are not inconsistent with the enhancement of families and the community. Moreover, the removal of the extended schools policy to focus only on individual needs is in danger of increasing the disadvantages experienced by rural communities.

US: A Recent History of Education Policy

A similar shift from thick to thin can be identified in the US. Thick conceptions and approaches to children's need can be identified since the 1960s, when Head Start,³ a federal programme originating during President Johnson's War on Poverty, offered 3- to 4-year-olds from low-income backgrounds a variety of social, nutritional, and educational activities, with an emphasis on involving and educating parents. Notably, Head Start is located in the federal Department of Health and Human Services and, it can be argued, in this way is not encumbered by the constraints of educational policy from the Department of Education. A number of later programmes, predominantly by the Department of Education, were characterized by a broad focus on well-being, a concern for people from the cradle to the career, and the need to involve a range of services and provisions to support and educate individuals and families. This includes Full Service schools, developed in the 1990s (Dryfoos, 1998), as well as the Harlem Children's Zone and replication efforts termed Promise Neighbourhoods (Tough, 2008; Whitehurst & Croft, 2010). Within the scope of these programs, disadvantage is understood as interconnected, experienced in varied ways by individuals and families, and connected to the varied challenges and opportunities of particular geographical areas. But while this interwoven set of ideas and programs continues, the initiatives remain on the edges of educational and community policy, acting as a novel idea to highlight issues, but with little widespread implementation. Even the Promise Neighbourhood program emphasized the narrow outcome of individual preparation for college and career success (without regard for community outcomes). Dominating the policy landscape across the US has been a professionalized school-centric policy, devoid of these community and semi-formal sector linkages and any thick conception of need.

In 2001, President Bush and Congress enacted the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act. The explicit goal of this policy was to enhance the attainment of all children with particular attention to annual English/Language Arts and Mathematics testing of children in Grades 3–8 and once in high school. Through this policy, special attention was paid to the

³ <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs>

educational attainment and accountability of schools and subgroups of students, the qualifications of teachers, and increased parental involvement. The required course of action for a school failing to meet testing targets (based on academic attainment of disaggregated student sub-groups) was to alter classroom curricula, provide additional supplemental educational services (i.e., tutoring), and eventually replace principals and teachers with new appointments. Beyond enhanced communication with parents, there was little focus on what happened outside the school walls and on the social support network of individual children, and hence no attention was given to principles of community development. What was notable about NCLB (2001) was that it continued the expansion of the federal role in educational disadvantage and accountability begun during Johnson’s administration, but did not include any focus on community challenge (e.g., poverty, health, nutrition, and jobs) or the enhancement of social relationships. This professionalized view of school reform targeted highly qualified teachers, focusing resources and attention on reading and mathematics skills and knowledge. This act can be largely characterized as rooted in a thin conceptualization of need. Again, our goal is not to cease attention to a thin conception of need, but to complement the thin conception (e.g., better individual grades, attainment, and jobs) with a thicker recognition of need (e.g., enhance social relationships and support for children), which in turn strengthens communities and enhances community outcomes.

Case 2: Universal Pre-Kindergarten in New York State

Inequalities. The past decade in the US has witnessed an explosion of attention to the leveraging of enhanced early educational experiences for students who may otherwise arrive in school less prepared with early literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills. While the language of politicians and educators is about broad early childhood experiences, this policy lever has aimed at the enhancement of learning opportunities and socialization of 4 year olds in a program referred to as Pre-Kindergarten (Obama, 2014). The recent push by professional organizations, states, and national governments has been on making PreK universal (e.g., UPK) promoting access to PreK for all 4 year olds (Rose, 2010). It has achieved national prominence in the US, and the motivation behind the movement to increase access to PreK programs can be found in the literature on the successes of early care programs (e.g., Deming, 2009) in what is termed Early Care and Education (ECE) and the expanded reach of the K-12 educational system to include PreK programs for 4 year olds. McCabe & Sipple (2011) have examined these “colliding worlds”, including their political, professional, and curricular differences. In short, the ECE world is built upon a set of assumptions and interventions that privilege a thick conception of need, while the K-12 version of PreK is typically designed and implemented using the thin conception of individual need. In addition, the ECE world represents the semi-formal sector described in a previous section reviewing the social services literature, while the K-12 system can be characterized as the formal sector. Table 1 summarizes key differences in the teaching philosophies of the ECE and K-12 worlds. We use these differences to illustrate the thick version of individual need (ECE) and the thin version (K-12). The ECE principles include multiple developmental domains and highlight the development of a child in both a social and cognitive manner. Conversely, the professionalized model of education in schools (K-12) targets almost exclusively the cognitive domains of learning in learning specific content driven by state-established standards.

Table 1

Teaching Philosophies of Early Care and Education vs. the K-12 public school world

Early Care & Education (ECE) in US: Thick conception of individual need	K-12 US public school: Thin conception of individual need
<i>Developmentally appropriate practice</i>	<i>Standards-based learning and accountability</i>
Multiple developmental domains (e.g., cognitive, physical, social and emotional)	Reflect common knowledge and skills to be learned by children of a particular age
Importance of social and cultural contexts	Teachers provide learning experiences to facilitate children's attainment of a common set of content and proficiency indicators (O'Day, 2002)
Individual development	Largely driven by the NCLB, reading and math standards beginning in third grade
Multiple learning styles	Aim to ensure that third grade students are prepared
Play as a vehicle for social and cognitive development (Copple & Bradekamp, 2009)	"Accountability Shovedown" (Hatch, 2002, p. 475)

(Adapted from McCabe & Sipple, 2011)

It is commonly argued that longstanding patterns of inequality in society (income, housing, neighborhoods, nutrition, healthcare, and safety) are correlated to educational inequalities and outcomes. In exploring these inequalities, research and policy attention is focused on urban schoolchildren and the gap (between urban and suburban, poor- and non-poor) in children's vocabulary at the start of kindergarten, Grade 3–8 test scores in reading and mathematics, and graduation rates (e.g., Chatterji, 2006; Coleman, 1966; Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Jencks & Philips, 1998, Reardon, 2011). The debate also rages as to whether blame should fall on differences in the quality of home or school. Advancing the argument that low-SES children advance when in school, but plateau or even regress while out of school, is a substantial literature on "summer set-back." Researchers have documented how children of low and higher SES backgrounds progress on similar learning trajectories during the school year and that children from low socio-economic backgrounds fall behind their better resourced peers during summer months (e.g., Alexander, Entwisle & Olson, 2001, 2007; Lawrence, 2012). But even with this well-established phenomenon, most contemporary policy focuses on school-based, instrumental activities, and resources at the expense of the more holistic, community-based, and semi-formal networks of social support.

Traditional achievement gaps between wealthy and poor, or majority and minority racial groups, however, serve to prompt attention to the literacy and numeracy gaps when children begin formal schooling at the age of 5 (Reardon, 2011). This argument aims to reduce both the need and cost of later remediation (Heckman, 2012). Young children entering PreK from a disadvantaged household are able to overcome some portion of disadvantage, with society often seeing a return on the investment of \$8 for each \$1 invested (Heckman, 2012) in enhanced tax revenues and reduced public spending on teens and adults (i.e., welfare programs and incarceration).

Thick versus thin conceptions of need. We argue that a broad conception of need defines the problems facing children in terms of poor health care, dangerous neighborhoods, lack of access to good nutrition, lack of strong supportive relationships, and less attention to academic matters in the household. This conceptualization is not uncommon, but this broad conception is absent from the actual policy lever (e.g., UPK policy) meant to ameliorate the problem. The instrument is commonly designed narrowly to encourage 4 year olds access to 9 months (the average length of a school year) of free educational programming in schools, with no enhancement of the health, safety, or parental involvement of the underserved child.

In New York State (NYS), there is a unique aspect to the state’s UPK policy⁴ that we describe to highlight a difference between thin and thick conceptions of need that could be embedded in educational policy. The policy requires a partnership with at least one community-based organization (CBO), specifically requiring a minimum of 10% of the state grant to be sub-contracted to a local CBO. While this policy is not in itself premised on a thick conception of need, it does include a more community-oriented view of provision of early education for 4 year olds. In this way, the policy allows the semi-formal sphere to be reintroduced to provision of early care in communities. In addition, it mirrors the goals of Promise Neighbourhoods to create coherent care and education for children throughout their lives. The policy was created in response to the constraints of limited space in urban schools (namely New York City); however, the unintended consequence of this policy may be either to enhance or damage an existing network of early care and education providers in a community. The infusion of resources into the CBO can help balance precarious budgets, but may also draw 4 year olds to a school-based program (free to parents), leaving the CBO with fewer fee-paying children. In this way, this policy demonstrates the possibilities and challenges of community-oriented policy making. The communities where partnerships have served to bolster the existing network of providers offer a model for policy-making intentionally created to benefit schools, children, and families, in addition to their communities (see Casto, Sipple, & McCabe, 2015, for a typology of partnering relationships).

Short-term versus long-term outcomes and needs. The provision of UPK, in conjunction with the community partnership required by the policy, serves several immediate individual and community needs (Casto, Sipple, & McCabe, 2015). The presence of UPK allows parents to rejoin the workforce, with at least a portion of their childcare covered by the school system free of charge. This benefit, while serving the community good by increasing access to the workforce for new parents, is more commonly understood as an individual and private benefit to the family and child. The partnership model in NYS may serve to enhance our understanding of community development-oriented social policy. If PreK policy only allowed state funding to be used in public schools (as it is in some states), the existing ECE sector would lose 4-year-olds to the public system (due to parents choosing a free PreK program in the school rather than pay a fee at a CBO) one year earlier than has been the case for decades in

⁴ The formality and opportunity for the education and care of 4 year olds in the United States is determined individually by each state, and community within some states. New York is one of several states now providing state funding for PreK services for 4 year olds, but the only one to requires a partnership with local community-based organizations (WV requires such partnerships in half of all programs state-wide). Many states that provide PreK funding require the school district to provide the service in its entirety (e.g., OK and OR), completely barring private and community-based programs from receiving state money.

kindergarten. This (mostly private) semi-formal ECE sector traditionally served children aged birth to 4 years. The partnership model in NYS allows for UPK to be offered in public schools, as well as injecting state funding into community-based organizations so they can offer free or reduced fee PreK. In this way, the formal K-12 school sector does not dominate the social service provision, with several benefits for individuals and community. For one, the business of the early care sector remains. This creates choice for parents, with special attention to the fact that the practices and pressures of public schools may not always create developmentally appropriate environments for 4-year olds. The financial bolstering of the ECE-based PreK programs allows for variation in the aforementioned teaching philosophies that can differ substantially, from those in the ECE world to those in the K-12 world. These early care sector businesses also create jobs in the community, and allow parents to re-join the workforce by facilitating childcare for their children.

Long-term community development and sustainability. In addition to the immediate needs described in the previous section, the partnership model of UPK in NYS can be viewed as creating long-term community development and sustainability. By maintaining the semi-formal early care sector, a community gains enhanced employment opportunities for those working in these businesses over time. In addition, a community with high quality opportunities (and choices) for young children is a family-friendly community that can present itself as attractive to young families, as well as businesses interested in relocating in communities that can serve the needs of their potential employees' families. Finally, investment in the education of young children is an investment in the human capital of a whole community.

Discussion: Possibilities for Thickening Conceptions of Need in Existing Policy Initiatives

Why should we be concerned about the link between educational processes and considerations of family and community supports and development? Our first concern is that the dominant policy/political paradigm surrounding what constitutes quality teaching, schools, and education largely decontextualizes these from local community and family circumstances (Eppley, 2009). This thin paradigm, as we demonstrated in both cases (extended schools and UPK) is myopic in its terms of effectiveness and its focus on individual gain. We must not lose sight of the fact that the way schools and teachers can enhance educational opportunities and identities is influenced by the family and community environments (risk/protective factors, social capital, support, etc.) from which children are drawn and inequalities are reproduced.

We therefore argue the case for broadening what it is that schools do and might achieve in promoting positive outcomes for rural children, families, and communities. Much attention has been focussed on urban centers and generating new networks, collaborations, and enhanced student outcomes. We argue, however, that rural communities also have great need but do not have the dense social networks of more populous areas. This bolsters the need to utilize the pre-existing structures, organizations, and resources to enhance the supportive relationships around children as they pursue their educational paths. There is some evidence to suggest that teachers have to engage with young people, not just in academic but in social support terms. For instance, teachers in Howard and Johnson's (2000) Australian study identified themselves as key sources of social and emotional support, particularly for young people with 'tough lives'. At the same time, young people expressed a

strong need for teachers to encourage them in their school achievements and successes in a meaningful way. Studies like this remind us that schools and teachers form a critical part of the protective support system for pupils.

Even in seemingly far more complex and holistic reforms such as the Promise Neighborhoods grant program and its requirement for greater neighborhood coordination, the college and career readiness of students was ultimately emphasized and not measures of community development. Moreover, complex interventions such as the Harlem Children’s Zone are so very complex and expensive that they can be overwhelming and are deemed impractical. Our discussion of community development practices within existing initiatives and policies illustrates how these useful practices can be implemented on a small scale and without dramatic increases in collaboration or expense. At the same time, however, schools and associated professionals are increasingly under pressure to focus their efforts on raising individual academic assessment. This perhaps further underscores the need to integrate their work with other key semi-formal agencies and groups that can be more proximate in the work they do with families and communities. This is perhaps one of the key messages from the PreK case study in the US.

This case study alludes to the distinct qualities of early care providers as part of a community-based social support infrastructure. Where there is a policy choice to link with these providers, we argue there is much potential to establish enduring family and community gains through enhanced relationships and opportunities for young children nested in families, neighborhoods, and communities. The presence of a strong early care supportive environment in rural communities will maintain a stronger child presence within the rural locale and provide rural economic benefits, primarily through employment and other spin-offs. Enhanced connections between the ECE care and formal school care can foster tightened social networks, providing greater social support to children as they begin their formal studies in school. We maintain that having this supportive arrangement will contribute to individual student success, and the vibrancy and attractiveness of rural communities.

The extended school case study from England identifies the socially “interactive and integrative” (Harmon & Schafft, 2009) approach that schools can assume (Cummings, Dyson & Todd, 2011). We see here the capacity of schools to act as a vehicle through which community-based social support can be activated (Katz, 2006). The extended schools have engaged in providing a suite of developmental and compensatory forms of support and interactions linked to communities, and this perhaps challenges how we view the role of schools (Cummings, Dyson & Todd, 2011). This case shows that schools have assumed leadership in forging partnership and integrated working with and between other key actors in children’s lives. It seems a reasonable claim that there is potential and motivation among schools to explore a stronger protective function in linking to the communities and professionals who serve them. This is not without its challenges in terms of how to provide services in an accessible, flexible, non-stigmatizing, and inclusive fashion (Katz, 2006).

The case examples are testament and reminder that community development and social support capacity are not alien concepts and applications for schools (Bell & Sigsworth, 1992, in England; Miller, 1995, in the US). Miller, for instance, found that rural schools could be a community center, acting as a resource for lifelong learning and for day care, adult literacy, and integrated family services. More recently, Miller, Wills and Scanlan (2014), in their study of Promise Neighbourhood planning grants, acknowledge that “Diverse networks of leaders are called to bridge organizational boundaries, cultural differences,

socioeconomic differences, and physical distances to develop coherent plans of action for collective ‘neighborhoods’” (p. 569).

Other community orientations are also identifiable, helping children to connect to the places in which they are raised. Miller (1995), Theobald, and Curtiss (2000), and Avery (2013) provide examples of where the community becomes a part of the curriculum, with students becoming involved in community needs assessments, studying and monitoring environment and land use patterns, or documenting local history through interviews. Similarly, we can include intergenerational learning projects, local environmental knowledge, and intercultural learning that help to establish understanding of other generations, cultures, and local connections and interactions. Students, families, and other community members can be involved in the identification of community priorities and the commissioning of services (Todd, 2007, 2012). Another approach sees a potential for school-based enterprise development, where students identify and address service needs through business initiatives. Whatever the approach adopted, Eppley (2009), echoing Theobald and Howley (1998), argues that rural teachers “have a special obligation to ground curriculum and instruction in the immediate locality” (p. 9), given the distinct features of rural communities. Attentiveness, commitment and meaningful support for both community development and social support actions, principles, and knowledge will, in our view, be critical to the long-term sustainability and quality of life in rural communities (Avery, 2013).

Conclusion

Policy design and implementation are often thinly conceived regarding the extent to which they meet the instrumental needs of individuals. In the case of education and early years provision, these needs are seen as instrumental, for economic participation in the present and future sense. However, a thicker conceptualization argues that needs are far more relationally defined and consequential. By consequential we mean that policy provisions in education and the early years sector have implications beyond individual children and their attainment stakes. From the social support and community literature, we can see that community-based support and institutions are vital in enabling more enduring positive outcomes for children and families. A thicker conceptualization of need seeks to affirm the relational quality of education in terms of learner identities and the consequences of educational decisions. An understanding of the significance of social support and community development principles and approaches can help towards this thicker conceptualization. The Promise Neighbourhood model demonstrates how the needs of children can be viewed as nested within their communities and is considered a community-based form of school reform. Warren (2005) makes the case in the US that, if urban school reform is to succeed, it needs to be linked to the revitalization of communities. With the Promise Neighbourhood model being too unwieldy for many communities, and considering Warren’s case for the attention to community revitalization, we have described a community-aware education policy. In this way the thick conception of need, only somewhat evident in the underlying ideals of the Promise Neighbourhood program and free from its instrumental and individually-oriented outcomes, can be realized through existing policy initiatives. In addition, community-level outcomes can be considered alongside the traditionally used individual academic measures. In these ways, community-responsive education policy makes the most of local educational investment, leading to success for students and vitality for communities.

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