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Powerful Reforms with Shallow Roots: Improving America's Urban Schools. Larry Cuban and Michael Usdan, eds. New York: Teachers College Press, 2002. 192 pp.

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Powerful Reforms and Shallow Roots seeks to make sense of urban school reform at the turn of the 21st century. Six case studies-from Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, Boston, San Diego, and Seattle-describe governance changes concerned with accountability and efficiency. The editors, an eminent educational historian and prominent policy research director, frame the cases by asking why there was so much enthusiasm for this type of reform across the country, and draw out lessons for improving urban schools. To do this, they compare current reform trends with those at the turn of the previous century.

Some things have changed and others have stayed the same over the past 100 years. School reform then and now embraces business practices and values. The current "systemic reform" approach borrows the business ideal of accountability through goal setting and systems of sanctions and rewards. Two features of the current reform era break with the past. Early 20th century progressives removed education from politics, while current reformers re-connect them by increasing mayoral or state responsibility. Additionally, current reformers have lost confidence in university-trained "professional" educators as leaders, turning to non-educators with management backgrounds in hope that they can restore public confidence and streamline the education bureaucracy. The cases in this volume represent variations on these two themes. Chicago and Boston are examples of mayoral takeover; Chicago, Philadelphia, San Diego, and Seattle are examples of hiring non-educators; Baltimore and Philadelphia illustrate mayoral control shifting to state control. Every city drew from the same "well" of ideas for their reform programs, with strategies to focus attention on math and literacy and the accountability elements of systemic reform.

The case studies detail each city's reform effort from the mid 1990s into the first years of this century, providing helpful political context and school reform history. The authors draw on a wealth of interview and documentary data to explain and analyze the reforms. Each reform effort proves to be vulnerable to changing leadership and political and civic alliances. Across the board, test score results are inconclusive as indicators of success. Elementary test scores rise, but with flat scores, middle and high schools seem impervious to reform. The editors avoid the "does it work?" question,

though, and draw out important lessons from each reform's accomplishments and disappointments.

The title, *Powerful Reforms with Shallow Roots,* is a central metaphor for this book's lessons. "Powerful reforms" refers to linking the power and resources of political and elite civic institutions to coherent policies focused on teaching and learning. Despite their power, however, the reforms have "shallow roots." The editors use "roots" as a metaphor for support from those closest to classrooms-teachers and parents. Even with school district investment in professional development, teachers did not become committed to the reforms. None of these reforms seriously tried to build the genuine support of parents and community members.

Another persistent feature of 20th century school reform is what the editors call the "schools alone" assumption-believing that solving the problems of schools can be accomplished within schools alone, and that improving schools can effectively address urban imperatives. The "schools alone" assumption ignores factors external to schools that affect student outcomes, such as poverty, social inequities built around race and class, and economic decline. With shallow roots, powerful reforms lack sustainability and ultimately do not penetrate to the classroom or community level where effective practices and supports can make an authentic difference in students' academic performance. To deepen the roots, the editors argue, reform theory would have to break with the century old "schools alone" assumption, though they do not offer examples of what such strategies would look like. The authors also point out the problem with the one-size-fits-all method of systemic reform when local context is so important.

The book's message about the importance of context fits well with education anthropology's epistemology, which calls for looking outside as well as inside the school to understand the obstacles to school improvement and student performance, and the need to reframe schools as situated in communities. While there is a growing recognition of the importance of civic capacity to urban school reform, these observations point to how-even when there is strong political and elite support for reform-it can be fragile and often dependent on "the alignment of the stars." Sustaining and making school improvement meaningful requires engaging teachers and parents as well as business and politicians. As anthropologists, we can use this book as a jumping off point to think about and suggest what constitutes truly deep roots. Gaining support is not a public relations task, but a long term organizing task. Education anthropologists can expand on Cuban and Usdan's definition, and think about what would it mean if deep roots included sensitivity to cultural and social meanings and values, respect for diversity among children and across school settings.

We can applaud the authors' critique of systemic reform as a "one size fits all" approach, because, as anthropologists and ethnographers, we believe in the importance of considering local context. This applies to measuring student achievement as well; fairness is not sameness. For those interested in learning from history and rethinking school reform, Cuban and Usdan, along with the case study authors, provide a bold and needed challenge to the received wisdom in policy and political arenas about the problems of urban schools and how to solve them.

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