Midwives of progressive education: The Bureau of Educational Experiments 1916-1919
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CHAPTER 1
Educational Reform and Professionalization of Educational Reformers in the United States 1890-1935

“How old the new! How new the old! The new is there in the old, embedded in much alien material; the old is here in the new, inspiring many novel applications.”

Herman Harrell Horne. *This New Education*, 1931, p. 81.

Historians of education distinguish two periods in the history of American educational reform between the 1890s and the mid-1950s (Graham, 2005). This chapter addresses educational reform initiatives during the first period and subsequent professionalization of educational reformers during the second period until 1935.

Economic and societal renewal and education reform typify a first period, roughly from 1890 to 1919 — dubbed Progressive Era. Reformers argued that education could ameliorate problems related to large-scale immigration, urbanization, and population congestion. Educating and Americanizing thousands upon thousands of immigrants and their children would meet the needs of the nation. During this period, the number of children enrolled in schools increased enormously — as did the number of grades completed. High schools evolved, vocational teaching flourished. School overcrowding ensued. Consequently, most educators embraced a cult of efficiency, exploring ways to combat school congestion through school management efficiencies, and teaching efficacy. It was the time of teaching the three R’s, characterized by lockstep method of instruction. It was the time of teaching patriotism. It was the time of assimilation. Throughout this first period, *New Education* describes education reform. The first part of the chapter outlines school restructuring during the 1890s and early 1900s as exemplified by the work of two pioneering reformers, and educational reform efforts by education stakeholders during the 1900s and 1910s. Taking New York City circumstances as an example, I highlight the ever-wider circles of those concerned with education reform — including social settlement workers, parent associations, authors on education, civic groups, and local politicians and their adversaries. Where feasible I introduce persons whom I describe more closely in subsequent chapters.

A second period of education reform began following World War I. In this period, which lasted from 1919 until roughly a decade after the end of World War II, the needs of the children replaced needs of the nation. Reformers widely adopted a new, more child-centered curriculum harmonious with needs, interests, and learning styles of students. We can date the beginning of professionalization of educational reformers to the founding of the Association for the Advancement of Progressive Education in Washington, D.C. in 1919 — renamed Progressive Education Association (PEA) in 1920. Throughout this second period, *Progressive Education* describes education reform. The second part of the chapter outlines nationwide professionalization of educational reorganization between 1919 and the time when disputes about social reconstruction through education began to politicize debates within the Association in the early 1930s, in the long run leading to the demise of the PEA in 1954.
The synopsis of the chapter points to a gap in the body of knowledge that exists for the period ending WWI.

**Two Pioneering Educational Reformers: Were They Prominent?**

As the Progressive Era began, a Bostonian Supervisor of Public Schools declared that schoolwork in Boston changed radically during the 1880s, brought about by amalgamating Froebel learning didactics (experiential learning by doing method) and the laboratory method of observing and experimenting. The Supervisor attempted to launch New Education as an overall concept of educational reform, signifying innovative connotations, suggestive of a large progressive reform movement in the field of education (Hopkins, 1892). By the end of the Era, not long after the Progressive Education Association (PEA) formed, one of the five PEA co-founders claimed in *The Atlantic Monthly* that an educational reform movement had been in existence for two decades (Cobb, 1921b). The *Washington Times* (1920) specified that the movement for progressive education had begun with John Dewey and Laboratory School, and with Charles Hanford Henderson’s manual training experiments and writings.

Are these assertions factual? What was the impact of Dewey and Henderson on fellow educators around 1900? Did they really initiate a countrywide movement for progressive education? The following subsections estimate their influence, based on contemporaneous texts when available.

**John Dewey**

In 1896, Alice Dewey (1858-1927) and her husband John Dewey (1859-1952) founded the University Elementary School at the University of Chicago, often known as the Dewey School, Laboratory School, or just Lab School. John Dewey regularly issued reports in the *University Record* through which we may infer the school's pedagogy, teaching methods, and early history. The reports address four initial problems that Dewey hoped to solve. A chapter in his (1899) *The School and Society* summarizes how the Lab School met the problems in its first years: How may schools better relate to the students' homes and the neighbourhood? How to teach history, science, and art to have significant value in students' lives? How to teach the three R's to spring naturally from studying disciplines such as social and natural science? Lastly, how to conduct individual instruction? Although 7,500 copies of *The School and Society* sold between 1899 and 1904, contemporaneous texts render the definite impression that the Lab School hardly was known outside University of Chicago perimeters. While a number of educational magazines reprinted a variety of Dewey's *University Record* reports, *Primary Education* (1900) summed up the attitude of the majority of U.S. teachers and educators regarding the reports: “But why should I seek to know about this school?…It will not make any difference in my teaching. I have my work all laid out for me.”

Dewey’s Lab School reports were not viewed as important “save by isolated persons here and there;” it was not anticipated that the Lab School “would last long, or that it would teach any important lessons” (Hinsdale & Whitney, 1900, p. 98). Only after the Deweys moved to New York City in 1904, and John Dewey began teaching philosophy at Columbia University, did their work at the Lab School begin to receive wider recognition (*School Journal*, 1905).

The virtual absence of details of attention on Lab School’s activities in contemporaneous texts signifies that the school, in fact, represented an isolated experiment. It certainly was not a basis for a larger movement of educational reform.
Contrary to the observation in the 1920 *Washington Times* (referenced above), a survey of turn-of-the-twentieth-century texts precludes concluding that communication and coordination between Lab School and other U.S. school reform experiments was fruitful, or even existed. Instead, Lab School impact appears insignificant. Moreover, at the time, the school’s results had not yet convinced Dewey to take a firm position supporting educational reform. He did write about it, but half-heartedly. His cautious words tell a lot about his stance at the time. In recognizing that a New Education did not exist, yet, Dewey literally placed himself outside discussions about it. In fact, Dewey’s thoughts on educational reform only began commanding respect during the second decade of the twentieth century. Only following the second edition of *The School and Society* (1915), publication of several authoritative articles and books on education, and contributions to the *Cyclopedia of Education*, did he become a welcome guest speaker at many meetings about public education in New York City. By 1915, he had become an ever more prominent authority on progressive education (Slosson, 1917). In *Schools of To-Morrow*, written with his daughter Evelyn Dewey (1915), they reported on different education reform initiatives that had independently and simultaneously sprung up throughout the country. The book became an instant success (first lustrum: nine printings); it has been continuously in print since 1915. The Deweys’ message in *Schools of To-Morrow* is that experimental schools are no longer rare. They did not portray a national movement (Oelkers, 2005), but found inventive and effective teaching practices in a school-as-social-settlement, and in the schoolwork in various laboratory schools that had sprung up during the previous decade.

**Caroline Pratt**

Around the turn of the twentieth century few teachers acknowledged Dewey's or Lab School influence. One rare exception was a female manual training teacher. Between 1884 and 1892, Fayetteville-born Caroline Louise Pratt (1867-1954) taught at primary schools in Pompey and Fayetteville. From 1892 to 1894, she studied at the New York City College for the Training of Teachers (later renamed Teachers College), founded in 1887 to provide schooling of teachers of children of the poor. After graduation, she taught woodworking in the Philadelphia Normal School for Girls until 1901. In 1901, she also worked for a social settlement house in Philadelphia. In the fall of that year, she moved to New York City and began teaching carpentry there at a Manhattan settlement house. A year later, Pratt (1902a-b), describing her work in a settlement magazine and in a report of the social settlement, favourably cited Dewey’s 1897 *My Pedagogic Creed* as an influence. Still, Pratt’s exception proves the rule. Pratt founded her urban one-room Play School in 1913.

**Charles Hanford Henderson**

During the late 1880s, Charles Hanford Henderson (1861-1941) taught physics and chemistry in Philadelphia. Following his appointment as principal of the Northeast Branch of the Manual Training School in 1893, he introduced a new instructive program. Henderson (1896) claimed, “A progressive education would be one in which the educational process [is] being constantly readjusted to meet…changing conditions” in society (p. 487). He advocated educating students in their physical, intellectual, and moral realms. As children are born investigators and inquisitive experimenters, he asserted, they want “to be employed…with something that interests them, not something that interests mamma or papa, or the teacher” (p. 496). His new method based on
manual training and exercising the senses would lead to self-prompted action by the students. During his tenure as Lecturer on Manual Training at Harvard University in 1897 and 1898, he advocated founding manual training schools that would, in today’s terminology, be learning laboratories. He advocated implementing such manual training instruction in primary and secondary schools.12

Beginning in 1897, Henderson actively promoted his views through public lectures on “organic education,” first at the Boston Sloyd Training School. In the winter of 1899, following an appointment as director of the New York based Pratt Institute High School, he continued lecturing in Boston, this time at the Industrial School Hall. In the fall of that year, he delivered a series of lectures at the Philadelphia Griffith Hall, illustrating his latest views on organic education (City and State, 1899). Although these lectures were well attended and Henderson issued a book on organic education in 1902, the actual impact of his work and writings seems to have been insignificant. Contemporaneous texts suggest that his turn-of-the-twentieth-century proposals of educational reform represent a one-off uncoordinated endeavour, lacking wider focus.13 And, much in contrast to Dewey, Henderson’s thoughts on educational reform never became authoritative.14

Marietta Johnson

As with Dewey’s views on education, perhaps a handful of teachers at the time wholeheartedly acknowledged a Henderson influence. Caroline Pratt (1948), not at the time, but much later recalled that Henderson “had stirred up [her] own thinking” by the end of the nineteenth century (p. 57). It is telling indeed that during the first decade of the twentieth century, only one reformer — Marietta Johnson of Fairhope, Alabama — dared to found a school, its core curriculum sailing under the flag of Henderson’s organic education. After graduating in 1885 from the State Normal School at St. Cloud, Minnesota, Marietta Louise (Pierce) Johnson (1864-1938) taught at rural elementary schools for five years, and then began teaching at Normal Schools. She married in 1897. In 1898 she had a ‘conversion experience,’ inducing her to embrace Henderson’s (1902) Education and the Larger Life, advocating implementing Organic Education in kindergartens and schools. Johnson founded her rural one-room School of Organic Education in 1907. In many lectures between 1909 and the early 1930s, she unequivocally embraced Henderson’s pedagogy and educational scheme.

No Nationwide Movement

More initiatives by pioneering educators to transform schools and schooling materialized following the turn of the twentieth century (Connell, 1980; Meyer, 1945). Acknowledging this may seem to indicate that no other impulses to modify educational realities existed. They did. Or, that the opinion of fellow educators was extremely supportive, as is currently denoted in antedating hindsight. Usually it was not. Throughout the Progressive Era, educational reform initiatives were initiated by individual groundbreaking educators. They took place on a local level, lacked broad impact. Turn-of-the-twentieth-century experimental schools received little attention — not even Dewey’s Lab School was noticed by a broad public. Only over time did Dewey become prominent as a leading educator. Henderson and the others never did. Therefore, I cannot agree with the opinion (e.g., Washington Times, 1920) that a national movement for progressive education existed, a movement that supposedly began with Dewey’s Lab School and Henderson’s manual training experiments and writings on organic education. It did not.
A NYC Settlement House Initiative

Those directly involved with schooling and educational matters, including teachers, principals, university educators, and school supervisors were not the only advocates of school reform. Others taking up the cause included social settlement workers, leaders of parent-teacher associations, and leaders of civic groups. Often their reform initiatives flourished, withered away, and, sometimes, reemerged later in another form. As an example, in this section, we explore an educational reform that began — and ended almost without a trace — in a New York City settlement house.

Social settlements were important agencies of reform. Education reform and the settlement movement often intertwined. As well as education reform, settlement house agendas included campaigns for better housing, outlawing child-labour, and, in some cases, support for union organizing, especially among young women immigrant garment workers. This activism, in turn, would have an impact on the subsequent education reform initiatives of settlement workers who participated in these campaigns.

Classes offered by the settlements often related to practical needs of the neighbourhood populace. One example is that Hartley House maintained a carpentry shop (Davis, 1967, p. 47). Who was the Hartley House carpentry teacher? How were the classes taught? Hartley House archives reveal the teacher was Caroline Pratt. Between 1901 and 1909, Hartley House News, a four-page monthly issued by the settlement, regularly reported on Pratt’s classes and how she was teaching them. Hartley House News articles offered no theoretical justification for the program. Pratt (1902a), however, in the social settlement magazine The Commons, reported her classes were an experiment. “The main feature of the [Hartley House carpentry shop class] experiment is that the children are allowed to choose their own models” (p. 11). She professed to be a devotee of Dewey’s thesis that school is not “a preparation for life, but life itself” (p. 12). Pratt made it her “primary object to help the children to take their proper place in the life about them” (ibid.) — through teaching manual training. Her experimental instruction, she suggested, “might be summed up as that of the laboratory, with the teacher in the background” (p. 14).

She cites six interdependent advantages generated by her teaching: With smaller classes, there is less need for disciplinary measures. Students become interested in the relation of their work to the larger world. Students make their models for a particular purpose, useful to them. The standards are lowered in order to let students fully experience consequences of their mistakes, solve their problems themselves, and learn from them. Lastly, students plan their chosen model in advance as to form and as to size; and, they are mentally active when working on their model. She declares that when students feel encouraged to develop their own activities, thinking and deciding, scrutinizing and reflecting, questioning and evaluating, they gain more and more confidence. Not only do they learn from their mistakes, they make it their self-chosen responsibility to learn.

Pratt expressed strong feminist views. She found that manual training in public schools had become a part of a highly inflexible male system. Male teachers were essentially mechanically oriented and respected the systematization of teaching manual training.

In the Fifth Annual Report of Hartley House, Pratt (1902b) outlined a view of the motivation of the children to choose a model that is slightly at variance with her article in The Commons. Pratt herself suggested the children’s very first model. Only when students were full of activity carrying out the suggested first model, were they asked what they would like to do next. Pratt kept records of her students’ progress, records of the uses students put their work to, and what, according to the students became of the models
they were making. Record keeping made the students’ work purposeful, she stated. By interviewing the children who attended her classes, Pratt found out that the rewarding part of their carpentry hour lay outside the classroom. She listed five advantages of her experiment. Note that the advantages reflected the socialist working ethos — and the Protestant ethic. Shifting responsibility for schoolwork on students trained students in judgment, and made them less satisfied with imitation. Since the students did not use prepared working drawings, they had to develop the habit of thinking carefully before acting. Among the results, she reported, was a noticeable decrease in the need to impose discipline; students engaged only in modest idling.18

Pratt’s ambition reached beyond carpentry. She felt that she was not only a woodwork teacher, but also a social settlement reformer whose contributions would beneficially change society (Pratt, 1905b, 1906). She wanted her pupils to become, in terms of later psychologies, self-actualizing and contributing members of society as soon as possible. In this sense, having a goal to improve society through her tutoring, she was a social reconstructionist avant la lettre (Kliebard, 1995). Interestingly, especially since newspapers and magazines did not often report settlement experiments, the New York Observer praised Pratt’s experimental lessons: “Many of the lads have fine ideas of what they like to do, but have little opportunities in their homes. In the carpentry class they have a chance to carry out these thoughts, and very few of them fail of realization” (White, 1903).

Subsequent to her November 1908 departure from Hartley House, apparently on friendly terms, Pratt divided her time between political activities — primarily raising funds for striking women garment workers — and designing and manufacturing wooden dolls and toys, an all-together different trade. Questions remain: “Was her teaching prominent? Did her experimental method command respect?” In fact, Pratt’s carpentry teaching at Hartley House thrived in practice. The number of children attending her classes grew over the years. Students and the settlement’s management held her in high esteem. Four decades later, one student warmly recalled, “Miss Pratt!…Do I remember her? As a little boy I went to Hartley House. She let me make what I wanted to make…for the first time” (in Benedict, 1942, p. 247). Yet, theoretical writings from her own pen went into oblivion straight away. These conjectural texts never became part of a mainstream reformist literature, certainly not part of a movement for progressive education. On the other hand, Pratt gained an enormous amount of experience. She addressed colleagues at small-scale local conferences of social workers, building a network of like-minded social reformers. By reporting results of her experimental teaching, she had sown seeds for future professional recognition. In 1913, when she founded Play School in Greenwich Village all these aspects of knowledge came into good use. She brought with her extensive professional expertise.

### A NYC Settlement Work Initiative Backed by a Civic Group

In sum, those most directly involved with schooling and educational matters were not the only ones advancing educational renewal; social settlement workers also advocated reform. Nevertheless, like Pratt’s carpentry classes, most of the educational renewal experiments failed to achieve prominence beyond their local communities. Still, New York City settlement work during the mid-1900s took a national lead in advocating reforms affecting everyday educational praxis (Davis, 1967). Settlement workers, in alliance with employees of a civic group, even gained nationwide success. This section outlines the innovative program established by Mary Marot at Hartley House, and its further advance by the Public Education Association of New York City.
Mary S. Marot (1861-1938) conceived the visiting teacher idea in 1905. Marot was a Philadelphia kindergarten and elementary school teacher until the turn of the twentieth century. She moved to New York City during the early 1900s, resided in Hartley House, and was their director of Children’s Work. How did she come to conceive the idea of visiting teacher? Well, she shared inspiration and ideas with Harriet Johnson (not to be confused with Marietta Johnson of Fairhope, mentioned above) and her lifelong companion Harriet Forbes who both worked for the Hartley House as Visiting District Nurses. Visiting nurses confronted urgent social issues of child labour, unsanitary living conditions, overcrowded housing as well as adjustment of the new immigrants to the American public school curriculum.

Since the 1880s, internal rural to urban migration and immigration, mainly from Europe, led to population congestion and subsequent school overcrowding in New York City — especially in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. While giving the needed nursing care visiting nurses educated patients and their families about preventative healthcare measures, sanitation, and the like. Since Johnson, Forbes and Marot worked alongside each other at Hartley House, thrashing out theoretical implications of the work of a visiting nurse and of a feasible visiting teacher was inevitable — especially since Marot “had done work of this kind, in Philadelphia” (Richman, 1910, p. 163). At some time in 1905, the spark must have launched itself. The work of visiting nurses vis-à-vis health matters corresponds to the work of visiting teachers vis-à-vis socio-educational issues such as failure in school and truancy. Early in 1906, Marot began working as a visiting teacher.

The new line of work was fully set in motion late in 1906 when the Public Education Association of New York City became interested, following the placement in the field of visiting teachers by four settlements where women were the head workers (Beard, 1915). Society women had founded the Association in 1894 to help solving particular socio-educational needs and problems in the city. Those tribulations originated in an extremely dense metropolitan population of mainly new, mostly European, immigrants arriving since the 1880s. The immigrants and their more often than not foreign-born children were living in unhygienic slum conditions in districts lacking parks and playgrounds, and adequate bathing and toilet facilities. The circumstances led to severe poverty, squalor, filth, hostility, despair, misery, and social disintegration, disruption in class, truancy, and crime. Internal rural to urban migration, in particular the great cities on the East Coast, worsened the pandemonium of rapid urbanization. The Public Education Association was leading campaigns against child labour (H. Marot, 1903), for compulsory education, school lunches, and sex education (Cohen, 1964). The Association also investigated the achievements of African American students (Blascoer, 1915a-b).

In March 1907, a conference of teachers and settlement workers led by Mary Marot under the auspices of the Public Education Association advocated having salaried visiting teachers in each district of the city (New York Tribune, 1907). The Association then took the work as a branch of its own (Carlton, 1986). This had an immediate and profound effect on the careers of Marot, Forbes, and Johnson. Marot resigned her work at Hartley House to become Chairman of the Home and School Visiting Committee of the Association. In 1908, she pleaded in the New York Evening Post to establish a bureau of “ten to fifteen visitors, a director, and a central office” (M. S. Marot, 1908b). She reported that John Dewey said at a meeting “that it [the visiting teacher program] is the most important and significant reform yet suggested” for New York schools, and “if taken up in a healthy and continuous way, would lead to changes not yet seen.”
Also in 1908, Harriet Johnson became a member of Marot’s Home and School Visiting Committee; a year later both Forbes and Johnson joined Marot full-time when they began work as visiting teachers under the Association (American Journal of Nursing, 1909). At some time during the early 1910s, Johnson was appointed head of the Association’s visiting teacher staff. Vigorously promoting the new type of social work by the Public Education Association paid off. By 1915, the Association employed ten visiting teachers. The Board of Education began using the services of visiting teachers too (The Survey, 1913). In July 1916, the Public Education Association organized the first national conference of visiting teachers, simultaneously launching The Visiting Teacher in New York City by Harriet Johnson (1916) — a book for promoting visiting teacher activities. It is obvious that the visiting teacher program, begun in 1905 by Marot, Johnson and Forbes when working together at Hartley House, was flourishing a decade later; although, it was hardly known beyond New York City Boroughs. The road to becoming a nationwide success was a long one.

**Overcrowding of Schools**

In 1908, settlement house workers began producing exhibits about causes and consequences of overcrowding. In March, they put together the Exhibit of Congestion of Population in the Museum of Natural History. In April, the exhibition moved to the Brooklyn Institute Art Building. Early in May, during the Second Union Label Fair of the Brooklyn Central Labor Union in the Labor Lyceum, members of the Women’s Trade Union League — among them Harriet Forbes and Harriet Johnson, visiting nurses at Hartley House — displayed an archetypal tenement sweatshop they had prepared for the Congestion exhibit. By 1910, New York City population congestion had become appalling. Authorities established a special commission to investigate. Their Report of the New York City Commission on Congestion of Population lists Helen Marot — younger sister of Mary Marot, founding mother of the visiting teacher program — as one of the individuals who appeared before the 1910 commission to testify in her capacity as Secretary of the city’s branch of the Women’s Trade Union League (NYC Commission, 1911, p. 272).

Mary Marot’s (1910a) “A Partial Remedy For School Congestion” counted 500 elementary schools in 1910, serving 600,000 pupils. According to Marot, schools attempted to force students to fit into a mold for their grade. In grossly overcrowded schools, a minority of insubordinate students would absorb a relatively high proportion of the teacher’s attention. Other students would drop out of school as soon as an opportunity presented itself. The educational needs of the majority of students, “who conform to most of the requirements, and therefore do not rise to the teacher’s consciousness as needing any special attention,” were given short shrift (p. 400). Marot argued that visiting teachers would make a difference; gathering background information on the students’ home situations could lend a hand to reduce some consequences of overcrowded schools, and would be welcomed by the teachers. In the socialist organ The New York Call, Caroline Pratt (1912a) agreed, “No teacher can handle such [overcrowded] classes. …They are an absurdity.”

In 1911, private as well as municipal activities were instigated to combat school overcrowding. For example, several hundred representatives of schools and religious and civic groups of lower Manhattan districts organized as the School and Civic League of the Ninth District (Evening Post, 1911e). Harriet Johnson, then of the Public Education Association, chaired the Programme Committee of the newly established League.
Founding of a New Teachers’ League

Throughout the 1910s, educators in diverse locations independently advocated radical educational reforms. As with Dewey and Henderson, their advocacy did not amount to a focused national education reform movement. Figuratively speaking, their appeals were small blips in the dimly emerging mosaic of early twentieth-century education. Furthermore, neither Dewey nor Henderson’s writings called for founding of a society or organization bringing educational reformers together, exerting political influence, organizing lectures and seminars, or issuing a newsletter, magazine, or journal. In one instance, though, a teachers’ league was formed that could have led to such an organization, a national educational reform movement. This short section focuses on that league. Interestingly, both Caroline Pratt and Mary Marot, who figure in previous sections in this chapter, were among the twenty signers of the call for founding The Teachers’ League of New York, appearing in diverse February 1913 newspapers. About two thousand teachers attended a general meeting held on February 28. John Dewey (1913) made an address. The League was to become an “organization of teachers on progressive lines…which shall have for its objects improving working conditions for teachers and better educational results for children” (New York Call, 1913a). The League organ, The American Teacher, carried articles related to educational reform, such as “Tools vs. Rules” by Caroline Pratt (1913), on teaching experimental manual training in public schools. However, the League had aims beyond educational renewal. Interdependences between educators, parent-teacher associations, school principals, superintendents, the Board of Education, education related organizations, and unions — as implied by the League’s main aims — may well contribute to educational reform. While its members promoted education reform, League members undeniably intended to organize a union, perhaps having learned their lessons in union organizing from the immigrant workers they served in the settlement houses. Early in 1916, League members reorganized as Teachers’ Union of the City of New York, affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Subsequently, it never grew into a national organization leading a movement for progressive education, promoting educational reform.

Writings Advancing Educational Reform

Those directly involved with school and education were not the only ones advancing education reform. The visiting teacher program, begun by social settlement workers, was soon backed, promoted, and financed by a civic group. At rare occasions, parents initiated educational reforms. Usually parents sought to influence classroom matters only in schools attended by their children. This they accomplished through parent and parent-teacher associations. As well as directly supporting educational reorganization within schools attended by their children, they indirectly exerted political pressure with publication of informative material. National offices of parent-teacher associations advanced reforms as well (Mrs. Schoff, 1916). In what follows I focus on activities of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations as emblematic of a growing interest in educational development, by parents and media.

Parents and Their Problems

In 1914, the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations distributed Parents and Their Problems, a series of eight books conversing matters of schooling, ways of improving them, child related welfare topics, and new outlooks, such as eugenics and
mental testing. Interestingly, the fourth volume contains “The Real Joy in Toys” by former Hartley House carpentry teacher Caroline Pratt (1914a). Since children learn through playing, Pratt argues, they need elemental wooden dolls and toys when playing. Since modern children are not able to gather play material from their surroundings as children did in pre-industrial times, they lack “the sort of real experiences of which they see the beginning and end and therefore, to some extent, the meaning” (p. 119). Toys, in Pratt’s sense, replace real experiences, and can thus serve as tools of play that provide meaningful experience.

At the time of publication, Pratt had already introduced the basic jointed dolls and other wooden toys into Play School, which she founded in the fall of 1913. The same dolls and toys were in use in several New York City experimental schools. What’s more, Pratt manufactured and marketed them under her trademark Do-With Toys™. At Play School, Pratt structured quasi-experimental conditions to study children playing with the dolls and toys. She found, “Thoughtful consideration of such play will reveal its educational value. In it lies the foundation of all thought processes” (p. 123).

By including Pratt’s “The Real Joy in Toys” in the 1914 Parents and Their Problems book series, the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations endorsed use of basic wooden playthings to aid learning and socializing in inner-city schools. Though Do-With Toys™ were in no more than a few laboratory schools, their presence constituted a small-scale quasi-experiment, to which Pratt’s book section brought attention. In this sense, it was yet another way of advocating educational reform, not to mention Pratt’s fledgling capitalistic enterprise.

Enlightening Books and Articles on Laboratory Schools


Educational developments, particularly concerning New York City schools, figured noticeably in regional newspapers with large circulations, such as the local New York Tribune. In 1915, educator Henrietta Rodman wrote a column on education and women’s interests in the Tribune. Rodman specifically wrote about educational renewal initiatives and experimental schools. Two of her widely read articles were about Johnson’s School of Organic Education and Pratt’s Play School. Regrettfully, Rodman never gathered her articles into a book.

During the mid-1910s, there were books, pamphlets, reports, and newspaper articles about a large-scale educational experiment in Gary, Indiana. They fed a need for background information to help understand a heated debate over a proposal to address school congestion by introducing a Gary-type system to New York City: the “Garyizing” of the city’s public schools. The 1915-1917 debate was perhaps the first to be widely reported nationwide in newspapers, magazines, and journals. Most informative for NYC residents were local newspaper articles and those published by the Public Education Association. For example, in 1915 and 1916, Alice Barrows Fernandez upheld the educational reform in Gary schools and the “Garyizing” of the city’s public schools in a twice-weekly New York Tribune column “What Is The Gary Plan?” A fair number of the thirty-one bulletins issued by the Public Education Association also address “Garyizing”
of NYC public schools (e.g., McAndrew, 1916; Nudd, 1915, 1916; Wirt, 1916). Interestingly, *Schools of To-Morrow* by the Deweys (1915) and *The New Education* by Nearing (1915) also praise the laboratory schools of Gary. The young philosopher Randolph Bourne, Dewey’s former student and close friend of Dewey’s daughter Evelyn, joined the ranks bestowing praise in his (1916b) *The Gary Schools.*

Ending this subsection on mid-1910s’ literature concerning educational renewal initiatives: the writings addressed here do not cite a need for a national society or organization to bring together educational reformers, exert political influence, organize lectures and seminars, and publish a newsletter, magazine, or journal. Although the publications may at times imply (false) notions of an active national reform movement in the field of education, the texts merely describe isolated local initiatives at most. These initiatives form but a few more specks in the dimly emerging mosaic of early twentieth-century progressive education reform.

**Three Plans to Combat Congestion of NYC Public Schools**

*Circa* 1915, school congestion was the major problem in more than just one East Coast city. Here, I concentrate on the state of affairs in New York City, three plans to combat school congestion by reforming the city’s public schools, the involvement of the Public Education Association with one of these plans, and the school war that ensued.

**School Congestion**

As stated above, in 1911 private as well as municipal activities were instigated to combat school overcrowding. In the fall of that year, the municipal Board of Estimate and Apportionment’s Commission on School Inquiry invited a group of experts to investigate school congestion, failure of the schools to hold onto their students, the city’s inadequate vocational training, and offer recommendations for improving the situation. They released their report in 1913. In 1914, the newly elected Mayor John Purroy Mitchel, who had studied the report, adopted three plans to reorganize public schools in order to fight congestion of schools: the Schneider Plan, the Ettinger Plan, and the Wirt Plan. Primarily, these plans were to reduce overcrowding. They would do so with novel schemes of building and equipment usage, and curriculum adaptation by social efficiency educators who would apply “the standardized techniques of industry to the business of schooling [with] a scientifically constructed curriculum at its core” (Kliebard, 1995, p. 24).

The third plan received the most attention, and full support of the Public Education Association. It ultimately led to an all-out battle known as the Gary School War. In fact, this school war of almost epic proportions, in turn, led to Mayor Mitchel’s failure to win reelection in 1917, and to an utter educational fiasco negatively affecting the other school reform plans.

**The Schneider Plan**

In 1894, Herman Schneider (1872-1939) received his professional engineering degree at the Engineering Faculty of Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Schneider was appointed Instructor at his alma mater in 1899. Immediately, he proposed a plan to concurrently train engineers in practice and in theory during a cooperative system of industrial apprenticeship. The plan combined gaining practical experience during apprenticeships sponsored by manufacturers in commercial shops and stores with
theoretical instruction at *Cooperative Schools* (Park, 1943). It was perceived as radical and not implemented.  

In 1903, Schneider began as an Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio. He became Dean of its College of Engineering in 1906; straight away, he introduced his plan. Early in 1909, the Lewis Institute of Chicago implemented a modification, known as the Half-Time Cooperative School Plan: Students would follow courses fifty weeks a year, “twenty-four weeks in the school and twenty-six in the shop. The work alternated week by week between the shop and the school” (Stephens, 1911, p. 30). By September of 1909, the schooling format was also introduced in Cincinnati public schools, as *Continuation Schools*. A Fitchburg, Massachusetts, high school introduced a similar modified plan in 1910. The success of the plan in Cincinnati, Chicago, and Fitchburg led to an invitation of Schneider by the NYC Board of Estimate and Apportionment to join the expert group to pioneer ways to combat school congestion. In 1913, their report included strategies to introduce cooperative and continuation courses in vocational schools. In 1914, the newly elected Mayor Mitchel hired Schneider as consultant to the Board of Estimate for one year for a week every month to introduce the vocational and trade related plan in the city’s overcrowded schools. Still, throughout the middle and late 1910s, Schneider’s plan barely impacted school congestion, and was not introduced in most secondary and tertiary education schools. The introduction of the plan in technical schools was not successful in public schools. It was in some private commercial schools.

Today the history of Schneider’s plan is about entirely forgotten; remaining is only a vague educational reform ghost from the past. Interestingly, the socialist magazine *The Coming Nation* announced that Caroline Pratt who was on the Socialist Party standing Committee on Education was making a special study of the Schneider Plan (Simons, 1913). Regretfully, the report is missing. Pratt’s life-long companion Helen Marot, though, reviewed the plan in *The Creative Impulse in Industry* (1918b). Marot’s opinion may well have aligned with Pratt’s.

**The Ettinger Plan**

In 1902 William Ettinger (1862-1945) developed a plan to fight problems of primary school congestion at Public School 147 of which he was principal (*The Sun*, 1918). The plan (also known as the Ettinger Experiment, or the Ettinger System) advocates that students, in the last two grades of elementary schools, take additional classes in a number of trades in order to get an idea whether a specific trade would suite them. Its pre-vocational preparatory courses in industrial work in co-operation with shops were indicative of a range of trades. Twelve years later, in the spring of 1914, when he was Associate Superintendent of Schools, Ettinger introduced his plan into the seventh and eighth grades of a Manhattan school to combat school congestion (*New York Times*, 1914e). By the end of 1914, Ettinger’s plan extended to only nine elementary schools in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Richmond. The experiment never thrived. It impacted school overcrowding even less than did Schneider’s plan. Today the plan is completely forgotten; it does not even denote a hazy educational reform ghost from the past.

**The Wirt Plan**

In 1907 William Albert Wirt (1874-1938), a former Dewey student, accepted the post of Superintendent of Schools in Gary, Indiana — a steel industry town founded the previous year. Wirt had developed a plan to combat school congestion, later widely
known as Gary Plan, by efficient use of the whole school. To utilize school equipment and buildings more fully, Wirt split students into two platoons, effectively creating two schools within the one school. While School X students were busy in the school’s academic classrooms, School Y students were studying art in a museum, doing homework in the library, taking physical education in the gymnasium or on the playground, or manual training and industrial arts in shops. School X students swapped places with School Y students in the afternoon. Initially, Wirt’s plan was implemented in three of Gary’s newly built schools.

1912 marks the introduction of Wirt’s system to the East Coast. In January, Wirt (1912) delivered an address at the Philadelphia New Century Drawing Room, while he addressed a teachers’ conference in New York City in October. The latter presentation apparently inspired Public Education Association workers. In March 1914, Harriet Johnson, head of the Association’s visiting teacher staff, visited Gary in the company of a co-worker — Lucy Sprague Mitchell. Johnson’s (1914) report, The Schools of Gary, further commanded attention of many involved in educational reform. In the fall of 1914, the head of the Association’s Vocational Education Survey Alice Barrows Fernandez (1914), a former fellowship Dewey student, announced plans for an experiment with the Gary system in a public school in Manhattan.

In October 1914 the newly elected Mayor Mitchel hired Wirt — as he had hired Schneider — as consultant to the Board of Estimate for a week every month of the school year to combat school congestion. Wirt first introduced his plan not only in one elementary school, as advised by Barrows Fernandez, but also in two utterly overcrowded schools in the Bronx. As a consequence of swift achievements in introducing the plan in both schools, the Board of Education asked him in December 1914 to implement the program in eleven more elementary schools in the Bronx.

In the fall of that same year, Barrows Fernandez made a trip to Gary and became as enthused as Johnson. Next, early in the spring of 1915, she was appointed special Secretary to Wirt in New York City, keeping Wirt’s agenda while she promoted his plan. Barrows Fernandez (1916c) genuinely found that Wirt’s system represented the “Greatest Step Forward in Education [the] World Has Ever Attempted.” John and Evelyn Dewey’s (1915) Schools of To-Morrow and Bourne’s (1916b) The Gary Schools nearly parallel her estimation. Dewey must have been proud of his former students Barrows Fernandez, Bourne and Wirt.

The Public Education Association and the Wirt Plan

The Public Education Association officially endorsed the Board of Education’s December 1914 proposition to “Garyize” more elementary schools in the Bronx. In May 1915, Harriet Johnson of the Association spoke about her study of the Gary schools at a meeting where merits of the Ettinger and Wirt Plans were compared. Dewey strongly supported the work of his former students Barrows Fernandez and Wirt. He stated in a letter sent to the organizers, “The adoption or rejection of the Wirt plan is the most momentous problem to be solved by the city” (in Bourne, 1915c; Rodman, 1915f).

In June 1915, the Board of Education finally approved the reorganization of additional eleven schools in the Bronx. From that time onwards the Public Education Association put full pressure on public opinion to embrace “Garyizing” congested schools. The Association’s director eulogized the plan time and again during meetings organized by the Association. He also put out a series of letters to the editors of various newspapers, intended to educate public opinion leaders to consent the introduction of the plan in the city’s public elementary schools. The Association published a bulletin
gathering of six of these letters to the editor (Nudd, 1915). It seems that the baton was then carried to former employee of the Association Barrows Fernandez and her twice-weekly New York Tribune column “What Is The Gary Plan?” In fact, the Public Education Association, Barrows Fernandez, Bourne, Dewey, and Wirt aggressively campaigned for acceptance of the “Garyizing” of the city’s public elementary schools.

Wirt typically stressed the economic efficiency of reorganizing schools, evidently dealing with overcrowded schools, unproductive use of school buildings, and rising costs. His plan to all intents and purposes was and remained a scheme of saving expense. Hence, in concert with the Schneider and Ettinger Plans, Wirt’s plan was a social efficiency educator’s plan (Kliebard, 1995, p. 24). As well, Barrows Fernandez stressed the child-centered pedagogy in Wirt’s system, arguing that “Garyized” schools fit other strands of educational reform too. She addressed the doings of developmentalists (stressing a child-centered curriculum) and of social meliorists and social reconstructionists (both having a common goal to improve society) with the former concerned to promote independent thinking and democratic problem solving abilities, and the latter being more “critically attuned to the defects of the social system and prepared to do something about it” (p. 161).55 John Dewey, Randolph Bourne and the Public Education Association reformers unconditionally endorsed this fusion of efficacy, child-centeredness, meliorism, and social reconstruction.

The Demise of “Garyizing” NYC Public Schools

The 1915 Board of Education resolution to “Garyize” more schools marks the beginning and the end of implementing the Wirt Plan in the New York City public school system. From then on, opposition to the plan turned vocal. In particular, after the Mayor, in the fall of 1915, floated the idea of “Garyizing” all public elementary schools, a war of words in newspapers and an all-out school war ensued.56 It is not imperative to sketch in detail that history here. One historian of education already observed, “The Gary School War was an extremely complex and confusing affair” (Cohen, 1964, p. 91).57 Over the years, other historians of education chronicled the events in ever more detail.58 I address only the major controversial issues.

At first, parental and community opposition was predominantly among Jewish immigrants. Though reorganization of the first dozen schools would not be ready in 1916, and would certainly not be evaluated before the end of that year, Mayor Mitchel wanted all public elementary schools to be “Garyized” as soon as possible. By 1916, the extension of the plan in ever more schools in congested areas of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan signified trouble ahead. Jews with children who attended “Garyized” schools were not pleased that the reorganization took place, for the most part, in schools attended by Jewish students.59 The Jewish immigrants had brought a radical union tradition with them.60 Without delay community leaders formed civic anti-Gary organizations to represent their grievances — for example regarding the academic level of the schoolwork and feared lack of discipline in “Garyized” schools. They argued that “Garyized” school emphasis on manual training would impede their children’s academic success, hinder their upward educational and social mobility (Greenberg, 1917; Gregory, 1917a-b). The organizations they set up held meetings repeatedly attended by hundreds of parents.

Barrows Fernandez, as Wirt’s spokesperson, relentlessly churned out a flood of articles telling the city’s populace about putative progress made in the Bronx. In the late winter of 1916, she co-founded the Gary School League, of which she became the first director. Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Eleanor Johnson61 of the Public Education Association, and Alice Dewey62 became League officers; each chaired a standing
committee. The League issued bulletins, prepared exhibits, placed ads in newspapers, and showed a series of movies on the Gary Plan — not only in the city. The League furthered the progress of “Garyizing” public schools, defending the Gary Plan at community and municipal meetings. When anti-Gary organizations presented their case at a public hearing before the NYC Board of Education, Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Eleanor Johnson (not to be confused with either Marietta Johnson of Fairhope, or visiting teacher Harriet Johnson, both mentioned above) represented the Gary School League and spoke in favour of Wirt’s plan (Evening Post, 1916a).

When the 1917 NYC municipal elections drew nearer, Barrows Fernandez (1917) in the New York Tribune addressed “The Anti-Gary Campaign” of civic anti-Gary organizations, while the Gary School League intensified its work — to no avail. The upcoming mayoral election only amplified objections voiced by parent associations and other community opposition to Mayor Mitchel’s plans. Mid-October 1917, three weeks ahead of the elections, student strikes and violent riots broke out lasting for about a week and a half. Banners reading “Down with the Gary System,” shown during election time, came to mean the same as banners reading “Down with Mitchel” (Elser, 1917; Volk, 2005).

New York City was in serious turmoil. Mayor Mitchel failed to win reelection. Introduction of the Gary Plan in the city’s school system came to an immediate halt (New York Herald, 1917). The Board of Education “gave orders to dismantle the shops and “de-Garyize” the schools” (Cohen, 1964, p. 99). What in potential could have grown into a national progressive reform movement in the field of education never blossomed. Consequences

Attempts at radical reform can fail — the bigger the attempt, the bigger the failure. The three plans to reform learning methods and reorganize New York City’s public schools represented innovative and substantive educational change. Still, the plans formed no part of a nationwide movement for progressive education. The March 1916 launch of the Gary School League to encourage “Garyizing” of New York City public schools at first appeared to be a serious step toward a national reform movement. However, the outcome of the Gary School War in late 1917 thwarted further steps in that direction. Introduction of the Gary Plan in the city’s public schools was reversed (Wright, 1918). School congestion persisted; the Gary School League withered away. Media coverage of NYC school overcrowding had been extensive, not only in The New York Times and in The New York Tribune, but also nationally — in books, reports, and widely distributed pamphlets. After the broadly publicized failure to institute the Gary plan in New York City, others seemed wary of advocating for like education reform. The Gary Plan conflated school management efficiencies with classroom experiential learning teaching methods. Its demise was a setback for both, as well as for the reformers who were its champions.
This second part of the chapter starts by focusing on another setback for educational reformers. In 1917, as the United States entered World War I, advocacy for reform of schoolwork, schooling, and schools came to a sudden halt. Debates about the war brought out sharp disagreements among former progressives. While some settlement leaders remained pacifists, the majority supported U.S. entry into the war (Davis, 1967). A parallel dichotomy developed among progressive educators. Their political disputes broke out in bitter quarrels and falling out of former allies (Cremin, 1961). This section briefly sketches the most widely explored example of the controversy and impact of government suppression of civil rights on the education reform movement.

During the summer of 1917, a number of Dewey’s essays in *The New Republic* favoured United States involvement in the European War. The essays aroused the opposition of Randolph Bourne (1917b) who first responded with an article sharply critical of Dewey and American participation in the war. In May of 1918, growing animosity between them fed a second major disagreement, this time over a *New Republic* book review by Bourne (1918a). Dewey had written an introduction in the book. A fierce exchange of opinion appeared in successive issues of the magazine. Dewey (1918d) openly dismissed his former student’s review. Bourne (1918b), in turn, responded in kind. In a 28 May 1918 letter addressed to Dewey, Bourne explained his earlier critiques came down to his rejection of Dewey’s instrumentalism. The unpleasant story has no happy ending. In the spring and summer of 1918, Dewey personally intervened to prevent Bourne from joining him, Helen Marot, and others on the editorial board of *The Dial*. In the summer of 1918, Bourne told friends that he felt as if he were living under government surveillance. He insinuated that he, an anti-war radical, was on some kind of enemies list, and that Dewey might be involved. Mid-December 1918, he moved to his new apartment in Helen Marot and Caroline Pratt’s townhouse in Greenwich Village, where he would live with his fiancé. On December 22, however, he died there, a victim of the Spanish Flu pandemic.

Was Bourne’s fear of government surveillance a paranoid induced conspiracy theory? Whatever the case, his prediction that war involvement would lead to suppression of civil rights — including those of educators he knew personally — would unfortunately prove true. The U.S. Espionage Act of 1917 and Sedition Act of 1918 “threatened suppression of all speech, press, and assembly that could be described as obstructing the war...Teachers opposed to the war were labeled ‘disloyal’ and suspended from their jobs” (Adickes, 1997, p. 136). Reports of suspension of teachers logically fueled prevalent fears of expressing political views that would enrage opponents and make their blood boil. One instance of suppression came close to involving his friend and (future) landlord, Helen Marot. She served the editorial board of the socialist monthly *The Masses*. In 1917, the government repressed publication of *The Masses* and seventy-four other periodicals and journals for antiwar advocacy (Adickes, 1997). In 1918, the editor-in-chief of *The Masses* and a number of co-defendants (but not including Marot) were charged and tried in April and October with conspiracy to obstruct military recruitment. The trials generated massive publicity and intense media disputes. Another example: Scott Nearing, the pacifist educator who wrote *The New Education* (1915), was also charged with obstructing military recruitment. His March 1918 indictment by a Federal Grand Jury also received national publicity and further heated media discussion.

The demise of the Gary Plan in New York City, the Bourne vs. Dewey controversy, and widely reported trials of persons charged with obstructing military recruitment for simply writing articles opposed to the war, including the educator Scott
Nearing, had an inevitable impact on New York City educators. Prosecutions of leading progressive education reform advocates under the aegis of the 1917-1918 Espionage and Sedition Acts had to make many persons leery of joining any of the activists’ reform efforts. Still, the reform leaders had lost none of their characteristic zeal for providing quality education to all segments of U.S. society. They learned from past mistakes. However, no longer would they have the kind of access to influence government decisions about education in New York City that once appeared possible in their alliance with Mayor Mitchel.

The Progressive Education Association (PEA)

The 1919 Treaty of Versailles marks the official end of World War I and it marks the end of the Progressive Era. Suppression of speech and press had postponed educational renewal discussion and attempts to recognize educational reform teachers as professionals. After the war a second period of education reform began: 1919 also marks the founding of a nationwide organized educational reform movement. The subsequent sections in this chapter address the professionalization efforts of educational reformers who organized in the newly founded nationwide association for educational reform, the Progressive Education Association (PEA). Professionalization of mostly wage-dependent primary and secondary education teachers began when the growth of school attendance and the collectivization of education reached a peak and levelled off following several decades of rapid expansion early in the twentieth century (De Swaan, 1988). Professionalization of educators holding a special expertise in teaching in progressive schools, along with protoprofessionalization of those having a vested interest in educational reform, commenced on a national level immediately after World War I. Five educators co-founded the Association for the Advancement of Progressive Education — in 1920 shortened to Progressive Education Association, PEA.73

In those early hours, the professionalization processes of progressive education teachers did not yet have characteristics comparable to professionalization processes of doctors, psychologists or lawyers, for instance. The PEA professionalization route included founding a nationwide organization of progressive educators, parents, visiting teachers, and other parties interested in educational renewal. Pent up pre-war reform ambitions among the die-hard reformers finally found means of to again take action. The organization would promote an esprit de corps among members, organize seminars, foster knowledge of experimental and progressive education, hold conferences, conventions, and courses facilitating continuing education, issue press releases, bulletins and newsletters to educate the media and the general public about educational reform, promote publication of literature reviews, articles and research findings in journals, newspapers, magazines and books, establish international contacts with affiliated organizations, and publish a journal to report all these and related relevant developments.

Protoprofessionalization is defined as “the cognitive impact of professionalization upon lay outsiders” (De Swaan, 1988, p. 242).

[People] increasingly orient themselves in everyday life to the fundamental notions and stances of the professions and they adopt corresponding standards of behavior. They do not themselves become professionals, but rather professionals in nuce: protoprofessionals. This protoprofessionalization…is the external effect of the process of professionalization…Well-informed lay persons will articulate their troubles as problems for professional treatment and seek corresponding professional service for the problems so defined. (p. 245).
The early process of PEA protoprofessionalization involved purposeful transmitting a simplified version of teaching methods consistent with the pedagogical and didactic aims of progressive schools to its lay members (e.g., non-teaching school personnel such as administrators) and lay outsiders (e.g., parents). It clearly represents a lesson learned from the Gary Plan debacle. Imposing education reform on a community had been shown to create backlash. Protoprofessionalization was a vital way to ally with parents in providing a kind of quality education dedicated to serving the interests and needs of their children.

**How the PEA Met Basic Professionalization Standards**

On April 4, 1919, the founding day of the PEA, nearly one hundred educators and persons supporting progressive education were present. At inception, the Association comprised eighty-six members. A year later, the PEA counted over 500. In 1925, it boasted nearly 1,700. In 1932, it had more than 7,500. By the mid-1930s, PEA members maxed out at just over 8,500. Among others, Marietta Johnson was on the Executive Committee. Members of the Advisory Council included Alice Barrows Fernandez, Charles Hanford Henderson, and Caroline Pratt (Cobb, 1919). A former President of Harvard University became Honorary President — not John Dewey, who was lecturing in Japan and in China in 1919 and 1920 (E. Dewey (Ed.), 1920). In 1919, a working group of primary PEA members, including Marietta Johnson and Caroline Pratt, issued a draft of ten preliminary principles. In 1920, the PEA refined the ten preliminary principles and endorsed seven (Cobb, 1928).

While the first PEA Secretary claimed, in *Good Housekeeping*, the PEA “is primary an association of parents, not of teachers” (Cobb, 1920, p. 204), the assertion was not entirely factual. Parents were eligible to be PEA members, but PEA first strove for professionalization of progressive education teachers — and second for protoprofessionalization of laypersons interested in promoting progressive education (Washington Herald, 1919). The PEA leaders formulated a mission of pedagogical and didactic reform in U.S. schools and sought to shape an esprit de corps for educational renewal among its members. They welcomed membership of parents and other laypersons, public school administrators, members of boards of education, and private school officials (Ayres, 1921). “Any person may become a member of the Association upon the payment of the yearly dues” (PEA, 1920, p. 45, emphasis added). However, the PEA did envision the role of parents as limited to providing council to and cooperation with teachers.

Early on, the PEA Secretary announced lectures by “prominent educators whose schools are interesting and noteworthy types of the new education” — for instance, lectures by Marietta Johnson. He pleaded for smaller and better-equipped classes, more individual attention to “the physical needs of the child…adequate playgrounds, spacious quarters and directed play” (Cobb, 1919). As a promising model of didactic renewal, he cited the project method, finding that it exemplified the educational reform for which the PEA stood.

The Secretary further stressed that the Association would issue informative bulletins. Between January 1920 and October 1923, the PEA issued seventeen bulletins. PEA bulletins included reports of PEA upcoming conventions, business transacted at conventions, transcripts of speeches on progressive schools, reports of the Secretary, and articles examining progressive schools in the United States and in Europe.

Publication of the PEA quarterly journal *Progressive Education* began in 1924. *Progressive Education* had a ‘Recent Books’ section, and ‘News and Comments’ and ‘News of the Schools’ sections as well as a variety of articles that reviewed international
developments, mental testing, educational renewal in schools, etc. Each number also had a book review section, and counted at least fifty pages, a considerable growth over the 1919-1923 bulletins, which for the most part counted less than twenty pages. Some numbers were so successful that reprints in book format were asked for.78

Three forms of PEA promotional activities — lecturing, publishing essays in newspapers, magazines, and books, and publication of an official organ — spearheaded informing lay members and the public about progressive education theory and practice. Counselling parents about how children learn, building bridges of cooperation with parents about their individual children, and influencing public education toward progressivism worked parallel with the informing promotional activities. These characterize a process of protoprofessionalization clearly aimed for by the PEA. The parents, for instance, knew about the educational aspirations of the progressive school attended by their children, and better understood the theory and terminology of the experiential teaching approach. Besides comprehending the terminology used, feasible problems may be formulated using a common vocabulary and can thus get solved with more ease. These are features of “the external effect of the process of professionalization” (De Swaan, 1988).79 This corresponds with the flip side of the parental aspect of protoprofessionalization: “Professional helpers [teachers]…will be more inclined to accept the clients [parents] who in their perception clearly present problems for which they feel competent” (pp. 245-246).

The three-fold public relations aim of the PEA — lecturing, generating articles in newspapers and magazines, and publication of an official organ — was part and parcel of a process of professionalization of educators, its ‘professional’ members.

Initial PEA Education Theory and Teaching Craft

The PEA inventory of “The Essence of Progressive Education” (Cobb, 1921a) asserts: All progressive education schools “seek to afford more freedom and more responsibility to the pupils” (p. 1), trusting that students would subsequently develop self-government and self-control. Education of emotions, hand-in-hand with education of the intellect, comes about through arousing “interest in the acquisition of knowledge” (p. 4), opportunities of physical movement, and “new presentations of the subject of learning” (ibid.) — that is, new, innovative experiential teaching methods. “In a progressive school there are no fixed desks. All the furniture is movable” (Cobb, 1921b, p. 228). The first demand of the new-association was more physical freedom for the students, including freedom of movement in classrooms. Having the students’ interests aroused before assigning work provokes mental freedom. Progressive schools should strive for all-round development of students, addressing their physical, mental, emotional, social, and aesthetic development. Opportunities for learning self-control and self-government ought to be included. Finally, yet perhaps most important, progressives must campaign for smaller classes.80 These were all elements of a child-centered education. Perhaps PEA co-founder Marietta Johnson (1920) drafted the essence of early PEA educational philosophy best in her speech at the first annual convention in 1920: “The essence of the new education is to find out what is good for the child. Progress in education means better children and better people” (p. 8).

The PEA Secretary explained PEA experiential learning approaches in an article in Good Housekeeping, a women’s magazine. Through describing teaching systems used in several so-called new schools, he showed that a variety of teachers followed the newly developed project method. “When a boy comes to the school he is studied carefully to see what he is most interested in, and in what direction his talents lie. Then he is asked to
choose some project along the lines of his talents...When he has thus selected a goal for himself, he goes at his work with a good deal of self-direction. The teacher appears to him as a guide rather than a taskmaster” (Cobb, 1920, p. 59).

It is clear; the PEA during its first years of existence promoted a child-centered pedagogical perspective, while actively promoting project method experiential learning.

Learning By Projects

Following the first Honorary President’s death in 1927, the PEA invited John Dewey to become the next Honorary President: “More than any other person you represent the philosophic ideals for which our Association stands” (cited in Graham, 1967, p. 41). Unlike Charles Hanford Henderson, Dewey had not accepted a Vice-Presidency in 1921; but he did become Honorary President in 1928. His acceptance address explores conditions of learning by projects and learning by activities methods as central to the craft of progressive education teaching. He stated, “Bare doing, no matter how active, is not enough. An activity or project must, of course, be within the range of the experience of pupils and connected with their needs” (Dewey, 1928, p. 202). He added, “the test of a good project is whether it is sufficiently full and complex to demand a variety of responses from different children and permit each to go at it and make his contribution in a way which is characteristic of himself” (ibid.). This section focuses on learning by projects and its history. The next section will focus on learning by activities and its history.

William Heard Kilpatrick, author of widely read books on the Montessori Method (1912) and Froebel kindergarten principles (1914), advocated learning by projects (1918a). His particular approach proposed putting students to work to solve practical problems. “It is to [the] purposeful act with the emphasis on the word purpose that I myself apply the term ‘project’” (Kilpatrick, 1918b, p. 4). “[As] the purposeful act is…the typical unit of the worthy life in a democratic society, so also should it be made the typical unit of school procedure” (p. 6). Kilpatrick (1921b) understood project to refer to “any unit of purposeful experience, any instance of purposeful activity where the dominating purpose, as an inner urge, (1) fixes the aim of the action, (2) guides its process, and (3) furnishes its drive, its inner motivation” (p. 283).81

Kilpatrick (1918b) acknowledged, “I did not invent the term [project] nor did I start it on its educational career. Indeed I do not know how long it has already been in use” (p. 4). But he was, and still is, accredited far and wide for having introduced the project method in American education in 1918, as well as for having tested it during subsequent years at Horace Mann School at Teachers College, and for promoting it nationally (Kilpatrick, 1919, 1921a-b). Through the 1920s, so many schools implemented teaching by projects, and so many teachers throughout the United States used the project method, stimulated to do so by the PEA, that it unavoidably grew to be synonymous with educational reform. Of course, other educational reforms, such as the Dalton Plan and the Montessori Method, advocated differing approaches. Even teachers of these rather exclusive latter methods would teach by projects in the 1920s.

Learning By Activities

A fair number of teachers misunderstood Kilpatrick’s project method. They did “hideous and silly things in its name,” compelling Kilpatrick to refrain from sponsoring “such going-on” (Tenenbaum, 1951, p. 248). Kilpatrick commented, “I decided that I would talk...about wholehearted purposeful activity. Later, people began to use the term activity program. I didn’t create the term, but it now seems best to use ‘activity program,’ if
we are to use any term at all” (in *ibid*.). The previous section concisely examined the project method. This section focuses on learning by activities.

In 1920, Gertrude Hartman launched a plan that advocated social education in community schools. Hartman was an accomplished educator. She sought to bring children more in line with community life through initiating them “directly into an understanding of the social life of which they are to become members” (*New York Times*, 1920b). Schools should, among other things, combine manual training, open-air study, and field trips (*School*, 1920). “Since education is the result of purposeful activity of some sort,” Hartman explained, “the school must be pre-eminently a place adapted to carrying on various activities” (in *ibid*).

Hartman herself, though, would not test or evaluate the plan suggested by her. She was busy writing a book on the particular subject in response to a request by The Bureau of Educational Experiments (BEE). The New York City clearinghouse and research establishment, founded in 1916, commissioned her to write *The Child and His School*, a book on learning by activities. In the book, Hartman (1921) asserts that purposeful activity in children may “be looked upon as the primary human motive force.” She added, “Activity...instead of being a by-product of the educative process, is the process itself, since it is through purposeful activity that learning takes place and that tested knowledge accrues” (p. 62).

Hartman by no means advanced learning by projects for young children. Instead, she emphasized a learning by activities learning approach, stressing the importance of playthings. To bolster her argument, she cited “The Real Joy in Toys” by Caroline Pratt (who figures in previous sections of this chapter), who held that children learn through play. Essentially, it was Pratt’s (1914a) view that play is the child’s work, and that toys have “their place as the instruments of play, just as garden tools [have] their place as the instruments of gardening” (p. 117). While playing in groups children learn the value of cooperating rather than competing with each other. Hartman (1921) agreed that the “essential difference between work and play is that work is productive” (p. 72), adding nonetheless her own emphasis that education should represent “a gradual development from the play to the work interest” (p. 108). Schools should therefore select appropriate activities. Hartman emphasized ‘Activity as Work’ for older children, underscoring that “activities should be chosen more and more as a means of organizing [children’s] powers in social directions” (p. 109).

During the mid-1920s, coinciding with an across-the-board curriculum revision development (e.g., Hartman, 1924), the trend away from Kilpatrick’s learning by projects method towards Hartman’s learning by activities scheme gained momentum. Pratt (1926), who had been Hartman’s mentor when she was researching and writing her book at the BEE, explained different types of activities, such as “Practical Activities” and “Play and Work Activities” (pp. 327-328). She sharply distinguished the school’s activities scheme from project method. She found that the very naming of a project might already promote disintegration of experiencing. Instead she strove for learning from integrating experiences through learning by activities:

I have requests from teachers at times to forward to them a history or a geography project applicable to a certain grade. We do not have history, geography, nor yet shop projects. We do not even think in these obvious school terms. The shop, the laboratory, the library, are places to go to work on something which applies to the general program of the particular group or possibly to something which is going on outside the school. (p. 332).
According to Pratt’s approach, learning would therefore best be pursued through activities.90

**Social Reconstructionism or Child-Centered Education?**

One educator rejected the project method since “Learning from immediate purposes, or incidental learning, is too much a hit-and-miss affair — it dips in here and there, but it gives no satisfactory perspective” (Bode, 1927, p. 151). He continued, “Perhaps children may learn a great deal about numbers from running a play store or bank, but this alone does not give them the insight into the mathematics that they need” (p. 150). In asserting that learning by projects more or less allows pupils to determine their own curriculum, he questions the child-centered intuition offered by teachers at progressive schools, and the child-centered methods promoted by the PEA.

Near the turn of the twentieth century, Dewey (1897b) deemed that the “educational process [had] two sides — one psycho-logical and one sociological and that neither can be subordinated to the other or neglected” (p. 4). Subsequently, historians of education differentiate two main strands in Deweyan educational progressivism: child-centered education and schooling to achieve social reconstruction (e.g., Sadovnik & Semel, 1998).

Through the 1920s, the child-centered, developmentalist branch of Deweyan thought (Rugg & Shumaker, 1928) flourished within the PEA — overshadowing educators who sought social reconstruction through education (Graham, 1967). Debates within the PEA, with increase of economic hardships during the Great Depression and decrease of discussion about teaching practice by child-centered progressives (who were mostly female primary education teachers), show that society-centered social reconstructionist voices (who were mostly male) grew louder in the 1930s (Cremin, 1959; Nusser, 1996).

In 1932, a social reconstructionist educator threw a bomb-shell by issuing the *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?* (Counts, 1932). In an activist style, he disparaged child-centered educators and child-centered learning. “Progressive Education cannot place its trust in a child-centered school” (p. 10). He stressed that the weakness of progressive education “lies in the fact that it has elaborated no theory of social welfare, unless it be that of anarchy or extreme individualism” (p. 7). He insisted that progressive educators should “face squarely and courageously every social issue, come to grips with life in all of its stark reality, establish an organic relation with the community, develop a realistic and comprehensive theory of welfare, fashion a compelling and challenging vision of human destiny” (p. 9). His analysis exemplifies the (more) society-centered voices heard in educational reform discourse, for instance by Caroline Pratt. The message was that the PEA should promote a more politically minded pedagogy (Bowers, 1967, 1969).


For a while, during the 1930s and the first part of the 1940s, the PEA shift “to research interests and its increasing professionalization [meant] that it was able to attract substantial foundation grants” (Nusser, 1996, p. 25). Still, the grants merely postponed a slow death of the PEA. Progressive educators, the original core of PEA members, had long become alienated from the PEA and its political clashes (Cremin, 1961; Graham, 1967).
Chapter 1

Conclusion

During the 1920s, the Progressive Education Association spearheaded professionalization of education reform in the United States (Benedict, 1942; Nusser, 1996). The second part of this chapter shows that the combination of promoting child-centered pedagogy and learning by projects and learning by activities instruction was the key to the initial success of the PEA during the early 1920s, but became its Achilles’ heel during the late 1920s and hence forward.

At the beginning of the chapter, I note the contention that “the movement for progressive education began with the experimental work of John Dewey in his school connected with the University of Chicago…and with the experimental work and writings of Hanford Henderson” (Washington Times, 1920). The discussion in this chapter casts serious doubt on this view. Few U.S. teachers knew of the Lab School during the years 1896-1904 when the Deweys were in Chicago. Of the few who did take notice, for the most part they were not interested in the results achieved in the experiment. Research shows that Dewey’s fame only rose by the mid-1910s, in New York City, after Schools of To-Morrow and Democracy and Education were published, the revised edition of The School and Society reissued, and his former students — Barrows Fernandez, Bourne, and Wirt — wrote articles on school congestion and education reform in New York City which received nationwide attention. However, the contributions, in theory and practice, of educators who also became known at the time, like Marietta Johnson and Caroline Pratt, who were among the few who had earlier championed Dewey, soon became eclipsed by Dewey’s growing reputation. It was Dewey who was increasingly invited to speak at educational meetings, report in local newspapers of rank like The New York Times and The New York Tribune, and publish educational essays in magazines and journals like American Teacher, The New Republic, Teachers College Record, and The Dial. All these theoretical contributions, however, did not lead to a nationwide movement for progressive education — not even a citywide movement in New York City, nor in Chicago, nor in any other city. Charles Hanford Henderson’s turn-of-the-twentieth-century’s writings and lecturing activities in East Coast cities did not either. His work only engaged a handful of educators. Still, many initiatives to renew education existed during the Progressive Era. Evidence in contemporaneous media archives shows that educational reform was not merely initiated and promoted by individual education theoreticians, but also by social settlement workers, parent associations, and civic groups. Sections in the first part of the chapter discuss some of those impulses to renewal while focusing on New York City circumstances.

The Teachers’ League of New York, founded in 1913, transformed into Teachers’ Union of the City of New York in 1916, did not become a nationwide movement for progressive teaching practices. The Gary School League, formed to promote “Garyizing” of New York City public schools, founded in 1916, had potential to inspire such a movement nationwide. However, the outcome of the Gary School War in late 1917 thwarted progress toward a national movement. The politically inept, top-down imposition of the Gary Plan by New York’s 1914-1918 Mayor Mitchel inspired opposition among leaders in the immigrant communities where the plan was to be initially implemented. One important lesson was that parents needed voice. Educational reform could not be implemented in schools without the consent of parents and local community leaders.

The first section of the second part of this chapter illustrates that expression of difference over the 1917 entry of the United States in World War I had a negative impact on education reform. Most likely, it suppressed possibilities for a national movement for
progressive education too. Still it did not dampen the spirit of the activist reformers. The first public meeting of the founders of the Progressive Education Association was held in February 1919 (Washington Herald, 1919), only two-and-a-half months following the November 1918 armistice and well before the June 1919 signing of the peace treaty of Versailles.

Here, at the end of the chapter, it is interesting that a number of the same persons appear over and over in differing settings. Mary Marot, for instance, was a Hartley House settlement worker, originator of the visiting teacher program, author of an article on school congestion, Public Education Association worker, before she became a Bureau of Educational Experiments (BEE) researcher in 1918. Marot’s career parallels Harriet Forbes, Eleanor Johnson, Harriet Johnson, Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Caroline Pratt’s careers before they became BEE members. Individually, each of their contributions to education reform appears greater than that of either Dewey or Henderson combined. (Their winding career paths are concisely summarized in biographical outlines in endnotes to this chapter’s body text.)

Before exploring the careers of these women with the BEE, and before showing that the BEE ought to be depicted as a kind of ‘midwife’ to the Progressive Education Association, in the subsequent two chapters I will more extensively sketch the careers of two women who joined the BEE, Marietta Johnson and Caroline Pratt.