

“Isolated Learning Is Doubtful Learning”

The Case of Howalton Day School, an African-American Private School in Chicago, 1947–1986

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Introduction

In 1946, three African-American female teachers founded Howalton Day School, considered the first private, non-sectarian African-American school in the United States. The school's model of community drew largely from two traditions: the DuBoisian model of the “talented tenth,” in which more privileged African Americans assumed leadership positions in the community and also assisted those less fortunate;¹ and a Deweyan model, which emphasized strong community-school collaboration, built upon the students' interests and backgrounds, and encouraged teachers' pedagogical innovations. To a large degree, these models were complementary, especially in their visions of school-community relations, strong parental involvement, and students' intellectual and social development. However, there were also differences in their practices and activities. Howalton teachers, many of whom had taken education courses at the University of Chicago, enacted Dewey's educational ideas mainly through their experimental pedagogies and classroom structures. However, they used the DuBoisian model in two specific types of activities: those of “social uplift,” an African-American tradition of assisting community members who were poorer, infirm, and elderly; and through the sponsorship of African-American history, literature, music, and arts. Because Howalton School was founded during the Chicago Black Renaissance, a pan-African intellectual and artistic movement from 1930 to 1955, the teachers were able to draw from many African-American community institutions' resources. One such institution was the nearby George Cleveland Hall Library, the first African-American library in Chicago whose collection of African-American literature and history was prodigious.²

In this article, I discuss how Howalton Day School built upon these two models, at least through the 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, financial difficulties and personnel turnover presented challenges to the school, in-

cluding its commitment to Deweyan principles. The school's decline in enrollment and consequent closure in 1986 raise the question of whether Howalton teachers and administrators might have reified Dewey's ideas to the point that the "Howalton way" became less experimental. My discussion first begins with an examination of the overcrowded, segregated, and inequitable conditions in Chicago's African-American public schools, which prompted the three African-American teachers to found Howalton.

African-American Schools on Chicago's South Side in the 1940s

During the late 1930s and the 1940s, the conditions of African-American schools in Chicago were dismal: classrooms were overcrowded, which resulted in half-day sessions; schools were largely segregated; buildings were dilapidated; teacher turnover was great, since many new white teachers were assigned to African-American schools, then requested transfers; and the curriculum was generally exclusive of African-American history, literature, and the arts.

The African-American migration, as well as limited school building construction, had resulted in overcrowding in many of Chicago's African-American schools then. From 1929 to 1943, African-American student enrollment in at least twenty-seven of the southside schools had increased by 88 percent. Nearly one-third of these new students were recent African-American migrants from Mississippi and Arkansas. The increased enrollment meant that as of 1941 the average African-American classroom had a high student per teacher ratio of 41 to 1.³ Despite crowded conditions, the president of the Chicago Board of Education countered that African-American students in the Chicago schools fared much better than those in southern schools. However, he skirted the issue of overcrowding, referring instead to better-prepared teachers and a higher expenditure per African-American student in Chicago than in the South. What he did not compare were differences in expenditures between Chicago's white and African-American students: an average of twelve more dollars spent on those students attending white schools.⁴

School administrators attempted to resolve overcrowding through double shifts, which meant that most African-American students attended schools for only half-days. Of the fifty-five elementary "double schools" in 1939, thirteen were in African-American communities and affected nearly 25,000 students.⁵ The editors of the *Chicago Defender*, an African-American newspaper, protested this situation: "78% of the Negro children spend 40% less time in school than do children outside of the colored communities in Chicago." A. L. Foster, then president of the Chicago Urban League, echoed this concern: "My own boy, in the seventh grade, has never gone to school a full day."⁶ The Board of Education considered redistricting in the early 1940s so that African-American children could attend white schools in adjoining areas. But restrictive covenant associations blocked these initiatives.⁷

Unfortunately, conditions of segregation and overcrowding continued at most southside African-American schools after World War II. Once again, Chicago Board of Education president blamed African-American migrants, insisting that the board was not legally responsible for educating children who had “migrated from other states.”⁸ The African-American community was indignant. Horace Cayton, then director of Parkway Community House, responded that “the ragged schools of the cotton patches represent [Superintendent James] McCahey’s notion of what the Negro really deserves, the implication being that what they are getting here, no matter what, is much too good for them.”⁹ Oscar Brown, Chicago NAACP president, called the African-American schools in Chicago “a disgrace.” Further, he concluded, “They [Chicago schools] are as much segregated as the schools in Savannah, Georgia, or Vicksburg, Mississippi.”¹⁰

In the late 1940s, the Board finally concurred that redistricting was important to establish more equity in the schools. The new superintendent, Herold Hunt, a graduate of Teachers College, worked with University of Chicago sociology professor Louis Wirth and the University of Chicago’s Committee on Education, Training and Research in Race Relations to establish a special technical advisory committee on intergroup relations in the Chicago public schools. This committee worked with parents and teachers from 1947 to 1949, advising them on the redistricting of elementary schools. Consequently, the Board changed the boundaries of 102 elementary schools to relieve overcrowding in African-American elementary schools and to ensure that African-American children did not have to walk so far to school. Yet they refused to do so for high school students, arguing that high school students had a higher “allegiance” to their schools. In truth, they were concerned about interracial dating and socialization.¹¹

One problem that remained unresolved was the large number of white teachers who had sought transfers from African-American to white schools. As noted, many of them were less experienced and took their first jobs at African-American schools because they were the only ones available.¹² To complicate matters, some of these teachers expressed prejudicial views about African-American students. In one study of sixty white teachers, the researcher noted how some spoke disparagingly about the Black southside schools and their students. For example, one teacher spoke of the low expectations of African-American students: “Now in a school like the D—— you’re just not expected to complete all that work.” Another teacher agreed: “If you want to take it easy and not work too hard, you teach at a school like DuSable or Phillips. If you really are interested in teaching, then you work at one of these better schools.” Similarly, “Down at DuSable they just try to keep the kids busy and out of trouble.”¹³

Concerned about these problems, Doris Anderson, an African-American adjustment teacher, complained to Mayor Edward J. Kelly. When she received no response, she discussed the matter with two other teachers; as a result Howalton was founded in the summer of 1946. Indeed, the founding of Howalton sig-

naled both a critique of the larger community and the possibilities of genuine reform.

Howalton School, 1946 to 1970

As noted, Howalton was singular as the first nonsectarian African-American school in the country. But it was also unique in its commitment to Dewey's model of a progressive school. Some scholars have criticized Dewey for his lack of attention to African-American children's schooling.¹⁴ However, that criticism is not completely warranted. In *Schools of Tomorrow*, Dewey and his wife described one progressive African-American public school in Indianapolis in the 1920s that functioned much like a social settlement. The school facilities included a large playground, manual training equipment, and a boy's clubhouse. There the teachers worked with the parents, establishing a club for them and a night school for community members at large. Despite the Deweys' claim that the school was "progressive," it also drew from Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee model. For example, the schoolchildren learned such practices as saving money to encourage thrift. The manual training classes, more likely than not, focused on employable skills, given discrimination in the job market then.¹⁵

Similarly, the University of Chicago's Laboratory School has been criticized for its exclusion of African-American students. Indeed, African-American students were not accepted there until several women drew up a petition to support African-American enrollment in the early 1940s. Nearly 80 percent of the parents whose children attended the school signed the petition. As a result, the school admitted a few African-American children to the kindergarten and elementary school in 1943.¹⁶ Thereafter, the school hired several African-American teachers, including eminent poet and playwright Langston Hughes, who taught writing and jazz. By the late 1940s, Oneida Cockrell, supervisor of the nursery school and kindergarten at the Rosenwald Apartments, taught during the summer sessions.¹⁷

To a large degree, Howalton School was also an experimental "lab school." Anderson and two other African-American teachers—Jane Howe, an art instructor at Englewood High School, and Charlotte Stratton, a teacher at Douglas Elementary School—decided to open Howalton School in the Michigan Boulevard Garden Apartments that summer. This was not the first time that the "Rosenwald" Apartments had been selected as a site for an innovative school. During the 1930s, Rose Haas Auschuler, director of Chicago's WPA nurseries, had started a model nursery school for children there.¹⁸ Because many professional African-Americans resided there, they could afford tuition for a private school and mothers could volunteer in the classrooms. This was in stark contrast to parents in nearby public housing, some of whom were single mothers who relied upon public aid for support.

All three cofounders had the professional experience and credentials necessary for such an endeavor. Doris Anderson had been a teacher, assistant princi-

pal, and acting principal with the Chicago public schools since 1929. She had also just received her master’s degree from Northwestern University. June Howe had studied art at the premier Art Institute of Chicago. Stratton was an eighth-grade teacher with administrative skills. Howe approached Oneida Cockrell of the nursery there and Cockrell agreed to lease its space for the summer school, provided her kindergarten children were included. Howe next talked with Robert Taylor, then manager of the Rosenwald Apartments, who agreed that they could use its fieldhouse. Clearly the cofounders were dedicated to this project. They used their own money to start the school and were later reimbursed from tuition, which was initially only twenty dollars per student. They also had to set up the school every morning, since teenagers used the fieldhouse for sports the night before.¹⁹

The school opened July 1, 1946, with nineteen children. The following summer, the school opened again. This time the parents approached the founders about keeping the school open year round. These parents, too, were concerned about the overcrowded classrooms and would willingly pay tuition to keep their children closer to home. So Stratton, Howe, and Anderson decided to add one grade each year, provided each year was successful. Truly the school was a collaborative effort, an “embryonic community.” In 1947, they started a first grade, with Stratton assuming responsibility as the school’s principal. The other two founders helped with the teaching and fund-raising. One of the student’s mothers also volunteered to be the dietician. Another volunteer, Florence Miller, taught French and ballet after school, since she taught in another school during the day. Corinne Taylor, a supervisor in child welfare, also volunteered. She had completed her studies at the University of Chicago and had conducted field work at the Institute of Juvenile Research, an institute started by University of Chicago sociologists.²⁰

To be sure, Howalton relied greatly upon the volunteerism of students’ parents, many of whom belonged to the school’s fund-raising arms, the parents’ council and the women’s auxiliary.²¹

Similarly, the Howalton founders were greatly assisted by its board of directors, which originally included Howalton and Chicago public school teachers, as well as prominent businessmen. Board members’ backgrounds reflected the relative privilege of the “talented tenth.” Nearly all of the teachers on the board had received their master’s degree, some from premier institutions such as Teachers College and the University of Chicago. Another board member, a lawyer, had graduated from Harvard University. Also on the board were *Chicago Defender* editor John Sengstacke and University of Chicago African-American professor Allison Davis, known for his studies of IQ tests’ cultural biases.²² Additionally, most of these board members assumed leadership roles in other African-American community institutions, such as the YWCA and the YMCA. Since most had children who attended Howalton, they were also involved in its fund-raising and other volunteer activities.²³

The primary goals of the school were consonant with progressive educators such as John Dewey: that teachers should nurture the growth and creativity of each student; that the school should be an integral part of the community; that schools should engage in democratic practices; and that the curriculum should be connected to students' daily lives and prepare them for life through problem solving and genuinely interesting subject matter. In fact, the founders often referenced their philosophical approaches by citing Dewey. For one, the school's emphasis was on the "whole" child, that is, his or her emotional and physical growth, not just academic achievement. It was imperative that each child develop to his or her "fullest capacity" through initiative and imagination.²⁴ Just as Dewey argued that children's learning was variable and not homogeneous, the first Howalton brochure stated, "Each child is a unique learner and everyone has a talent; therefore, failure need not happen."²⁵

Given the small classes at Howalton of twenty or fewer students, teachers were able to learn about the interests, capabilities, and backgrounds of their students, thereby ensuring that each child's learning was an "unfolding from within."²⁶ The founders also understood that, despite the relative wealth of its first students, they should be engaged in community life, thereby learning real-life conditions. Be they visits to the museum, a local hospital, or other field trips, the students' learning, then, was both academically and socially meaningful. As Dewey emphasized, subject matter did not just exist "in the head" but was indelibly connected to purposeful actions.²⁷ The founders, too, articulated that "education [wa]s useful living in action."²⁸

The founders understood Dewey's idea that isolation was detrimental to students' growth, that it led to "static and selfish ideals."²⁹ Through varied experiences and interactions within and outside of the community, students gained new understandings through dialogue and activities. Like Dewey's model of hypothesizing, students learned to be open-minded and critical, evaluating evidence critically and basing arguments on facts. Such an attitude not only fostered critical thinking but respect and consideration for others, a requisite for a democratic society. In turn, such democratic practices promoted a "better quality of human experience."³⁰

The Howalton founders also believed that teachers were a critical influence in their students' lives. Not surprisingly, Howalton teachers took their responsibilities seriously. They met regularly to discuss their pedagogy and curriculum, as well as to attend in-service meetings. In the spirit of progressive education, they experimented with their teaching, eschewing traditional methods. For example, they decided after several years not to give out report cards but instead informal reports on each child's efforts, application of knowledge, and accomplishments. They did not use phonics to teach beginning reading but instead used an "emergent literacy" pedagogy in which students learned through the contexts of their everyday environment. In their classrooms, they created learning centers, with emphases on the arts, music, and science. They started a school

bank, so children learned how to save and to develop math skills. They taught creative writing and started their own school library. Students in the upper grades participated in the city-wide science fair. In disciplining their students, the teachers focused on each child's personality and social needs. Teachers were encouraged to provide different kinds of activities, following Dewey's belief that an engaged child is not one that needs discipline. To further reduce student differences, Howalton experimented with an ungraded approach so that children of varying ages would learn together.³¹

Although the first students were from Rosenwald Apartments, Howalton soon accepted African-American students from other neighborhoods. This was possible in the beginning because the tuition was fairly low: only 250 dollars for kindergarten and three hundred dollars for elementary grades as of 1949. The founders were inclusive in other ways as well. Knowing that small classrooms were conducive for teaching gifted children, as well as those with learning problems, they accepted children of all abilities. Some students also had emotional problems, as was the case of one girl who had lived in foster homes most of her life. She attended Howalton until she was "well enough" to return to a public school. Howalton teachers gave those students in need the individual attention and encouragement to succeed there and in their subsequent schooling.³²

Howalton teachers carried out Deweyan practices in many ways. First, because they were familiar with community, they utilized its institutions as a valued resource. To be sure, this entailed a great deal of skill and time on their part. Second, in the spirit of "intellectual learners," teachers reflected on their practices and were willing to experiment with classroom structure, curriculum, and traditions. As such, they also acted as role models for their students in how to carefully reflect and socially act upon ideas. Third, teachers knew each child so that they could build upon his or her strengths and interests, thereby ensuring successful learning. In this way, they were "advocates" for the children.³³ Fourth, teachers engaged in community building within the school by working cooperatively with the other teachers. Clearly, the high number of volunteer teachers spoke to a deep commitment and an esprit de corps at Howalton.

News about Howalton spread so that there was a waiting list of nearly three hundred students its second year.³⁴ Indeed, from the very beginning Howalton was selective in its choice of students. Although there were no explicit criteria mentioned for the selection of students in the early years, parental involvement seemed to be imperative. By the early 1960s, though, the school did base its decision on IQ tests, as well as interviews with both the parents and children. Further, despite the administrators' insistence that it was inclusive, middle-class status seemed an important consideration for selection of students.³⁵ To be sure, students did come from different parts of the city. But those neighborhoods mentioned—South Shore, Hyde Park, and Evanston—were wealthier ones. Thus many of these students had access to forms of cultural capital not accorded to most African-American children: travel to Europe; field trips to the opera house

and museums; music lessons; and later acceptances to excellent colleges such as Wellesley, MIT, and Howard and Fisk Universities.³⁶ In truth, the African-American students at Howalton were comparatively privileged, just as students at the University of Chicago Laboratory School were. However, this was not contradictory to the DuBoisian model. Indeed, there had been an African-American “elite” in Chicago since the late 1880s who had assumed leadership roles.³⁷ Still, one might question how “democratic” Howalton was and how successful it would have been if there had been students from the poor and working class as well.

By 1948, Howalton had become overcrowded with its thirty students and so moved to Parkway Community House, a social settlement nearby. Because Parkway’s facilities take up one city block, there was ample space for playgrounds, a gymnasium, and classrooms. Accordingly, enrollment increased each year when the founders added a successive grade. With forty students enrolled as of 1949, Howalton started a building fund so they could move to larger accommodations. By 1953, Howalton had all six grades and so held its first graduation ceremonies for five six-grade students, four of whom continued their schooling at the University of Chicago Laboratory School.³⁸

Despite the school’s expansion, the founders wanted to keep classrooms small so that teachers could still work with children individually and in small groups. Further, the social projects and field trips to Chicago’s community institutions and museums required that the classrooms remain fairly small. Again, social projects taught the children community spirit, including the African-American tradition of “social uplift.” For example, students visited Provident Hospital to give toys that they had repaired to sick children. They sang songs for the elderly in a local nursing home. During one Christmas holiday, they helped with Christmas Seal mailings for tuberculosis prevention, an important community issue, since the incidence of tuberculosis remained higher in the African-American communities. Students sent clothing and other items to *Chicago Defender* journalist Ethel Payne, stationed in Tokyo as a Red Cross worker in 1952.³⁹ This confirms the contention of Douglas Simpson and Michael Jackson that community and cultural traditions are powerful and become “one more useful and accurate initiation into an on-going tradition of inquiry.”⁴⁰

Further, Howalton teachers drew from the DuBoisian model to connect school learning to community forms of activism. Deeply concerned over the deaths of two 1960s civil rights leaders, James Reeb and Martin Luther King, the students wrote to their widows and raised money to send to their families.⁴¹ At the same time, teachers organized cultural activities to encourage students’ pride in the accomplishments of prominent African Americans. For example, two of Howalton’s benefits were concerts by African-American opera singers, Grace Bumbrey and Marian Anderson. Additionally, students attended dress rehearsals at the Civic Opera House, visited the Chicago Art Institute, and attended the children’s monthly concert series at Orchestra Hall. Again, these experiences were beyond those of most African-American students in the Chicago public schools.⁴²

In a similar vein, Howalton teachers and administrators provided opportunities for students to learn about African-American history, sociology, and literature. Annually students celebrated Negro History Week, inaugurated by African-American historian Carter G. Woodson and his organization, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. In students' frequent visits to the "Hall" Library, they met children's authors, such as Langston Hughes and Reba Paeff, the latter speaking about Zulu schools in South Africa. During the 1960s, students in the upper grades learned about pan-African issues that included Ghana's new leader and problems closer to the community, such as urban renewal and discrimination in housing.⁴³ Such events, in a DuBoisian fashion, enhanced students' intellectual and social development for future leadership roles.

Howalton students also participated in fund-raising projects for the school. Fund-raising was, in fact, imperative, since tuition covered only 90 percent of the school's expenses. Although the parents' council and fathers' club were largely responsible for organizing the fund-raising events of annual teas and benefit performances, students assisted. They put together flyers for each fund-raising event and performed in the musical and dance performances and skits. Fund-raising was also imperative because parents wanted Howalton to add a seventh and eighth grade. Again, the founders added one grade at a time, as well as moved to a larger building, this time to the Blackstone Building, owned by John Johnson, editor of *Ebony Magazine*. By 1955, the first eighth grade class of Howalton graduated.⁴⁴

By 1957, eleven years after its founding, Howalton had much to be proud of. Its total school enrollment was 160, which meant that classes still remained small. Students' reading and math scores were higher than those of students in the Chicago public schools, and on par with children attending the Chicago Laboratory School. Howalton students engaged in creative and intellectual learning, as well as meaningful community projects. In terms of finances, the school was self-supporting through tuition and fund-raisers. Because the school rented facilities, it did not have to pay for building repairs and overhead.⁴⁵

By 1960, Howalton School relocated to the educational building of St. Paul's A.M.E. Church because of high rental costs. The facilities there consisted of only a two-story building without a gym or extra rooms for science laboratories. The assembly room was used as a multipurpose room, and the Washington Field House, across the street, was used for sports and for their graduation ceremonies.⁴⁶ Not only was the facility crowded but there were later problems with vandalism.

Howalton during the 1970s and 1980s

Administrators and parents were concerned about the deteriorating neighborhood and determined to build a new Howalton. As early as 1968, the Howalton community had hired an architect to draw up plans for a new school building.

With a building fund of over 350,000 dollars, Howalton parents, teachers, administrators, and board members were determined to have their own school with a library, science laboratories, a gymnasium, and large playgrounds. Five years later, they bid on property farther south, on 83rd Street, and put down 20,000 dollars in earnest money. For reasons not discussed in the archival documents, the community lost the bid, as well as the earnest money. Apparently, this was not the only time they had lost a bid on property. One of the board members, a director of a redevelopment corporation, had tried to negotiate for property in the African-American community known as Bronzeville, not far from the Ida B. Wells Housing Project.⁴⁷ These unsuccessful efforts must have been very discouraging to the Howalton community, who had spent many years fundraising.

Other problems emerged during the 1970s as well. In one memorandum, teachers recommended reevaluating whether the seventh and eighth grades should be continued. Admittedly, they argued, this was a difficult age for students, especially those who were new to Howalton. This statement suggests possible differences in behavior or expectations between the new students and those who had attended Howalton since elementary school. The teachers also recommended changes in the curriculum, especially that students spend at least one-third of their time out in the city, gaining “first-hand experiences,” then returning to the classroom to research, discuss, and plan other experiences. Lastly, the teachers insisted that cultural subjects such as dance and French not be “tacked on” but an “integral part of the pursuit of learning.”⁴⁸ Given the lack of documents, one can only conjecture about such statements. Had Howalton’s curriculum become less experiential and less connected to the community? Had the neighborhood so deteriorated that field experiences were cancelled for fear of students’ safety?

Another complication during the 1970s included a turnover of teachers, plus a new principal. There was little archival information about the new principal, Ella Cummingham. However, during her tenure, classrooms did remain small, an average of twenty students per class; the student body remained steady at 196. But one problem she faced was the retirement of the first cadre of Howalton teachers. She and other administrators emphasized the importance of training the new teachers in the “Howalton way.” But it was not entirely clear what the “Howalton way” was in the 1970s, given the above-mentioned concerns. One might ask whether the “Howalton way” was emblematic of Howalton’s mythic past, when the school’s success was greatest. To what extent could new teachers experiment with curriculum? Or did they have to follow a prescribed model? Interestingly, one of Howalton’s former pupils, after receiving her master’s degree in teaching from Yale University, returned to teach there.⁴⁹ Such a decision most likely showed commitment to the Howalton model or perhaps the “Howalton way.”

In 1983, Mildred Johnson, a teacher at Howalton for over fifteen years, became the school’s principal. In one *Chicago Defender* article, she spoke about

some of the school's problems. She reported that Howalton had flourished until the recession of the 1970s, when enrollment decreased because parents could not afford the tuition of over 1,000 dollars. The author's phone interview with community leader Susan Woodson, whose son attended the school then, corroborated this. Another problem at Howalton was that the neighborhood had so deteriorated that Howalton had to hire two security guards. Woodson noted that she had to walk her son to school every day because she feared for his safety. Given the problems of violence and high tuition, some African-American parents enrolled their children in parochial schools instead. Since Howalton relied so heavily on tuition for operating expenses, the administration could not afford to pay its teachers and staff. Although the school had a capacity for two hundred children, only seventy students attended in 1983. As a result, the school operated at a 75,000-dollar deficit.⁵⁰

The school was in a difficult position from which it could not recover. It had to charge a high tuition in order to pay its staff, yet the staff still wanted to keep classes small. However, most African-American parents could not afford the tuition; for those who could, many had decided to enroll their children in safer schools. It is also possible that many parents had perceived the school as too selective. Yet Johnson defended the school in this matter. She noted that Howalton had been one of the most prestigious schools in Chicago: "There were children of doctors, lawyers, teachers, and judges here. They wanted a place for their children to come get a good basic education apart from the crowded public schools at that time." But, she added, the school was "not exclusive intentionally: it seemed that we were, but all along there were the average student and the average parent who sent their children here for the same reason that the judges and lawyers did."⁵¹

In 1986, Howalton Day School closed its doors. What is left of the school today are archives with brochures that largely celebrate its success. Documents that might tell us more about its troubled finances, such as the minutes of board meetings, are conspicuously absent. What is also left are the memories of those who attended Howalton, as well as their professional accomplishments. At a Howalton reunion in 2003, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and business leaders returned to pay tribute to those teachers and administrators who had given them so much. Ethel Darden, former assistant principal during the 1970s, was honored at the reunion. Over one hundred years old, she was able to recall the names of all those students who had attended during her administration.⁵²

Nostalgia aside, we need to ask: Why did Howalton School thrive during its first twenty or so years? And what happened during the later years that led to its financial difficulties and closure? In terms of finances, school costs and tuition were kept low as long as they rented the facilities, and as long as parents volunteered their time and services. Dedicated parents, teachers, and students ensured that fund-raising events were successful. But as we all know, school success is more than financial security; success is teaching students to act upon their curi-

osity and imagination, as well as their sense of social and political commitment. Howalton School started with a vision that enacted a philosophy of progressive education: of teaching the whole child; of creating a community of learners and practitioners; and of promoting a sense of democracy in practice. Howalton thrived for at least two decades because of this vision, which allowed the founders and teachers to experiment with pedagogies, subject matter, and structures.

However, during its last twenty years, Howalton experienced financial difficulties. Parent Susan Woodson, for one, questioned the motivations and decisions of the school board members.⁵³ Certainly one has to wonder why the board members were not able to negotiate and buy property for a new school or, at the very least, locate rental property in a safer neighborhood. Could the board have borrowed from the building fund of 350,000 dollars to keep the school afloat during the 1970s and 1980s? Might Howalton have scaled back its size to serve the lower elementary grades only?

The difficulty of keeping Howalton's vision alive raises other questions as well. As Dewey himself emphasized, nothing remains static; change is inevitable and necessary.⁵⁴ It appears that the Howalton community tenaciously held on to ideas and practices that it considered progressive. But as historians of progressive education have cautioned, there were many versions of progressive education. Similarly, they have noted, schools which embraced progressive educational ideas often engaged in contradictory practices.⁵⁵ One of the most obvious ones was that they recruited mostly from the privileged class. As Alan Sadovnik and Susan Semel have noted, the "democratic" ideals of progressive education were the privilege of wealthy children in wealthy communities.⁵⁶ This was especially true in Chicago and its northern suburbs. Although Howalton students were perhaps not as wealthy, they did have relative privilege and wealth.

At the same time, one needs to remember why Howalton Day School was founded. Since the 1920s, the Chicago public schools had been largely segregated. Since the 1930s, African-American public schools in Chicago had been overcrowded and substandard. Thus the question of whether these public schools were "democratic" or not may be a rhetorical one. The founders of Howalton School simply did what many African-American teachers and parents have done historically when their children's educational opportunities were limited: they created alternative community facilities. Howalton Day School is a story of both successful and unsuccessful practices. In the end, Howalton can teach scholars, policy makers, and practitioners about the possibilities of progressive education, as well as the important lesson that school staff and community members should remain critical and open to change.

Notes

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1. See David Levering Lewis, *W.E. B. DuBois—Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: H. Holt, 1993).
2. Anne Meis Knupfer, *In Defense of Culture: Women’s Activism during the Chicago Black Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).
3. James B. McCahey, “A 1944 Message about Chicago’s Schools,” box 21, file 2, Louis Wirth Papers [hereafter LWP], Special Collections, University of Chicago.
4. Ibid.; Rabbi Morton Berman and Zonia Baber, *Report of the Commission on Intercommunity Relationships of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Council of Churches and Synagogues on “The Negro Problems of the Community to the West* (Chicago: n.p., 1940), 17.
5. Citizens Schools Committee, Data on Negro Schools in Chicago as of September, 1943, box 5, file 2, Citizens Schools Committee Papers [hereafter CSCP], Chicago Historical Society.
6. “Council Wages War on Unfair Shift System,” *Chicago Defender*, 3 Dec. 1939; Michael W. Homel, *Down from Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920–41* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 82.
7. *Chicago Defender*, 16 Dec. 1939; Polly Graham, Ruth Weaver Halpern, Muriel Herson, and Irene Landkof Jerison, “An Investigation of the Chicago School Redistricting Program” (Master’s thesis, University of Chicago, 1952), 4, 19.
8. James B. McCahey, “A 1944 Message about Chicago’s School,” LWP.
9. School in Ward 3, June 12, 1946, box 5, file 5, CSCP.
10. City of Chicago, *Home Front Unity, Proceedings of the Chicago Conference on Home Front Unity* (Chicago: Mayor’s Committee on Race Relations, 1945), 23.
11. Committee on Education, Training and Research in Race Relations Records, box 13, file 8, LWP.
12. Memorandum Re: School, Gaines to Oscar Brown, May 29, 1945, box 7, file 4, Irene McCoy Gaines Papers [hereafter IMG], Chicago Historical Society; Berman and Baber, *Report of the Commission on Intercommunity Relationships*. Accused of being a Communist because he had attended Teachers College and supported progressive educational ideas, Superintendent Hunt was ousted in 1953.
13. John A. Winget, “Teacher Inter-School Mobility Aspirations Elementary Teachers, Chicago Public School System, 1947–48” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1952), 2–3, 51, 73–78, 166–168, 173; Howard S. Becker, “Role and Career Problems of the Chicago Public School Teachers” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1951), 54. In the first teacher’s quotation, D—— refers to either Dunbar or DuSable, two Black schools.
14. Douglas J. Simpson and Michael J. B. Jackson, *Educational Reform: A Deweyan Perspective* (New York: Garland, 1997), xliii.
15. John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1915), 208–224.
16. Ida B. DePencier, *The History of the Laboratory Schools: The University of Chicago, 1896–1965* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 154–155.
17. Timuel D. Black, Jr., *Bridges of Memory: Chicago’s First Wave of Black Migration* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 569.
18. Biographical Sketches on/Tributes to Founder, box 1, Howalton School Archives [hereafter HSA], Carter Woodson Regional Library, Chicago; Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, Historical Sketches on Howalton School file, HSA; WPA Nursery News, box 1, file 10, Rose Haas Auschuler Papers.

19. Biographical Sketches on/Tributes to Founder, box 1, HSA; Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, Historical Sketches on Howalton School file, HSA.
20. Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, Historical Sketches on Howalton School file, HSA.
21. Box 2, file 3, HSA; box 2, file 6, HSA. Poet Gwendolyn Brooks was on the parent council's committee for a 1950 benefit.
22. Box 1, Financial Statements-Howalton School, 1951–1975 file, HSA. Davis had studied anthropology at Harvard under Lloyd Warner and it was through Warner that he was offered a faculty position at the University of Chicago. See Dallas L. Browne, "Across Class and Culture: Allison Davis and His Works," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, ed. Ira. E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 171–172.
23. Howalton Day School Prospectus, box 1, file 1, HSA.
24. See John Dewey, *The School and Society: The Child and the Curriculum* (1902; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 18; John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1939); Arthur Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930–1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3–8, 17.
25. Howalton School brochure, "FACTS," Box 1, file 1.
26. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 79.
27. *Ibid.*, 162.
28. Brochure, 1950–51, box 1, Brochures file, Promotional Literature, HSA.
29. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 94.
30. Meeting Notes from 1948, box 5, Memorabilia file, HSA; John Dewey, *How We Think* (rpt., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 102–106.
31. Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, Historical Sketches on Howalton School file, HSA.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Simpson and Jackson, *Educational Reform*, 121; Martin Bickman, *Minding American Education: Reclaiming the Tradition of Active Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003), 107–108; Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 36.
34. "FACTS," box 1, file 1.
35. Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, file 2.
36. Untitled manuscript, box 1, file 9; *Chicago Defender*, 8 Sept. 1965.
37. See Knupfer, *Toward A Tender Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African-American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), also Willard Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
38. Letter from Parkway Community House to Allen-Anderson July 1, 1952, box 3, Correspondence-Allen-Anderson file 1946–1975, HSA; Letter from Parkway Community House to Allen-Anderson Aug. 8, 1952, box 3, Correspondence-Allen-Anderson file 1946–1975, HSA.
39. Meeting Notes from 1948, box 5, Memorabilia file, HSA.
40. Simpson and Jackson, *Educational Reform*, 39.
41. Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 2, file 2.
42. Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, file 2.
43. Need Four, box 1, file 9.

44. Box 1, Financial Statements-Howalton School, 1951–1975 file, HAS; Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, Historical Sketches on Howalton School file, HSA.
45. Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, file 2.
46. Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, Historical Sketches on Howalton School file, HSA.
47. Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, file 2; Status Report of Howalton Day School Building Program, box 1, file 3; Meeting of Investors, 1973, box 1, file 9.
48. Need Four, box 1, file 9.
49. Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach, box 1, file 2; Autobiography of Mildred Carstensen, Box 3, file 10.
50. *Chicago Defender*, 19 Feb. 1983, box 2, file 8; Phone Interview with Susan Woodson, 14 October 2004.
51. *Chicago Defender*, 19 Feb. 1983, box 2, file 8.
52. Phone Interview with Susan Woodson, 14 October 2004.
53. Ibid.
54. Dewey cited in Zilversmit, *Changing Schools*, 17.
55. Susan F. Semel and Alan R. Sadovnik, eds., "Schools of Tomorrow," *Schools of Today: What Happened to Progressive Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Zilversmit, *Changing Schools*; Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964).
56. Alan R. Sadovnik and Susan F. Semel, eds., *Founding Mothers and Others: Women Educational Leaders during the Progressive Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 255.

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