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First appearance in the mid-nineteenth century American normal school, educational history was one of the earliest subjects to comprise the professional teacher education curriculum in the United States. Yet despite its long lineage, the field has always had a difficult time of it. University historians have been as skeptical about its academic legitimacy and the scholarly competence of its practitioners as were their liberal arts faculty colleagues about virtually everything and anyone associated with the training of teachers and the study of education. At the same time, however, educational history was criticized by many faculty members in schools of education as lacking the relevant focus on the professional training of teachers and other immediate educational problems to merit a place within their midst.

In recent years the status of educational history among professional historians has actually improved. In part this has been the result of the growing interest of faculty in university departments of history in the study of education. Equally, if not more important, is the fact that a new generation of educational historians have come of age since the 1960s who see the purpose of their field of study as broader than simply the professional preparation of teachers. Unlike their predecessors who taught the subject at the turn of the twentieth century, these scholars are more likely to have had formal training in history and to share the outlook of their counterparts in university history departments that the history of education is a liberal study.

The place of educational history among those who teach and do research in education is less clear. There are certainly indicators that the field is well regarded among educational scholars. At less than

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600 members, the division of educational historians within the American Educational Research Association (Division F) is the smallest of its twelve standing divisions. Yet, educational historians have received five of the Association’s annual outstanding book awards since the prize was established in 1983. The publication efforts of American educational historians point to the robustness of current research within the discipline, and the field’s premier journal, *History of Education Quarterly*, enjoys a strong reputation for its standards in accepting articles and for the high quality of the articles that it ultimately publishes.

At the same time, however, the suspicion that many in the educational disciplines have about the field’s lack of application to the problems of teacher education and educational practice remain. The dominant role that social efficiency thinking has played and continues to play within the educational disciplines since the 1920s has created a less than hospitable setting for any discipline that defines itself as a liberal study. An alternative disciplinary tradition, social foundations of education, which has from time to time challenged efficiency thinking in the name of social reform, has not provided a more welcoming terrain for educational historians. From its early appearance on the scene during the 1930s, this field has sought to direct the educational disciplines away from a traditional academic focus toward a commitment to at least social change if not outright social reconstruction. Rather than favoring educational history or any single social science discipline as the vehicle for studying schools as institutions, it promoted under the rubric of social foundations a new, integrated, and decidedly reform minded subject. Some social science disciplines, namely sociology, anthropology, political science, and philosophy have been able to find a place within this new discipline of social foundations while at the same time continuing their own distinct identities as lenses for exploring issues of schooling. This dual identity however, has been less comfortable for educational historians.\(^3\)

Educational historians have certainly not been refused a place within the social foundations family. It is not unusual for educational historians to be members of both the History of Education Society (HES) and the principal organization of the educational foundations, the American Educational Studies Association (AESA). The two organizations in fact often hold their annual conferences jointly. Education historians are frequent contributors to the principal AESA journal, *Educational Studies*.

\(^3\)Ibid, 311-313.
Notwithstanding all of this, however, there is something of an underlying tension that strikes us as present in the views of some educational historians when they talk about the social foundations of education. These historians are, we think, somewhat uncomfortable with the decidedly more practical orientation of those who identify themselves with the social foundations of education. They are not as willing as their counterparts in the foundations seem to be in according teacher education a central focus of their discipline. And while certainly not any less "left" in their political viewpoints than are the vast majority of social foundations practitioners, these educational historians seem less accepting of the role of their discipline as a vehicle of explicit social reform.

In a recent article in History of Education Quarterly, John Rury has raised the issue of the place of educational history within the broader field of education by comparing it with other similarly situated historical studies in science, law, and economics. What seems to provide these other historical studies with their place within their respective parent disciplines, he argues, has been the ability of scholars to connect their historical research to the concerns of these professional fields. His recommendation for addressing the problem is that educational history reorients itself as a field so that its research agenda is more in line with the immediate concerns of professional educators. The purpose of this essay is to consider the prospect that a focus on policy on the part of educational historians might better connect the field with the concerns of the broader field of education and how that connection might be achieved. We will begin by looking at the comparison that Rury draws between the work of educational historians and those historians who work in other non-historical professional fields. We will then consider the record of current efforts on the part of educational historians to focus their work on the exploration of educational policy. Finally, we will look at how an approach to research modeled after the discipline of ethnohistory might serve to provide a needed connection between educational history and the research agenda of the broader field of education.

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4 Rury, John L., "The Curious Status of the History of Education: A Parallel Perspective," History of Education Quarterly 46 (2005), pp. 553-576. Rury's assessment of the state of educational history is not, however, universally shared. See the exchange among historians from schools of business, theology, law, journalism, medicine, and education in "Interchange: History in the Professional Schools," in The Journal of American History 92 (2005), 553-576. The participants of this commentary did note important differences in their work from that of scholars teaching in university departments of history. Yet, the depiction of the state of affairs that educational historian Jonathan Zimmerman offered did not seem all that different from the views offered by the other historians who work in professional schools.
II.
Rury’s starting point is to consider the similarities and differences between educational history on the one hand and the other similarly situated fields that he refers to as disciplinary history, namely the history of science, legal history, and economic history. There are, he points out, a number of commonalities among these disciplinary historians. The majority of these scholars, although a number of them have studied history or even received a degree in history, have completed their academic preparation in the professional fields in which they work. Another similarity is that for the most part these disciplinary historians teach in schools and departments in these professional fields rather than in departments of history. And finally, these scholars report that to varying degrees they have had to confront doubts from traditional historians about the value and rigor of their brand of disciplinary or professional history.

Yet there is, Rury argues, an important difference between historians of education and the other disciplinary historians he considers in his essay. He argues that most disciplinary historians believe that there is a strong connection between the issues about which they study and write and the professional field to which they belong. Educational historians, on the other hand, seem to emphasize the distance between their work and the educational professions. It is not that these scholars do not study educational issues. As Rury sees it, they focus their attention on a host of such subjects. The problem is that the issues that educational historians most often explore are broad in nature and tell us more about the larger culture and its practices than they do about the various realms of educational work, such as teaching, testing, curriculum development, and teacher education to name but a few. In other words, the close connections that exist between the history of law and other disciplinary histories and the concerns of practitioners within these professions are not to be found between educational historians and professional educators in related, non-historical fields. He goes on to wonder whether in fact educational historians can change the focus of their work and provide the same assistance to teachers, policy makers, and researchers that other disciplinary historians offer to scholars within their fields.5

A distinguishing feature of the work of these disciplinary historians, according to Rury was their penchant for introducing new con-

5 Ibid., pp. 572-573.
ceptual frameworks and methodologies that challenged longstanding, virtually taken-for-granted and outdated assumptions within their fields. In this vein, he points to the role that these disciplinary historians have played in introducing the methods of social history to their respective fields. Rury goes on to note that it was the grounding of revisionist educational historians in social history that enabled them to contribute to the revitalization of their field during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Educational historians may be able to play a similar role in today's world of educational research and practice. As Rury sees it, the majority of educational historians hold positions in schools and colleges of education where their work brings them into contact with a range of issues that are important to the broad field of education to which they might offer their particular insights. Such issues as teacher certification, testing and assessment, religion and education, academic achievement, and youth culture to name a few are subjects that he believes would benefit from the perspective that educational historians might offer.6

III.

There is a strong utilitarian orientation to the discipline of history in the United States that would support a research agenda for educational history along the lines that Rury suggests. This functional outlook was evidenced in some of the first historical accounts about America that were penned during the seventeenth and eighteenth century to promote travel to the new world and ultimately settlement. Later accounts during the nineteenth century offered narratives to promote nationalism and Western expansion and support for the Federal Union. It was during the first half of the twentieth century that historians became more directly involved in the public policy arena. Their activities included among other things writing in favor of progressive era social reform, propagandizing in support of the allied cause in World War I, participation in World War II military intelligence work, and advising government agencies during the years of the cold war on international affairs.7

These efforts became more institutionalized with the emergence during the 1970s of the fields of public history and policy history. The work of public historians in government agencies that address such policy issues as defense, economic regulation, abortion, and employment

6 Ibid., pp. 574-593.
7 Vinovskis, Maris A., History and Educational Policymaking (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 3-47.
discrimination would suggest that policy history would play an important influence within the field. As it turned out public history has achieved a degree of recognition and status within the broader field of history. It is less clear that this has been the case for policy history. Julian Zelizer has noted in this vein the division of opinion among historians about the state of policy history. Some see it as about to emerge as an important specialty area within the field of history. Others, however, are less optimistic noting the small number of history departments that offer programs in policy history, the absence of regular conferences as well as professional organizations in policy history, and the infrequent appearance of articles on policy history in the principal journals in the field. There are a number of explanations for why policy history has not emerged more forcefully as a field of specialization. Historians, it seems, tend to be skittish about using their expertise to undertake what would probably be the central task of policy history, namely studying the past to derive lessons for the present or for making predictions about the future. Beyond that, however, the decade of the 1970s saw the emergence of social history as a dominant focus for historians coupled with a diminished interest in what might have been the most appropriate terrain for the study of policy, political history. At the same time, it has also been the case that those who work in public policy do not readily turn to history for guidance.

IV.
There is something of a model for reorienting educational history in the direction that Rury suggests in the field of educational policy studies. The designation goes back to the mid-1960s and represents to some degree an extension and modification of the social foundations movement of the 1930s. Like its earlier counterpart, educational policy studies represents an interdisciplinary designation for exploring educational issues from the vantage point of such disciplines as sociology, political science, anthropology, philosophy, and history. What can distinguish it at least in some quarters from the social foundations of education is the less explicit commitment of its practitioners to using their scholarship

10 Vinovskis, pp. 239-242.
12 Vinovskis, p. 241.
to promote social reform and change. Where those associated with the social foundations of education, at least in its earlier days, were unabashed reformers who saw the task of the schools as social reconstruction, contemporary scholars who identify with educational policy studies are less so. This reformist impulse is not absent from the field of educational policy studies. Yet, an important concern of those who affiliate with this area of study is with using its constitutive disciplines including educational history as lenses for developing and interpreting educational programs, policies, and practices.

Policy has for some time now been a popular topic among educational historians.13 It is less clear, however, whether a focus on policy will connect the research of educational historians to the concerns of educators in anything approaching the way that Rury’s disciplinary historians link their research to the professional fields in which they work. A 1995 collection of essays edited by Diane Ravitch and Maris Vinovskis points to the role that historical scholarship can play in helping policy makers recognize the historical roots of many of the issues that they mistakenly assume are new and novel. They are careful to note that such an awareness does not provide specific recommendations for resolving immediate policy dilemmas. Yet, it can, they believe, provide some helpful direction for contemporary policymakers.14

A recent volume of essays from a 2007 conference at Brown University on the role of history in educational policymaking explores the same terrain as the earlier work but is more guarded and cautious in asserting the connections. There are a range of essays contained within the volume. Some explore issues in the distant and not so distant past such as civic education and school segregation but leave the connection to current policy questions up to readers to make. Other essays, however, are more explicit in their linkages and offer readers historical accounts of the development of a number of policies over time including Head Start, No Child Left Behind, and standards-based reform and the

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patterns of conflicts and agreements surrounding them.\textsuperscript{15} What is left unclear in these essays however, are the connections between educational history and educational policy making.

There are as it turns out several historiographical essays in the volume that explore this issue. In her essay, Tracy Steffes argues that the penchant of policymakers to want to generalize from the past to the present as well as to make predictions about the future on the basis of the past represents a misapplication of historical scholarship. History can, she goes on to say, help us in understanding the past, but not in those ways. Rather, its contribution among other things is to help us to frame more appropriate questions about the past, to challenge our taken for granted assumptions about the present, and to discover the often invisible influences of the past on the present.\textsuperscript{16}

Jack Dougherty takes a more pessimistic view. While history and policy enter into his work, he notes that it is not all that easy to fit these two enterprises together. While historians focus on the past and are concerned with what has happened, policy makers look to the future and are interested in what will happen. A second reason for the uneasy relationship is their differences as to the purposes of history. Historians examine the past with the intent of learning about that time and place while policymakers assume a more functional outlook and are concerned about how to use their knowledge of the past to promote current policy objectives. Finally, historians wish to understand the past while policymakers are more concerned with taking action to bring about change. Any collaboration between these two fields, he concludes, would be a daunting effort that would require practitioners in both domains to make fundamental changes in the ways that they work.\textsuperscript{17} One leaves this volume with the sense that there well may be valuable connections between the work of historians and policy makers. What is less certain, however, is how those linkages might be used to enhance the role that educational history can play in the broader field of educational research.

\textsuperscript{15} Wong, Kenneth K. & Rothman, Robert eds., Clio at the Table: Using History to Inform and Improve Education Policy (New York: Peter Lang, 2009). To gain a sense of the range of ways in which these essays offer a historical perspective on policy see the contributions by William Reese, Anne-Lise Halvorsen and Jeffrey Mirel, Elizabeth Rose, Gail Sunderman, and Margaret E. Goetz.\textsuperscript{16} Steffes, Tracy L., "Lessons from the Past: A Challenge and a Caution for Policy-Relevant History" in Clio at the Table: Using History to Inform and Improve Education Policy ed.Kenneth K. Wong & Robert Rothman (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 263-282.\textsuperscript{17} Dougherty, Jack, "Conflicting Questions Why Historians and Policymakers Miscommunicate on Urban Education" in Ibid., pp.251-262.
and practice. Resolving that uncertainty requires something of a different approach.

V.
A way that we propose to narrow the gap that Rury argues exists between educational history and educational policy, is with a strategy that brings together historical and ethnographic methods to form what can be called an ethnohistorical lens for examining the cultural practices of schooling. The epistemological links between history and anthropology are in principle quite strong. Yet, the two disciplines have for much of the twentieth century pursued distinct and different methods of inquiry - archival research for the historian and ethnographic fieldwork for the anthropologist. In the case of the US, this separation began to lessen in the period following World War II as increasing numbers of anthropologists began to respond to emerging demands from both the state and civil society for knowledge related to areas of the world in which the nation had new strategic, economic, and political interests and involvements.

American anthropologists soon found themselves taking leading roles in many universities in the organization of area studies programs in which groups of scholars in different fields were brought together under one roof for the purpose of creating knowledge about less known but increasingly important national settings. The result was to establish under the rubric of area studies a group of new fields that encompassed the methods and research of a number of different social science disciplines. These new groupings included political scientists, economists, historians, and sociologists with their focus on such topics as modernization, nationalism, and colonialism. Also included in these new disciplines were anthropologists whose ethnographic methods of face-to-face observations coupled with their knowledge of indigenous languages enabled them to extend the research agenda of area studies to include explorations of villages as "authentic traditional" bounded entities, connected to national cultural, economic, and religious networks. It is at this point that history and anthropology began to establish connections

that would pave the way for what has become a mutual interaction between these two disciplines.

We believe that two factors provided the impetus for this interaction between history and anthropology. There was the growth and diversification of anthropology during the 1960s that extended its focus beyond the study of indigenous culture to include research on urban, industrialized societies and such modern institutions as medicine and education. And during the following decade there was the emergence of cultural studies that among other things identified additional “others” for many social scientists including anthropologists to direct their attention, namely Blacks, ethnic minorities, women, and the urban poor.20

One of the major effects of these disciplinary changes was that the ethnographic methods based on participant observation and open ended interviews ceased to be the singular hallmark of anthropological inquiry. They were embraced by other social science disciplines in their efforts to explore the human story. At this point, the ethnographic look, which started with a gaze focused on the “exotic other” as part of the non-Western cultural and distant geographical world was transformed into an inward look into the “otherness” that characterized industrial modern and developed Western societies.

As a result, the clear definition of ethnography as a construction of the present as observed in the field versus the historical construction of the past as uncovered in archives becomes attenuated. Ethnographic work now came to feed historical constructions of the past and saw the impact of policy making as social and cultural production in the present.21 Advancing this connection was the growing popularity of social history among educational historians. As Bernard Cohn describes this movement, it was history from the “bottom-up.” Its subject was the study of the masses, the deprived, the exploited, and other excluded groups that more mainstream historians at the time saw not so much as protagonists but as passive objects for study. These groups, classes, or categories (women, the lumpen-proletariat, Blacks, ethnics and the dispossessed) began under the influence of social history during the decade of the 1970s to enjoy more attention. Accompanying this focus was the use of new sources including oral traditions, the study of marginalia, folklore, public celebrations and rituals, through the utilization of different kinds of records to explore past and present characteristics and life

20 Ibid.
21 Sutton and Levinson, Ibid.
patterns of the life of excluded groups. Cohn argues that this historical perspective, as a new kind of social history, has set the stage for a dialogue between historians and anthropologists that has made historical research receptive to ethnographic methods.

His model for this link between history and anthropology is the research and writing of ethnohistorians whose studies of indigenous populations in North America, Africa, Australia, and Oceania were written from a native point of view. The great contribution of ethnohistorians, according to Cohn, was their efforts to reconstruct what they saw as the distorted accounts of these indigenous, often non-literate peoples produced by European intellectuals and colonizers. Their sources for this new and what they saw representing a more accurate narrative, were the oral traditions of these populations that they gathered through ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation.²² It is this effort bringing together these two documentary sources, one historical and the other anthropological and ethnographic, that we look to for what we see as an ethnohistorically informed research agenda for the history of education.

VI.
One of the first attempts at bringing history and ethnography together to explore issues of educational policy was Louis Smith and his colleagues' second look during the mid-1980s at the student-centered, Kensington Elementary School. Fifteen years earlier, Smith had studied the establishment of this progressively oriented school in the conservative Milford School District. The original research involved both a narrative account of the creation of this school and a description of its innovative features as well as an effort to develop a broader theory of innovation and change that had the potential to be generalized to other educational settings.²³ In the follow-up study Smith and his colleagues undertook an examination of the development of the Milford School District in an attempt to situate the creation, growth, and ultimate fate of the Kensington School in a historical context. Relying largely on board of education minutes, newsletters, school annuals, other district records, and interviews, the resulting narrative traced the evolution of the district from 1914 until the end of the decade of the 1970s, paying particular attention to the

²² Cohn, Ibid.
important political conflicts affecting key school personnel. Their intent in developing this account was to describe the role that the Kensington School played in this history and to incorporate that history into their more general model of educational innovation and change.\textsuperscript{24}

Writing in the mid-1980s Smith and his colleagues noted that despite what they saw as the similarities between the methods of historians and ethnographers, there had been very little previous research that sought to link these two approaches together. Although they did not begin their study as historians but rather as ethnographers, they found themselves drawn to historical research in order to explain the importance of the district and its development in the life of the Kensington School. It was, they claimed, their historical study that enabled them to move conceptually from a study of innovation in one school to frame a broader theory of innovation and change in American public education.\textsuperscript{25}

Rubén Donato's recent examination of the struggles of a subgroup of Hispanics or Latinos of Spanish origin in Southern Colorado between 1920 and 1963 to expand their educational opportunity is a good example of how educational historians can use this ethnohistorical approach. Looking at the experiences of Hispanics in four Southern Colorado school districts, Donato examines the interplay between patterns of discrimination, segregation, and acceptance that mediated the schooling of children in these communities. His account employed an array of sources that historians traditionally rely on including state and school district archival records, school board minutes, superintendents' reports, census reports, and high school and college yearbooks, In addition, he conducted a large number of ethnographic interviews of former teachers, administrators, students.

Donato focuses his attention in this study on the access that Hispanics had to the public schools, their treatment within the schools, and the ultimate impact on their lives and careers. He argues that the key factor that accounted for any educational success that these children enjoyed was the degree of autonomy that Hispanics experienced in their relations with Anglo populations in directing their schools and more generally their communities. His study not only provides a historical account of this struggle for equal educational opportunity but draws the implica-


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., pp. 25-41, 65-75, 258-283.
tions for contemporary policies regarding the education of Latinos. In concluding his essay Donato highlights a point that we have made earlier in this essay that educational historians have been reluctant to connect their research with matters of educational policy because as they see it "such analyses abandon the stance of detachment that helps them deal with the past on its own terms."  

One group of researchers who have not been bothered by concerns about the need for detachment has been curriculum historians. Their studies of curriculum change and reform have provided a popular venue for connecting history to the development of curriculum policies and their implementation into actual school practice. One of the authors of this essay, Barry Franklin, has focused his research on such case studies since the mid-1980s. His most recent work, which he is completing with one of his doctoral students, explores the reorganization of a large, comprehensive urban high school with an enrollment of around 1500 students into a number of smaller learning communities each enrolling approximately 300 to 400 students. The sub-title of the grant that funded this research, "the history of a curriculum reform" addresses what they are attempting in this study, namely to situate the notion of smaller learning communities, which has become in recent years, a very popular and trendy reform policy, in its historical context. They are doing this to explain why a host of stakeholders in this school and its surrounding community have embraced this reform model and once having done so how they have put it into practice. Much of the research is ethnographic in nature and involves in-depth interviews of various stakeholders; participant observation, including classroom observation, attendance at meetings, and simply conversing with school personnel in the staff lounge; and the review and examination of a variety of archival documents, including grant applications, school district reports, curriculum materials, and memoranda of various sorts. The goal in this portion

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27 Ibid., p 143.
of the research is to explain this reform in terms of the lived experiences of the various stakeholders.

There is, however, another dimension to this research that is clearly historical and involves placing this reform in the longer life of the school and in the school's place over time within the school district and the community. Here the research relies on the examination of an array of primary source documents that address both the history of the school and history of the reform itself. They believe that such an approach will not only inform readers about the history of a particular school reform. It will offer them information about the trajectory of reform efforts that will prove helpful to policy makers in their work in understanding not only smaller learning communities but the reform process itself.

This examination of smaller learning communities is part of a larger collection of case studies entitled *Curriculum, Community, and Urban School Reform* that Franklin has undertaken using an ethnohistorical approach. One such study, for example, explored the implementation of late 1990s reform efforts in New York City and Detroit sponsored by the Annenberg Foundation. Here Franklin used ethnographic methods, particularly interviews, to examine the role that intermediary organizations played in both cities in sponsoring and implementing different school-based reforms for addressing low academic achievement among economically disadvantaged students in urban school systems. Such interviews enabled him to describe how a number of stakeholder organizations in both cities conceptualized the problems facing urban schools and then to consider how these organizations framed and implemented polices to address them. The data obtained from these interviews were particularly helpful in allowing him to identify how the agreements and conflicts among these stakeholders advanced and retarded reform initiatives. He then examined an array of archival documents, particularly newspaper accounts and various reports, to construct a historical narrative that linked this reform to a longer history of efforts of urban schools and communities to address post-World War II demographic and economic transformations and associated patterns of racial discord.

Another case study in this volume examined the development and implementation a policy initiative of Britain's New Labour government, Education Action Zones (EAZ). Introduced in 1998 and continued through 2002, the program brought together clusters of usually fifteen to twenty-five schools located throughout England in areas of social and economic distress with the intent of raising academic standards and enhancing the social inclusion of the population. The EAZs were partner-
ships involving schools, local education agencies, parents, community groups, and private sector agencies and were funded by a combination of direct government support and business contributions. The study employed ethnographic methods, particularly interviews, to look at the introduction and implementation of the EAZ initiative in the schools of a borough of London given the pseudonym of North Upton. The account paid particular attention to the economic and social conditions facing the borough and its schools, the conflicts surrounding the introduction of the EAZ initiative, the changes that the EAZ program brought to the schools, and the impact of the initiative on student achievement.

The study also included a historical account of the origins of New Labour's reform agenda, including its recommendations for the nation's schools, and the connections between those reforms and the post World War II transformation of the British economy. Relying largely on an array of archival documents, this section of the study focused its attention on the transformation of the Labour Party into its more politically moderate counterpart known as New Labour, the embrace of "third-way" thinking under the leadership of Tony Blair, the relationship between the reform views of New Labour and the previous Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher, and the emergence of New Labour polices for reforming the nation's schools.²⁹

The explorations of the links between history, anthropology and ethnography and the rich approaches that this perspective can produce, continues to be part of the debate in both historical and social sciences circles.

For us, it is this interplay between these distinct research methodologies—one for reconstructing the past and the other for interpreting the present—that we see as a way of connecting the work of educational historians to contemporary issues of educational policy.