

School(house) Design and Curriculum in Nineteenth Century America

Historical and Theoretical Frameworks

Joseph da Silva



School(house) Design and Curriculum
in Nineteenth Century America

Joseph da Silva

School(house) Design
and Curriculum in
Nineteenth Century
America

Historical and Theoretical Frameworks

palgrave
macmillan

Joseph da Silva
Bristol Community College
Tiverton, RI, USA

ISBN 978-3-319-78585-1 ISBN 978-3-319-78586-8 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78586-8>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018952372

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover image © TimAbramowitz/ E+/ gettyimages

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

I am particularly indebted to my family for their sustained support and love. This book is dedicated to my daughter Shantel, son Aaron, and son-in-law Danny. Their support and inspiration have been foundational. A special dedication goes out to my wife Fatima whose commitment to this project has been unwavering and without her support this project would not have been possible. In addition, this book is dedicated to my mother Elzira and my father José for their unconditional love and care through all my life's journeys and to my sisters Filomena and Maria for believing in me and encouraging me every step of the way. Finally, this book is a tribute to my grandmother Filomena, who sacrificed much to make our family's dream possible in the United States.

FOREWORD

Dr. da Silva vividly illustrates why public school facility planning needs frontline educators and communities integrally engaged in the planning and design of public schools. Dr. da Silva explains how the dominant and competing educational ideologies, philosophies, and culture drive key aspects of the design of school buildings.

The tensions of state, economy, and culture that he cites are no less in play now than they were in the nineteenth century and so his exploration and study are strongly relevant today. The innovation that is the foundation of this country is not that Americans do not have within us a nature different than those described in a Hobbesian society—nasty, brutish, and short—but that democratic rights of free expression, assembly, due process, and elective government would give Americans a better way to navigate the tensions of power, money, and human nature which are embedded in the state, economy, and culture.

The design arts and building sciences and trades are at the essence of school facilities design and construction. However, the decisions about the location, design, care, and utilization of our built environment for public school spaces requires the application of our democratic tools and innovations. When there is respect for the perspectives, aspirations, and input from traditionally disenfranchised communities—low income, non-English speaking, female, and minority—the educational facility planning and design processes will build social capital and facilitate a shared educational mission and objectives.

School(house) Design and Curriculum in Nineteenth Century America: Historical and Theoretical Frameworks is a must read for educators,

designers, and civic leaders, alike, who work in the nexus space around education, community, and equity. The complexity of planning and designing school places, most of which have endured major governmental, economic, educational, and cultural movements and reforms, requires our collective intelligence and humility. This book is a framework that will help.

Washington, DC, USA

Mary Filardo

PREFACE

My personal and professional life has long been predicated on the politics of “dwelling” in American schools. As a young student—a working-class immigrant to Massachusetts in the 1960s—my schooling refused to let me think and act in particular ways. Abjecting my academic interests and Portuguese tongue, my education quickly silenced my sense of self. Today, this history ignites my professional practice as a school architect and policy-maker; daily, my work is fraught with questions about what ways of thinking and being a school might nurture or foreclose. What curricula might a particular kind of architecture support? Which ones might it thwart? What kind of citizens might a certain curriculum, delivered in a specific spatiality, rear? In taking up these questions, I have to consider the context in which a school will be built; the history and norms of the culture in which it will inevitably intervene. To figure out what it will mean to dwell in a school design that has yet to be built, I always have to first consider what, exactly, it means for students to dwell in American schools today.

Surely, whatever “dwelling” in our schools means today is deeply tied to what it has meant to do so historically. Centuries of theory about what exactly “education” and “educational” spaces are, together with the construction and standardizing of schools and the pedagogies carried out within them contour our senses of what the school is and what it can be in the twenty-first century. And so, I dove into the history of American school design. As I combed through the past centuries, I found one period particularly important: the nineteenth century defined American education like no other. Enlightenment legacies. A burgeoning American identity, independent from its British roots. Industrialization. During these years, America’s

sense of schooling underwent meaningful changes. From education predicated on humanist ideals to scientific management, nineteenth century pedagogy and architecture were deeply debated and fiercely fought over. The impact of these complex struggles on America's historic approaches to school design remains the foundations of education in the nation today. *School(house) Design and Curriculum in Nineteenth Century America* carefully unfurls this history, all the while curious about what the politics of dwelling in nineteenth century schools says about how students are and are not allowed to dwell today, and the ways in which builders, policymakers, and teachers—all those stakeholders in our children's education—might best respond to the historicized politics of the present schooling to hold the institution to its founding democratic commitments.

Tracing the history of American school design through individual experiences gives an opportunity to unpack the intricacies of its formative impact. The theories I develop in this book offer important frameworks to query the ways in which school design shapes students, to be sure. But the ideas these frameworks can yield are so much more when they engage with experience. My own history stands as an entry point; a way to locate the limits and stakes of the study by humanizing it (while also doing the double duty of establishing my positionality as a researcher): my original “classroom” was a far cry from the ones I design today, both geographically and politically. Growing up in Portugal, at six years old, my most formative environment was a narrow, cobbled street in the island region of the Azores. Whenever the oxen-pulled carts gave the street over to us, my friends and I transformed these roads into sites of discovery and play, colonizing the cobblestones with conversations, experiments, jacks, hide-and-seek, and marbles. But as the Apollo missions kissed the moon, my family left Portugal for Boston, taken by the promises of the American Dream. Stepping foot on the Promised Land's gilded soil, we realized my uncle wasn't waiting for us as agreed. Unable to speak English, my family was disheartened and quite literally disoriented. The stress mounted as my mother's high heel caught in an escalator—a cruel metaphor for how stuck and powerless we were already feeling.

The anguish I felt that day at the airport didn't let go: it followed me to Fall River, Massachusetts, where my family settled on the third floor of a six-tenement house on the city's main street. (Ironically, Fall River is where the *Dollars for Scholars* program was founded in 1958; a program that earned Fall River the nickname of “Scholarship City” despite the fact that the city has historically underperformed compared to the majority of

other Massachusetts communities). It followed me to my first school, an uptown bilingual school for immigrants. Realizing that I was unable to negotiate the English public transportation system, the school administration quickly transferred me out of my bilingual school and into an English school in my neighborhood, Laurel Lake Elementary. But Laurel Lake only intensified my anxiety. There was no cafeteria or gymnasium, and certainly no spaces for art or music. Laurel Lake had only classrooms, an administration office, corridors, stairs, and a large boiler room. Dishearteningly, the staff filled these spaces with repressive pedagogies. Take for example, Laurel Lake's rule that—rain or shine—the school day began with students lining up in the outside courtyard before parading to class in military-style. Arrive late and miss the line up? Principal's office. Mess up the line? Reprimand. Fail to walk as instructed? Shamed. Bare, militaristic, and unforgiving, Laurel Lake tolerated no "disruption". Education was predicated on obedience; discipline, staff believed, made learning possible. "Play"—my first pedagogy—was banned.

At Laurel Lake, my kindergarten classroom was square, spacious, south-facing, approximately 900 square feet, and—intentionally or not—determinedly committed to assimilating children into the nation's white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. More specifically, miniature tables and chairs made for six-year-olds sat in the center of the room, oriented toward a chalkboard on the north teaching wall. The room's south side offered a storytelling greenhouse-like nook with soft perimeter seating and flooring surrounding a rocking chair and books. On the window sill, seedlings planted by students sprouted, nurtured by the bright rays of the sun, which filled the room with a soft, radiant, and soothing glow. The classroom's entrance was bookended by a long, narrow closet in which we hung our coats. But despite these welcoming signposts, the classroom remained a painful site for many of its students: the coatroom doubled as an area where doctors and nurses would vaccinate students—immigrants given many more vaccines than other children. The scars from these extra shots stood for me as permanent marks of my outsider status. Meanwhile, it was between the hopeful plants and the gentle rocking chair that I found myself, again, completely disoriented in an English world—unable to understand what I was being asked to learn and given no support, I was sidelined academically and often ignored. Though an upright piano diagonally positioned in the room gave some relief when played by my kindergarten teacher, Ms. Bernstein, it produced a glorious and unfamiliar sound, this experience was dampened when the first grade class would join

us for a group sing-a-long. The first grade teacher, an immigrant to Fall River, was French-Canadian preferred we sing in French. Already lost in English, French only deepened my despair. Equally unsettling were the strict, disciplinary pedagogies with which my teachers carried out these activities and the school's stark environment, so disarming after my free and unregulated island life. Quick and dirty assimilation techniques, Laurel Lake's harsh stance against self-expression and its inability (or refusal) to engage my language and, with it, all my senses of self beholden to Portuguese, systematically pathologized everything I thought I was. Caught in a new geography, a new culture, a new language, a new community, and a new time zone with no support, my confidence plummeted. In this new world, esteem and agency became freshly predicated upon silencing any desired expressions and movements other than those licensed by the teacher. Coming of age in America, this system suggests, meant obeying authority. I struggled with the transition, but had no choice other than to adapt and assimilate as best I could.

My anguish followed me to junior high. The school segregated students within their grade levels based on their academic performance, making clear to everyone which students the school considered "successes" or "failures". This silent labeling, which likely influenced the teacher's instructional pace and so too their students' expectations, did not escape us and many students reiterated this hierarchal system, using its labels to bully each other. This sense of "sorting" continued into high school at BMC Durfee. I vividly remember telling my high school counselor that I wanted to become an architect. I had grown up watching the *Brady Bunch*, enthralled by Mr. Brady, an accomplished architect who lived in a modernist mansion with a family of six children—a lifestyle to which I aspired. Later in life, I would come to recognize the show's economic, racial, and gendered stereotypes and realize how starkly different my own experiences were from those it depicted. Few people in my neighborhood owned a single-family home and no one had an "Alice". Every male adult I knew was consumed by working extended hours at jobs that involved physically exhaustive labor, trying to make enough of a living to support their families, with little extra time to devote to their loved ones. In my world, young adults were encouraged to work full-time, as soon as possible. Many teenagers accordingly dropped out of school to help their families pay the bills. I myself, at the age of 13, started working on a farm alongside seasonal migrant workers to help my family buy a house (albeit in one of Fall River's lowest-income zip codes).

In this environment, the *Brady Bunch* represented a kind of American Dream, portraying the architectural profession as a viable path to success by suggesting it could support a gorgeous house and family. The luxury of Brady's modern mansion stood in stark contrast to my six tenement apartment or my one-room island home with a half-story bedroom loft. Recalling the promises of the Promised Land that brought us to America, I believed that if I worked hard, I could be like Mr. Brady. And so, I told my counselor I wanted to be an architect. His reply was, to say the least, discouraging: he advised me that architecture was a "gentleman's profession", work suited for middle- and upper-class (read: white, Anglo) males like Mike Brady whose families could afford a five-year private education and who, upon graduation, would have access to networks of wealthy patrons through their social circles. What he meant was that I did not fit into America's particular "architectural subjectivity". Class distanced me from my dream and I knew, once again, that due to my background I simply didn't fit into the mold America wanted me to; that despite my best attempts, I still wasn't part of the dreams my nation had for its children.

To his credit, my counselor wasn't wrong: in my senior year of high school there were no affordable public institutions of higher education in New England that offered a degree in Architecture, and all the nearby institutions (Harvard, MIT, Yale, and the RISD) offering such a program were financially and academically out of reach. I knew I couldn't stray far from my family who felt more alone than I did in our new world, and so further but more inexpensive institutions weren't an option for me. My plans to move beyond my neighborhood, beyond physical labor; to own my own home and enjoy my profession; to achieve, as my family sought to in leaving Portugal, the American Dream, felt impossible. At 18, I didn't understand that the Dream was really an ideological illusion rarely realized in practice and blamed myself for my inability to climb the "ladder". And so my anguish deepened. The realistic post-secondary solution for me was to enroll in an engineering technology program, which was, disappointingly, a program that would not lead to my becoming registered as a professional architect. After applying to and getting accepted by three local colleges for engineering, I ultimately enrolled in the Associates Engineering Transfer Program at Bristol Community College, working full-time to support my education.

But I knew I wanted something more than my Associates Degree would offer. After graduating, I transferred to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where I earned a Bachelor of Science degree. BSc in hand, I went

to work for an architecture firm and there, finally, was able to become a registered professional architect. Yet my anguish stayed with me. I knew I wasn't the only student whose subjectivity couldn't meet my schools' expectations. Driven by this concern, I wanted to transform educational spaces, to make them more compassionate, responsible, and caring environments. To understand how best to do this, I went on to complete an MSc in environmental science, MA in education, and a PhD in educational leadership. In the fall of 2011, at my PhD cohort's first colloquium, I engaged in a discussion prompted by a speaker's evaluation of English as a Second Language programs against more inclusionary alternatives. Openly, I communicated what I believed at the time was my successful experience as a first-generation immigrant dropped into a classroom at an English-only school by an administration with a sink-or-swim attitude. I recounted how I had learned to speak English through immersion, and questioned the focus on separate programming for English language learners. The colloquium scholars, well versed in critical theory, deconstructed the assumptions of my narrative, gently suggesting that I might more carefully consider how my journey spoke not just to a personal success but, more broadly, to the failure of America's education system to meet its democratic (or, at least meritocratic) promises. I am forever indebted to these scholars for helping me to understand myself and my work in such an empowering new light.

Personally, critical theory gave me a new sense of agency: the inverse of my K-12 education, agency in critical theory emerges with self-determination, not obedience. The field taught me to systematically dissect my identity and rework it anew. Professionally, critical theory helped me define and focus my research. It gave me a new language and method with which to recognize the common sense of schoolhouse design and curricula and to situate such norms as part of broader arrangements of power. Moreover, critical theory inspired me to develop my work into a social critique always concerned with emancipation, justice, and equity. By introducing me to and helping me navigate such a meaningful discipline, my professors and peers in the educational leadership program at the University of Massachusetts have shaped this research more than they know. Without the tutelage of such distinguished scholars and the support of my fellow students, I would not only have been unable to complete this research, but also unable to so deeply understand my positionality and potential.

Today, I'm a nationally recognized school architect and public educational administrator (now, somehow, part of that "gentleman's club" that rightly plagued my counselor's imaginary). As a school construction coordinator and architectural design reviewer for the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), I had unusual access to the detailed historical data necessary to complete this project. More specifically, I obtained data through the libraries, resources, and archives of the Rhode Island State Capital Library, Rhode Island Board of Education, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Rhode Island Historical Archives, University of Massachusetts, University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, Bristol Community College, Brown University, Rhode Island School of Design, Roger Williams University, University of Vermont, Yale University, Tiverton Public Library, Bristol Public Library, Bristol Preservation Society, Providence Preservation Society, Newport Historical Society, and Newport Public Library. I am deeply grateful for these opportunities and to these institutions for their support. In addition to my position at RIDE, I also have the privilege of being an instructor to a diverse group of students at Bristol Community College, whose ingenuity inspires me every day. And yet, my anguish remains. Today, our education systems continue to silence, marginalize, give up on, and push out otherwise gifted learners simply because they struggle to locate themselves in an institution that refuses them from day one. Of late, with the run up to and aftermath of the 2016 Presidential election, such attitudes towards immigrants and other non-normative ways of thinking and being have only grown more hostile. If something doesn't change, our children and our children's children will have to reckon with the assimilative *modus operandi* of the nation and its schools; will have to learn, from day one, that who they are just doesn't make the grade.

Tiverton, RI, USA

Joseph da Silva

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my gratitude to my friends and colleagues who supported me throughout the writing of this manuscript. To the distinguished University of Massachusetts scholars, Dr. Donald Macedo, Dr. Joao M. Paraskeva, Dr. Ricardo Rosa, Dr. Ken Saltman, and to my Educational Leadership doctoral cohort, thank you for your guided research advise for the manuscripts initial iterations. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. George Willis from the University of Rhode Island for helping to craft this manuscript and encouraging its publication, Eileen Botelho colleague at the Rhode Island Department of Education for critiquing countless earlier versions, and Dr. Jeffery Vincent the University of California for feedback on the final manuscript. A very special tribute goes out to my Rhode Island School Building Authority colleagues, Mario Carreno and Manuel Cordero, for their long term contributions in venting, editing, and critiquing countless versions through the seven-year tenure of this manuscript. To Brian Agular, Kevin Dore, and Daniel Quaille go out special thanks for assistance with graphics. I want to especially thank Danielle Matark who helped copy edit the manuscript from dissertation to final manuscript. I am sincerely indebt to countless others whom I have neglected in mentioning but who helped shape this manuscript. Thank you.

Finally, I want to honor my late Rhode Island Department of Education colleague Forrest Avilla, who generously handed down to my custody his exhaustive historical legal collection of the Rhode Island Board of Education official publications from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. These precious archives are the very foundation of this historical research, without these volumes this work would not be possible.

CONTENTS

| | | |
|----------|---|------------|
| 1 | Introduction | 1 |
| 2 | From Origin to Modernity: A Brief History of American School Design | 17 |
| 3 | Hotspot of Change: Case Studies in Nineteenth Century Rhode Island | 75 |
| 4 | Structuring Sociality: School Design as Social (Re)Production | 117 |
| 5 | Conclusion | 167 |
| | Appendix: Chronological Inventory Chart of Public Schoolhouses in RI from 1870s to 1920s | 191 |
| | Index | 209 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | | |
|----------|--|----|
| Fig. 2.1 | Exterior façade photo of replica <i>wetu</i> from the Wampanoag Homesite at Plymouth Plantation highlighting the central roof venting mechanism. <i>Wetu</i> is a bark-covered domed hut dwelling that provided shelter for families wandering the wooded coast hunting and fishing. These dwellings were made with sticks of red cedar and grass and had a deerskin door. (da Silva Photographer, 2015) | 19 |
| Fig. 2.2 | Illustrates an extant exemplar of the timber frame design typical in New England in the seventeenth century. The existing Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House built in 1670 in Newport, Rhode Island is characteristic of this popular seventeenth century architecture in the US. It includes a robust timber frame, brick or stone foundation, high pitch roof, medieval techniques, low ceilings, an exposed wood structure, relatively spacious rooms, two and a half stories, wide vertical siding boards, large central hearth opening, small windows, plaster brick chimney, small ornamental jett, and wide floor planks. The house has undergone many renovations in the last centuries, particularly noteworthy is the main entry and multiple expansions to the original modest dwelling. (da Silva Photographer, 2015) | 23 |
| Fig. 2.3 | Colony House, 1739. (da Silva Photographer, 2015) | 28 |
| Fig. 2.4 | Redwood Library, 1748–50. (da Silva Photographer, 2015) | 29 |
| Fig. 2.5 | Touro Synagogue, 1759–61. (da Silva Photographer, 2015) | 30 |
| Fig. 2.6 | Henry Barnard’s architectural plans for a graded school. (da Silva, 2018) | 38 |

| | | |
|-----------|--|----|
| Fig. 2.7 | Plan for a one-room schoolhouse recommended by Horace Mann. (McClintock & McClintock, 1970, p. 118) | 39 |
| Fig. 2.8 | Typical ‘Quincy Plan’ floor plate incorporating four classrooms. (da Silva, 2015) | 40 |
| Fig. 2.9 | ‘Philadelphia Plan’ floor plans designed by Sloan. (Cooledge, 1964) | 42 |
| Fig. 2.10 | Photograph and typical floor Plan of historically preserved Nathan Bishop Middle School in Providence, RI. (da Silva Photographer, 2013) | 64 |
| Fig. 2.11 | Photograph and site plan of the restored Central High School (built circa 1931) in Providence, RI. (da Silva Photographer, 2006) | 65 |
| Fig. 3.1 | A school room for young children. (Board of Education, 1898) | 79 |
| Fig. 3.2 | A rendering and floor plans of the Rogers High School in Newport (1875). The building is of Venetian Gothic architectural styling and measures 53 by 60 feet. (Board of Education, 1875) | 85 |
| Fig. 3.3 | Stone foundation, Gargoyle, and Windows at Rogers High School. (da Silva Photographer, 2014) | 86 |
| Fig. 3.4 | Photos of the Thayer School built in 1873, now a Boys and Girls Club. In this recent photo, the mansard and turret roofs have been demolished and the building now supports a flat roof. (da Silva Photographer, 2014) | 88 |
| Fig. 3.5 | Photograph of the Townsend Industrial School in Newport, RI (circa, 1894). (RI Board of Education, 1894) | 89 |
| Fig. 3.6 | Floor plans of the Basement, First, Second, and Third of the Townsend Industrial School in Newport, RI. (Board of Education, 1894) | 90 |
| Fig. 3.7 | The Thompson Middle School addition to the existing historic Townsend Historic School in Newport, RI. (da Silva Photographer, 2015) | 91 |
| Fig. 3.8 | An aerial site plan of the Bristol Town Common. (da Silva & Cordero, 2013) | 93 |
| Fig. 3.9 | The front façade of the Byfield School in Bristol. (da Silva Photographer, 2003) | 94 |
| Fig. 3.10 | Photos (front and rear) of the Walley School in Bristol, RI. (da Silva Photographer, 2014) | 96 |
| Fig. 3.11 | A photo of the Walley School in Bristol. (RI Board of Education, 1895) | 97 |
| Fig. 3.12 | The typical floorplan of the Walley School in Bristol. (RI Board of Education, 1895) | 98 |

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Fig. 3.13 | A photo of the Oliver Memorial School in Bristol, RI. (da Silva Photographer, 2003) | 100 |
| Fig. 3.14 | A photograph of the Oliver Memorial School in Bristol. (RI Board of Education, 1903) | 101 |
| Fig. 3.15 | The floor plans of the basement level, main level, and upper level of the Oliver Memorial School in Bristol. (RI Board of Education, 1903) | 102 |
| Fig. 3.16 | A rendering of the Point Street Grammar School in Providence RI (1874). The building of French Gothic styling is located on Plane Street. (RI Board of Education, 1876) | 105 |
| Fig. 3.17 | The floor plan of the Point Street Grammar School in Providence RI (1874). The building is 131 feet by 86 feet. The school rooms are relatively square, measuring about 32 feet by 33 feet with gendered split wardrobe rooms. Each room has a raised platform for the teacher and sits 49 students at fixed desks. (RI Board of Education, 1876) | 106 |
| Fig. 3.18 | A rendering of the third floor of the state Normal School in Providence. (RI Board of Education, 1879) | 109 |
| Fig. 3.19 | Floor plans of the first floor, second floor, and third floor of the state Normal School in Providence. (RI Board of Education, 1879) | 110 |
| Fig. 3.20 | A rendering of the Providence Manual Training School in Providence, RI (circa 1892–1894). (Board of Education, 1894) | 112 |
| Fig. 3.21 | Floor plans of the Providence Manual Training School in Providence, RI (circa 1892–1894). (Board of Education, 1894) | 113 |
| Fig. 4.1 | Floor plans of the Rhode Island Normal School in Providence. (RI Board of Education 1899) | 146 |
| Fig. 4.2 | A rendering of the Rhode Island Normal School in Providence. (RI Board of Education, 1899) | 148 |
| Fig. 5.1 | Photograph of the Paul Crowley East Bay MET School in Newport, RI. (William Marchetti Photographer, 2014) | 188 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Table 2.1 | <i>The Yale Report: Pedagogy and Spatial Forms</i> | 34 |
| Table 2.2 | Translating the scientific management curriculum to spatial forms | 62 |
| Table 3.1 | Efficiency factor analysis of Bristol Memorial Schools | 104 |
| Table 5.1 | An overview of the history of US culture, architecture, and curricula from 1760 to 1950 | 169 |



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This book explores the relationship between American curricula and school architecture in the nineteenth century. The need for a more nuanced history of schooling in the US is all too apparent given today's pedagogical landscape. Over the last few decades, American education has increasingly moved away from its founding democratic commitments of introducing students to a vast range of scholarly traditions in ways that nurture curiosity, critical capacities, and confidence. Instead, our children spend their days learning that success means getting the right answers on a standardized test—any other intellectual pursuit is a waste of their already limited time (Saltman & Gabbard, 2010). Security guards and police patrol our schools' already prison-like learning environments, their presence telling our kids that they're not to be trusted from day one, reminding them that stepping a toe out of line is not youthful experimentation, but criminal behavior deserving of zero-tolerance and, in some cases, strong-armed arrests (Giroux, 2009). We're fining children for being too poor to afford a healthy lunch (Siegel, 2013). And we're sorting students by class and competency, the pressure of state standards leaving little room for teachers to consider the complexities and undoubtable potential of young life beyond background. In short, for our kids, coming of age in America means surviving—not thriving in—school (Saltman & Gabbard, 2010). I want to know where we went wrong.

To be sure, the answer to such a question reaches far beyond this study. But what I hope to do here by unpacking nineteenth century schoolhouse¹ design and curriculum² is offer a history with which we might better understand the issues in American education today. The nineteenth century was a deeply influential time for American education: it saw the concretization of the earliest forms and aims of the nation's schooling and the development and standardization of the curricula and school architecture from which our current system emerges—in short, growing in this period like no other in American history, nineteenth century schooling firmly established the nation's pedagogical norms. This history thus exposes certain assumptions about what education should be from this period that, though they might have been forgotten over time, nevertheless continue to shape contemporary schooling. By making the nineteenth century nuances of American education clear, I hope to offer a site of inquiry for exploring the power structures of contemporary American education, an institution in desperate need of change. Though schoolhouses stand as complex and immensely formative sites, though they hold such transformative potential for the students who dwell within them, we relegate them too often to the backdrop of educational and architectural tapestries. Very often their conditions—however poor—are naturalized and ignored in public discourse. *School(house) Design and Curriculum in Nineteenth Century America* stands as a reminder that schoolhouses are critical sites of interrogation and intervention in education.

Certainly, I am not the first to have these concerns. Many scholars have already exposed the formative impact of architecture and curricula in nineteenth century America and beyond.

There is a common sense that school facilities matter; that their architecture does indeed impact learning. This sense is captured in a speech delivered by Churchill to the House of Commons in October of 1944 in which he articulates that “[t]here is no doubt whatever about the influence of

¹As prescribed by the Rhode Island Department of Education's (RIDE) *Public Schoolhouse Assessment* (2013) and *State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses* (2017), I use the term “schoolhouse” to denote educational architecture, by which I mean any space created to deliver schooling.

²After William Schubert, I use “curriculum” to signify any and all directives advocated for teaching and learning. For Schubert, a curriculum is made up of internal and external school environments and explicit and implicit as well as general and detailed notions of subject matter and its development, attainment, and consequences (Schubert, 1984).

architecture and structure upon human character and action. We make our buildings and afterwards they make us. They regulate the course of our lives” (Churchill, 1994). Similarly concerned about architecture’s formative power, thinkers such as D. Vitiello, M. Clapper, G. E. Thomas, and A. S. Weisser have carefully documented developments in US schoolhouse forms, which focus on school design, siting, planning, and administration.

In a 2006 article published in the *Journal of Planning History* titled “Re-Forming Schools and Cities: Placing Education on the Landscape of Planning History”, Vitiello introduces the integration of education with its corresponding schoolhouse history. He acknowledges that there has historically been a lack of discussion around their integration and opens avenues to explore the role of education in planning history. According to Vitiello (2006), the collaborations produced a number of related questions that the authors attempted to answer, which are worth quoting at length here:

- How have school design and planning shaped the physical and social fabric of city and suburban neighborhoods?
- How does public school planning tell us about citizenship, power, and the state in neighborhoods, cities, and regions? What have been the meanings of “public” in public school design and development? What does the history of education suggest about the relationship between church and state in planning and policy?
- How have race, class, and gender shaped the politics of education reform and school development? (Since women have made up the vast bulk of the educational workforce in the United States since the nineteenth century, the history of schools represents an especially promising area for exploring the roles of women in planning.)
- How have students, teachers, neighborhood residents, and architects shaped education-together or in competition with district administrators and educational pundits and reformers, the typical protagonists of educational histories?
- How have the public and private economies of school building been organized in divergent contexts of urban growth and decline?
- What challenges and opportunities face planners engaged in school reform, and how can planning historians contribute to current and future debates about school reform? (p. 186)

These questions have helped to inform and shape the question of how race, class, and gender shaped the politics of education in the nineteenth century. In the volumes of published reports of the Rhode Island Board of Education in the nineteenth century, the silence concerning women governance is deafening, which is second only to the screams in the deliberate omission of education of persons of color.

In Clapper's 2006 article, "School Design, Site Selection, and Political Geography of Race in Postwar Philadelphia", he reveals the ways in which the school siting and design process in post-World War II Philadelphia escalated racial inequities in the city and suburban school system despite the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to prohibit segregation. He documents how schools built in urban African-American communities demonstrate catastrophic disparities when compared to their suburban counterparts, and in doing so, shines a light on the ways in which school design can function as a racist mechanism of social control. He draws attention to the centralized educational and architectural professionals responsible for the inequities, as well as the financial failure of the state and federal governments to remedy these inequities.

In a 2006 article, "From Our House to the Big House", George Thomas brilliantly posits that Philadelphia public schools are products of the dominant ideologies of their time, supporting his claim by analyzing *The Public School Buildings of the City of Philadelphia*, seven volumes that document the development of the city's schools from 1745 to the early 1800s. Thomas claims that

When education was embedded in the home, schools looked like houses; when education became civic, schools took on a civic character; when Philadelphia gave itself to the forces of industry, schools were derived from industry. In the twentieth century, as schools became places of conflict, they took on the character of the architecture of reform-prisons. (p. 218)

Finding that Philadelphia school designs mimic familiar architectural prototypes, such as the house, mansion, church, mill, factory, prison, fortress, and office park, Thomas argues that these prototypes reflect the values of the culture that were popular at the time they were built. More recently, Gyure examines the high school schoolhouse over the course of 150 years in his 2011 book, *The Chicago Schoolhouse*, taking us from the schoolhouse's beginnings in the 1820s through its transformative period from the 1880s to the 1920s and into its current form. Throughout, Gyure sheds light on