Can Architects Help Transform Public Education?

What the Sarasota County School Building Program (1955-1960) Teaches Us

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Abstract:

The Sarasota County School Building Program (1955-1960) is revisited through a detailed examination of how architects and educators collaborated to design an innovative group of public schools that provided opportunities for the transformation of learning space. This multi-dimensioned examination is grounded in a historical contextualization of the school building program, in visual and discursive archival analysis related to three of the schools considered especially notable, and in the integration of contemporary voices of some of the teachers, students, and educational employees who worked in these schools. A concluding section discusses four key lessons of this artistic-educational collaboration that might be fruitful for educators to ponder as they seek to create the kinds of community-based learning environments that optimize students' educational experiences.

Introduction

From 1955-1960, one of the most remarkable public school building programs in the history of American education took place in Sarasota, Florida. In less than a decade, projects for nine new elementary and secondary schools or additions were commissioned, designed, and constructed --and almost immediately--were being acclaimed as some of the most exciting and varied new schools being built anywhere. This critical attention appeared in the popular press (*Time Magazine*, 1958) and in the professional literature (*Architectural Forum*, 1959; *Architectural Record*, 1959; *Progressive Architecture*, 1960a, 1960b). More recently, a newer generation of scholars have revisited the Sarasota County school building program either as part of a larger historical record in regional architecture (Howey, 1995; Trebbe, 1989), or as an important, local historical moment in its own architectural right (Muldowney, 1999). While the story of the Sarasota County public school building program has been told from many architectural and design viewpoints, little attention has been paid to this phenomenon from an educational perspective. The approach I take here considers some of these educational aspects through their expression in several specific elementary and secondary schools that were part of this initiative and suggests how these experimental designs provided opportunities for the transformation of teaching and learning space.

Historical Background:

In the 1950s, Sarasota, Florida--like many other postwar American cities--was experiencing phenomenal population growth. From 1950 to 1960, the city nearly tripled its population from 29,000 to 77,000 residents. This rapid demographic increase led to an equally immediate demand for increased educational facilities for children of the "Baby Boomer" generation. The need was so great that Sarasota County was faced with a crash program for commissioning, funding, and building a series of new schools or new school additions. What distinguished Sarasota's situation from other postwar American cities, however, was the presence of two interlocking factors.The first was the extraordinary architectural talent that had assembled in Sarasota at mid-century: a group of architects whose work would soon become collectively defined as the Sarasota School of Architecture. These architects included some of the innovators of post-war American design: Ralph Twitchell, Paul Rudolph, Mark Hampton, Ralph and William Zimmerman, John Crowell, Victor Lundy, Joan and Ken Warriner, among others. The open and airy structures that these architects created, articulated by a vocabulary of clean and simple lines, lightness in construction, and a sensitivity to the natural Gulf environment was a unique contribution to American mid-century design and stood as a particularly refreshing alternative to the overexposed Mediterranean Revival buildings that had come to define much of Sarasota's residential and commercial landscape. With just one exception, none of these architects had designed anything resembling a school. Moreover, the tacit and long-standing architectural take was that school building and design ranked much lower in the professional status hierarchy, much lower, say, than corporate office projects, or beach houses for well-heeled northerners, or primary residences for independently wealthy investors. Despite these considerations, many of the architects were excited by the challenge of designing such civic projects: "I just held my breath and plunged in," recalled Mark Hampton (Hampton, cited in McQuade, 1959, p. 80) as he, along with his Sarasota colleague, John Crowell, began their initial designs for Venice Junior High School in southern Sarasota County in 1957.

The second distinguishing factor in the Sarasota school building program was the commanding presence of Philip Hanson Hiss, an unlicensed architect, builder, developer, and world-traveler. A Brooklyn Heights-born New Yorker whose uncle had left him a substantial trust fund, Hiss spent his post-secondary school years exploring the world, working as a photographer, serving with the Office of Strategic Services in Holland, and writing several award-winning travel books. (Hiss graduated from Choate Preparatory School, but did not attend college.) In 1948, at the age of 37, Hiss arrived in Sarasota ready for a new adventure. He bought a large slice of undeveloped and prime real estate on Lido Key from John North Ringling, persuaded several of the more talented local architects to design modern, glass-walled houses for his development, and shortly began to design houses himself, including his own at the then unheard of cost of $200,000. Tooting around town in his Mercedes 300SL convertible, the outspoken Hiss quickly became known for being that "damyankee [sic] with the loudest mouth around" (McQuade, 1959, p. 79). As his wife, Shirley mentioned to me at a recent Sarasota dinner party, "He wasn't an educator or a professional anything, but he knew his own mind and had the courage to speak it. He would have thought he was a failure if he pleased everyone" (Hiss,,personal communication, April 15, 2010,).

In the early 1950s, with young children of his own, Hiss became aware of the condition of Sarasota public schools. "When I got the facts they drove me wild. Some of the schools were downright unsanitary-they were built of materials that couldn't be maintained. The restrooms were so bad the kids wouldn't even go to the bathroom. The curriculum was just as bad" (Hiss,

cited in McQuad*e*, 1959, p. 79). Only a few years earlier, as if presaging Hiss's opinionated self-study, an extensive survey of Sarasota County public schools sponsored by the Sarasota County Board of Public Instruction indicated that most of the school facilities were completely inadequate and in very poor condition--a direct result of deferred maintenance following the Great Depression and World War II (Muldowney, 1999).

Challenged by a friend to make a difference in the existing state of affairs, Hiss filed for a seat on the school board on the Republican ticket in 1952, and, with Dwight D. Eisenhower leading the way in the general election, was swept into office. (He was the first Republicans to be elected to the five-member school board since 1892.) As soon as he began his first four-year term, Hiss immediately began to draw attention in board meetings for his campaign about progressive architecture as a powerful key to educational reform.

During his first months as a member of the Board, Hiss actively promoted his ideas of how a school's design, shape, orientation, lighting, and classroom spatial characteristics could influence both teacher and student performance. "A school, like it or not," Hiss asserted, "is an important factor in a child's growth, and should contribute positively to his education. It should be esthetically good, and it should be a pleasant place encouraging learning" (Hiss, cited in "Sarasota's New Schools: A Feat of Economy and Imagination," 1959, p. 203). To support his beliefs about the progressive power of architecture, Hiss presented a number of architectural journals featuring examples of new models for school design. These models broke sharply from the box-like, factory-type, isolated-classroom orthodoxy that had come to dominate American public educational architecture since John Philbrick's influential "egg-crate" design for the Boston schools in the 1850s. Classrooms could be imagined otherwise, Hiss maintained.and they could be oriented differently--into "clusters" or "villages", for example--each containing two to four classes around shared courtyards to promote a more friendly and nurturing learning community.

In 1954, Hiss persuaded the school board to let Ralph and William Zimmerman (a non-State Department of Education recommended, but M.I.T. educated and Hiss-supported father-son architectural team) to design plans for the new 12-classroom Brookside Junior High School. Integrating low-cost, lightweight technologies developed during World War II, the Zimmermans' drawings provided for an open campus of low, horizontal structures, radiating around a central, triangular set of walkways. Classrooms had floor-to-ceiling windows with eight foot overhangs to minimize the Florida heat, effectively creating shaded areas and softening the transition between indoor and outdoor spaces, as air-conditioning was not yet widely available in Florida in the 1950s. A soaring, 2-story A-frame structure housing administrative space echoed the school's overall design and provided a unifying reference to the campus.

Image 1: Brookside Junior High School, aerial view. Photo: Reprinted courtesy of Architectural Record. Copyright 1959. The McGraw Hill Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

The Zimmerman plan was put out for bid, and what immediately got the Board's attention was that it came in $45,000 *under* the Board's imposed budget. (This was during the same week that a State Department of Education-recommended architectural plan for an addition to another school came in at $50,000 *over* budget.). In his second year as School Board member, Hiss had won a major victory and one that would have consequences for future Board school construction decisions during the next several years: forward-looking, architecturally innovative schools wouldn't cost more than conventional ones. The Zimmerman plan was quickly approved, and it became the first school that was constructed as part of the new Sarasota County School Building Program, opening just in time for the 1955 school year. As Shirley Hiss recently told me: "The timing was right and the money was there. The school bonds were sold, and the State contributed money, too. It was the beginning of an incredible time" (Hiss, personal, communication April 15, 2010,).

In the next four years, operating with a county and state-funded $7 million budget, eight other schools or school additions followed: Alta Vista Elementary School Addition, 1957 (Architect: Victor Lundy); Fruitville Elementary School Addition, 1957 (Architects: Bolton McBryde, Jack West, Elizabeth Waters); Booker Elementary School, 1957 (Architects: Ralph and William Zimmerman); Venice Junior High School, 1957 (Architect: Mark Hampton; Associate Architect: John Crowell); Riverview High School, 1957 (Architect: Paul Rudolph); Brentwood Elementary School, 1958 (Architect: Gene Leedy; Associate Architect: William Rupp); Englewood Elementary School Addition, 1959 (Architect: Bolton McBryde, Jack Waters, Elizabeth Waters); and Sarasota High School Addition, 1959 (Architect: Paul Rudolph).

If much of the vision for this school building program was informed by the presence of Philip Hiss, it was also the result of the Sarasota County School Board itself, a determined and imaginative group that quickly adopted a bold approach to school construction politics: " [It] was more important to pick the best architects [for the building program], even though they had not previously designed schools . . . a good architect not only should be able to design a school as well as any other type of building, but *not* having designed one previously might give a fresh mind and an open approach to the problem" ("Sarasota's New Schools: A Feat of Economy and Imagination," 1959, p. 203). To more than a few observers, this policy was a refreshing departure from previous school building agendas,or as Walter McQuade (1959) noted, it was "the School Board that dared" (p. 79).

School Analysis

Alta Vista Elementary School Addition

The addition to the Alta Vista Elementary School was the second school built in the Sarasota County School Building program. Designed by Victor Lundy, the 12 room addition opened in 1957 and was a dramatic departure from the original box-like elementary school that itself was constructed only four years earlier to provide for a growing population on Sarasota's East side. Lundy's design was visually defined by its soaring, upswept, double-wing roof with 18 foot overhangs that ran the entire length of the building. Constructed from native yellow pine and fir and integrating laminated technologies, the beamed roofline conveys the impression of flight, as if the entire building were soaring above air, a feature that gave the addition its popular name, "The Butterfly Wing." In his notes, Lundy remarked how he consciously designed the addition "for the effect it would have on the kids. [The building] has a feeling of optimism; it shoots upward and outward."

Image 2: Alta Vista Elementary School Addition, main façade, looking north. Photo: Courtesy of Populuxe Books

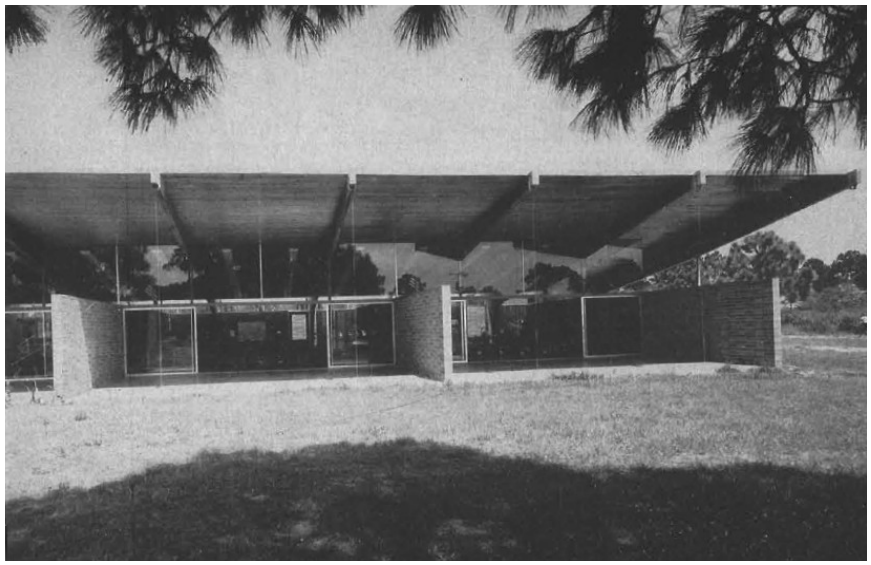

Image 3: Alta Vista Elementary School Addition, side view. Photo: Reprinted courtesy of Architectural Record. Copyright 1959. The McGraw Hill Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Image 4: Alta Vista Elementary School Addition. Inner Atrium and Corridor. Photo: Courtesy of Populuxe Books

Classrooms in the Lundy addition opened along a long central atrium surmounted by a full-length glass skylight that further amplified the sensation of openness and light. To dissolve the long-standing architectural isolations of classroom and school space from the outside world, each classroom had floor-to-ceiling glass windows and sliding glass doors that promoted extended possibilities for teaching and learning. The classrooms themselves were separated by flexible partitions (rather than fixed walls) that could be opened or closed for diversified student groupings and large/small team-teaching opportunities. Lundy's imaginative attention to even the most taken-for-granted detail is also revealed in his interpretation of the addition's brick walls at the east and west ends of the building. The rhythmic, alternately-cast brick surfaces with their rows of chevron motifs further emphasize the wing-like architecture of the building itself and simultaneously suggest the endless folding and unfolding processes inherent in the activity of learning and the educational experience.

Image 5: Alta Vista Elementary School Addition, west end wall.

Since the addition's opening over half a century ago, numerous retrofittings and modifications have severely compromised the integrity of Lundy's original design. On one of my site visits to the school in early April, I spoke with Laura Welch and Sandy Atkinson, two long-time Alta Vista teachers, who kindly invited me into their classrooms to experience some of the present-day interfaces between architectural promise and contemporary realities. Both teachers drew my attention to a number of internal classroom alterations that were added to "improve" Lundy's original planning. To accommodate for air-conditioning, for example (not widely available in Florida in the 1950s), the Alta Vista addition's ceilings have been dropped and leveled to conceal installed HVAC systems. Unfortunately, this is a modification that compresses the sensation of classroom space, reducing the atmospheric "lightness" that was originally intended for each room. Sandy, in particular, directed my attention to the external semi-glass wall of his classroom. The original glass-paneled, floor-to-ceiling classroom windows have been in-filled with wood and block components, and the sliding glass doors have been replaced by conventional single passage doorways:"Definitely not what it was like when I was in sixth grade here when the addition opened," Sandy tells me. From my teacher's perspective, I try to imagine what the play of inside-outside learning space might have originally been like, but it's hard; the classrooms seem closed in and closed up, probably just like thousands of classrooms everywhere else. As I follow Sandy who takes part of his class outside for a science activity, I stare at the upswept 18 foot roof overhangs that symbolically lent the building its visual optimism and velocity. But they've been sheathed over in steel and plastic, and literally "tied down" by steel girders to secure the roof from the possibility of high

Image 6: Alta Vista Elementary School Addition, main façade, looking north, April 2010.

wind damage. "We had to make many of these changes to meet updated building codes," Dr. Barbara Shirley, Alta Vista's knowledgeable current principal ruefully explained to me one Monday morning before school. But perhaps the most striking modification is how the entire Alta Vista campus itself is completely surrounded by cyclone fencing with single exit and entrance security systems, unimagined in Lundy's time, ,but reflective of much of today's educational realities. On more than one occasion during my site visits did I hear teachers, administrators, and staff refer to how this unfortunately necessary external modification has transformed an architectural structure that once conveyed a sense of openness into a hyper-controlled, lock-down space. "In many ways, it's just like a prison, now, and that's so sad," Sandy told me. And, as Lorie Muldowney (1999) put it in her careful review of the modifications to Lundy's addition: "'The Butterfly Wing' . . . no longer soars" (p. 54).

Point of View: *May 26, 2010. Sandy Atkinson, former sixth grade student at Alta Vista (1957-58), former fifth grade teacher at Alta Vista (1973-2008); current substitute teacher at Alta Vista (2008-present)*

I was a sixth grader when I went to the Butterfly Wing. It was the first year it opened, and it was of very similar construction to some of the other new schools that were being built at that time in that the outside walls of the addition were floor-to-ceiling glass – the inside was glass, too – including a glass ceiling that covered the hallway. One of the things I remember is that as a student – if you were bad – you'd get stuck out in the hallway- atrium. The Florida sun would beat down and it was about 90 degrees or more out there, so the lesson was you didn't want to get stuck in that hallway. How's that for innovative school design influencing student learning?The school itself was all open space – like a huge breezeway. As I progressed as a teacher during my 35 years there, one of the on-going problems they had when renovations were done to the building was that they never could get it air-tight for the air conditioning to work properly – there were always cracks somewhere in the retrofitting and the conditioned air was always leaking out. Looking back, I never had any trouble teaching without not having air conditioning. We had such good natural air circulation back then – the sea breezes would come and go – that was before all the coastal development and high-rise condos began blocking the natural sea air from coming inland.

When I finished my college work in Georgia and got a job in Sarasota, new teachers tended to get shifted around a lot. But then, in 1975 an opening came up at Alta Vista, so I applied and got the job,

having a minor in Social Studies. I started teaching 5th grade at Alta Vista and it was still pretty much the same architecturally as it was when I was a kid. All of us – teachers, students, staff – were proud to be in the Butterfly Addition. We developed [our] own "butterfly" sign that we'd wave at each other during and after school, or whenever we'd run into each other in downtown Sarasota. It was a unique experience and I always felt that one of the things that made the school so tight as a group was that not only did the full-length classroom windows open out to the world outside the school, but all the inner walls and doors opened to that inside atrium so teachers could easily talk to each other and meet informally before and after school. As a teacher in the Butterfly Wing, you would always know whether someone was sick, or how somebody felt, or if someone was having a bad day. There was always somebody to listen and help out, and there was so much interaction that we teachers grew to be a tight knit group. After all these years of teaching there,, I'm convinced that the design of the building lent a sense of camaraderie, a sense of community that was special.

But then they started to box it, close it in because of the air-conditioning. Initially, they had individual units in each classroom, then they installed piping, then they went to a more centralized plan but what all that led to was a closing and boxing up of the building, removing the openness that we experienced as students, and later as teachers when I first taught there. Because everything was closed up, kids and teachers started to complain about the mold. I personally never had any allergies until they closed the building up, and I don't have any now – now that I'm retired. That problem wasn't there for the first 15 years before they started dropping the ceilings, closing the walls, eliminating window light, restricting outside-inside air flow. The building's still functional, but it's not like it was. Even with all that, though, much of the building's original idea remains. Even when I go back now as a substitute teacher, I hear teachers still saying similar things – they know what's going on in their and their colleagues' classrooms across grade levels – and with each other. And even though they slowly changed things around over the years, making this and that modification structurally, closing off the openness and sliding glass paneled doors and windows, the basic design of the building still stands and, in my opinion, lends itself to that kind of camaraderie and community that I experienced when I was a student there, and later when I was a full-time teacher. The Butterfly Wing was a great place to teach, to be a student -- and as I look back on I -- I lived a large part of my life there and enjoyed the openness and spirit of community that it provided.

Booker Elementary School

Following their successful design for Brookside Junior High School, Ralph and William Zimmerman submitted plans for a new elementary school--Booker Elementary--to be built on Sarasota city's north side. The plans were submitted in late 1957, and Board approval followed shortly thereafter. The Zimmerman plan for Booker Elementary School incorporated several architectural innovations that the Zimmerman team first tested in their design for Brookside Junior High. Structurally, the Booker plan made use of new lightweight construction technologies, such as prefabricated materials and steel decking to lower building cost. The school itself was conceptualized as a campus whose buildings were oriented around a central open space. Arranged around this organizing quadrilateral was a quartet of "school villages" of six classrooms each. Each "school village" had its own interior courtyard complete with a small ornamental pool and stage that provided for differentiated instructional activity, such as plays, social gatherings, and performances. Classrooms in each "village" were connected by covered walkways, and each had an additional, small play/instructional area facing externally, opposite the courtyard. Described in some of the architectural drawings as "nests," these four school villages transformed what was a sizable 25 classroom educational complex

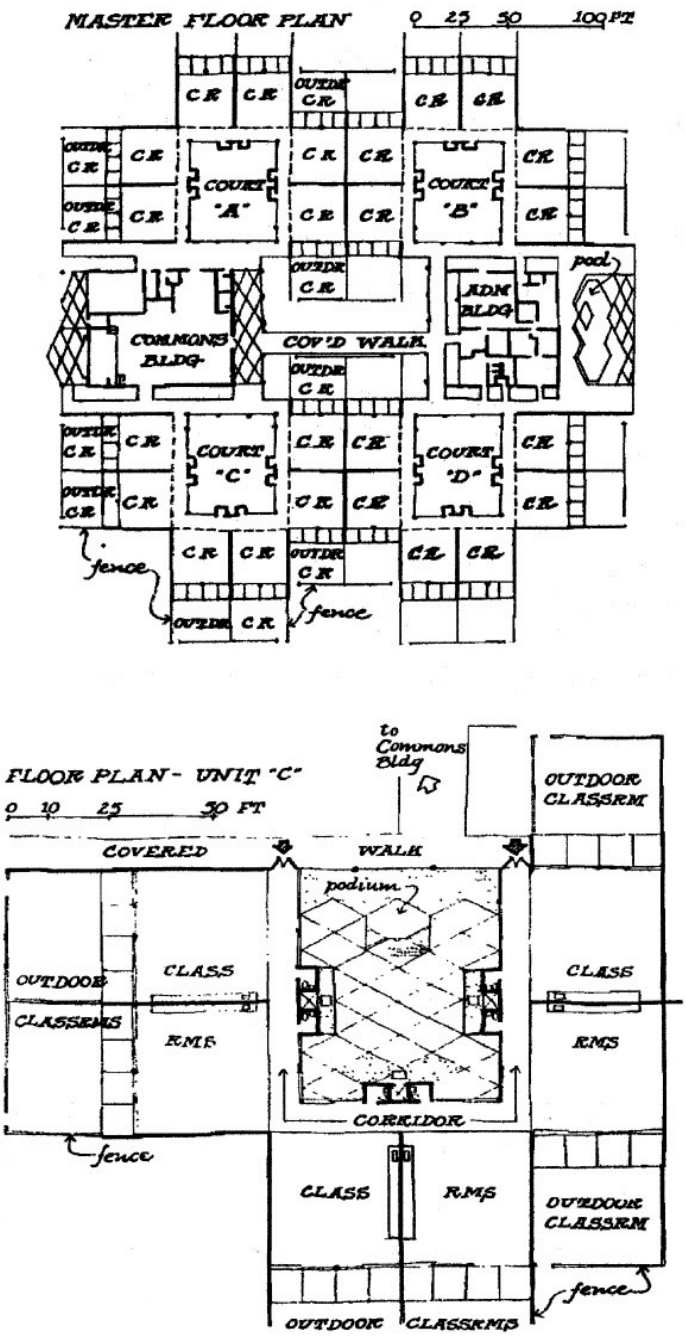

Image 7: Booker Elementary School, original architectural plan, campus overview and West classroom detail showing “village” concept. Photo: Reprinted courtesy of Architectural Record. Copyright 1959. The McGraw Hill Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

into series of small, decentralized spaces that were aesthetically sensitive to students' needs for intimacy and community--qualities that the Zimmerman team thought that younger children might benefit from. This concept--"small is a big idea"--predated by decades some of the "revolutionary" educational innovations of the 1980s and 90s, especially in large urban institutions where schools were internally deconstructed, sometimes by floor, sometimes by curricular theme, to provide smaller "learning campuses" to minimize the anonymous, isolating effects of school space. Administrative offices and other school units such as the library, music room, and an auditorium-cafeteria completed the Booker campus. The budget for construction was $453, 400, or $7.40 per gross area square foot.

As was the case with Lundy's Alta Vista addition, numerous modifications over the past 50 years have altered the integrity of the original Zimmerman plan. Perhaps the most apparent change was in 1985, when Booker Elementary was transformed into a secondary school and made part of the renovated Booker High School educational complex. Other modifications have reflected responses to some of the contemporary social and economic realities noted previously in the Alta Vista Addition above. The ornamental pools in each courtyard and at the school's entry plaza have been filled in with concrete; cyclone fencing surrounds the perimeter of the school itself; and a security system patterned on the "one-way-in/one-way-out" model is monitored by video surveillance and Sarasota police enforcement personnel on an hourly basis. In 1990, an entirely new and larger Booker Elementary School (renamed as Emma T. Booker Elementary School) was built, located several miles south east of the original Zimmerman campus. The Zimmerman structure originally known as Booker Elementary School has since been renamed Building 6.

Point of View: *April 9, 2010: Talking with Jeff Hart, Sarasota Architect*

Yes, but you have to remember that Sarasota schools were still segregated then, Jeff Hart tells me. Sometimes all the talk about the cool Sarasota building program leaves that history out. [Indeed, I found no mention of race or segregation in any of the historical or architectural articles I reviewed for this project.] Jeff is a graduate of Ringling College of Art and Design, and he and his wife Joyce have been actively involved in Sarasota's architectural history for nearly five decades. It's mid-afternoon on Saturday and I've just returned from a site visit to Booker Elementary School in Newtown, a traditionally African-American Sarasota neighborhood. [Read: segregated de facto by long-standing policies of restricted covenants and local real estate and lending practices. Booker Elementary is now part of the Booker High School campus.] Jeff continues:

I graduated from high school in Orlando in 1965 and everything was still a white and colored world down here then — restaurants, water fountains, schools. This was Florida after all — the deep South — and Florida was one of the last states to begin changing that unfortunate history. To tell you the truth, I don't remember when the schools were desegregated around here, but I do remember that when Joyce moved here from Dayton in 1968, she was a junior in high school and the Sarasota schools were in the first years of desegregation through forced busing. [Sarasota began its desegregation program through a three-year phased program in 1968, with high school students being bused first. or during the 1968-69 school year. Junior high school students were bused the next year, and finally, elementary students the following year. At that time, Sarasota County's desegregation plan was highlighted as a model for other Florida school districts by the all-white Florida federal court.]

But like most everywhere else, the busing plan was all one-way — no way were white parents going to put their kids on a bus to go to Newtown and Booker, and, you know, they got their way. So what happened was that all the African American kids from Booker High got bused from their homes and

neighborhoods in Newtown to Sarasota Senior High which was located on the city's South, predominately white, side. I really didn't pay too much attention to all this when I was growing up and going to school — that's just the way things were — and, looking back now, I unfortunately just took a lot of stuff for granted. But I remember that the Booker campus was closed just like that. I think it was in 1969. A lot of kids from Booker refused to get on the bus in those days. Some of the Booker teachers held classes in their homes for kids who didn't want to get on the bus to ride to the white school. The Sarasota desegregation plan may have been a model for some, but white planners overlooked an important point — the importance of a public school to the fabric of neighborhood and social life, and the importance of what the school stood for historically and socially to the African American community. I may have this wrong, but I think there were only a few black students in Joyce's class when she started at Sarasota Senior High after her family moved here from Dayton.

Jeff's comments give me pause, and later that evening after dinner, I return to the literature that I've collected related to Sarasota County's school building program. Jeff LaHurd's book (2006), Sarasota: A History, provides an important reference: "Into the 1950s and early 60s," LaHurd notes, "black students had few textbooks, most of their assignments had to be copied from the chalkboard. When they did manage to get textbooks and supplies, they had hand-me-downs from the white schools. Former Mayor Jerome Dupree recalled, "Every piece of equipment sent to Booker schools was second hand" (p. 89). "Schooling for Black children at this time was substandard. Black children were certainly not welcome in Sarasota's white schools. Many whites believed that Black children didn't need any education at all – or no more than the fourth grade" (p. 85). LaHurd's study supports what Jeff Hart mentioned to me in our afternoon conversation. "Booker High School was closed in 1969 [as part of Sarasota County's approved desegregation plan]. There was a Black boycott of white schools in 1969, during which Black educators and leaders established Freedom Schools to educate Black children to get equality in Sarasota public schools." According to LaHurd, the history of Sarasota reflects a larger history, with "Florida being a slave state and racial prejudice flourish[ing] long after the Civil War and Civil Rights legislation." On March 2, 1960, a full two years **after** the Zimmermans' new Booker Elementary school opened, "A group of 11 African-Americans sat down at a Woolworth's lunch counter at Ringling Shopping Center, and were refused service." (LaHurd, 2006).

My notes also indicate that, out of Sarasota County's nine new schools or school additions constructed during this time, only one (Booker Elementary) was built in a non-white neighborhood. Although the design for Booker notably reflected innovations such as the cluster and village concept for classroom orientation, as well as a series of shared courtyards enhanced by ornamental fountains, its overall gross construction cost per square foot was the lowest of any of the other schools in the building program at $7.40 per square foot compared to, say, Lundy's Alta Vista Addition at $8.40 per square foot, or the Fruitville Elementary School Addition at $12.10 per square foot. But the implications of what these figures might mean are a question mark on several counts. The figures could easily reflect the use of more efficient, prefabricated technologies; or the implementation of construction lessons learned from the Zimmermans' initial Brookside design; or the lower costs associated with consolidating a new elementary school within a comprehensive school campus at one site; (Booker Elementary shared geographical space with its junior and senior high school partners, as well as cafeteria and general auditorium space); or a lower working price point for the Zimmerman team compared to other architectural firms. The extant print literature that I reviewed turned up blank on all of these issues. Still, my curiosity about this discrepancy and about the history of Booker Elementary itself led me to schedule an appointment at the current Emma E. Booker Elementary School.

***Point of View**: May 27, 2010: Talking with Diana Andersen, Registrar, Emma E. Booker Elementary School*

At 10 o'clock, I walk into the main office of Emma E. Booker Elementary School and ask for Diana Andersen with whom I've made an appointment to talk about the confusing (to me) history and

identity of Booker Elementary School. Diana has been the Registrar of Emma E. Booker Elementary School since it opened in 1990, so that means that she's keeper of 20 years of student and staff records. She is also the unofficial School historian, having had two children attend the original school back in the late 1970s. The Emma E. Booker building was built in 1989-90 and is located several miles south east of the original Zimmerman campus. It was renamed to more fully reflect its namesake, a prominent African-American educator and Sarasota activist in the early 20th century, Emma Edwina Booker (A black and white full-length photograph of Ms. Booker looking intently at the camera hangs in the school's main office.)

Diana and I have played telephone tag for the past two weeks, and it was only yesterday that she was given the official ok to spend an hour with me this morning (more on this in a moment). As I get situated next to a wall of floor-to-ceiling file cabinets in her Registrar's office and take out my notebook, Diana laughs and tells me that I'm not the only person who's gotten confused about the two Booker Elementary Schools. *But you're correct about the initial location of the school. It was located right next to Booker High School with Booker Junior High right across the street. Many of the public schools in Florida used to be built like that, as comprehensive K-12 campuses to consolidate resources and minimize the need to duplicate things like cafeterias and gyms. But then the Junior High needed more space, this was back in the 80s, I think, and it swapped locations with the Elementary School's location. Eventually, this swapped location of Booker Elementary became part of the Booker High School, and part of the deal was to build a brand new elementary school, the one we're in now.*

As I review Diana's historical outline, she backtracks to talk about another development that influenced Booker's history--court-ordered desegregation. *After the desegregation order in Sarasota back in the late 1960s--which was a good thing--everything was about having African American kids get on buses to go to white schools in the city--which was a not so good thing. I mean, not good that one group of kids had to do all the traveling. To make matters worse, and just like that, the original Booker Elementary School lost at least half of its student population, maybe more. This was back in the early 70s. Eventually, the school closed down for a few years--I think it may have been five years--because of the high cost of keeping the school open for just a few kids. But then in 1977 or 78, it opened up again as a Volunteer School, a specialty elementary school that focused on the performing arts, like dance, theater, and music.* "Like a Magnet School," I interject, "a school designed to attract kids because of its specialized academic programs." *Exactly—but here these schools were called Volunteer Schools -- Sarasota parents could "volunteer" to send their kids to Booker because of its distinctive program, Diana explained, even though they might have been originally "districted" to attend a school closer to their own neighborhoods —a lot of us parents liked the idea of having a choice where to send our kids. Busing wasn't the best way to work things out — wasn't really fair, like I said earlier. But then the Volunteer School thing happened, and Booker was a beautiful place with courtyards, open-air classrooms, and a community-feel to it. Both my son and daughter loved music and dance, so when I heard about Booker being reopened as a Volunteer School for the Performing Arts, I signed them up even though I had to drive for half an hour one-way to get there. My kids spent their entire elementary school years at the Booker campus, and part of their junior high years, too, before they went to Sarasota Senior High.*

As I reflect on what Diana is telling me, her timeline for the Volunteer School plan in Sarasota brings me back to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments in the 1970s. The Emergency School Aid Act was one of those amendments, first enacted into law in 1976, which provided federal funding for school districts to design, develop, and implement voluntary desegregation plans (as opposed to involuntary plans like forced busing). i.e., Volunteer or Magnet Schools like Booker. *"But after a few years of that, things changed again," Diana says. "Because of student and parent interest in Booker as a Performing Arts School at the secondary level, the elementary school was made part of Booker High School, which then led to the construction of the new Emma E.*

Booker Elementary School in the late 1980s." I ask Diana if any archival photographs or information about the initial years of the Booker Elementary School have been preserved and am disappointed when she tells me that if there are any, they should be located at Booker High School. When I tell her that Booker High staff have repeatedly referred me back to her for such information, she shakes her head and tells me that she'll try to track this down with Booker High folk after the school year ends, but I shouldn't " hold [my] breath."

All too soon, my scheduled hour with Diana draws to a close, and I thank her and her principal for their generosity. On the way to my car, I feel a swirl of emotions that includes the pleasure of Diana's informed company, admiration for Ms. Emma Edwina Booker's social and educational courage, and frustration that visual documentation related to the original Booker Elementary school seemingly wasn't important enough for school or district administration to think about, much less preserve in a specific location. While part of me understands the challenges of maintaining an archive of a school's history what with everything else that happens in a school on a daily basis, this apparent lack of concern was disconcerting. I sensed that Diana felt this frustration too.

Riverview High School

In 1957, Paul Rudolph designed a new, comprehensive high school to serve students on Sarasota's city's southeast side. Considered to be one of the most influential civic structures that Rudolph created, Riverview High School is one of the best examples of his early Modernist style as applied to public work with clean horizontal planes; extensive use of glass that opened to the school's natural surroundings; and passive cooling features that minimized the effects of Florida's climate. Rudolph's 37-room multi-structure school was constructed using low-cost prefabricated materials, including exposed steel-frame girders, expansive glass windows, and concrete block materials. Its two-story design unified individual classroom space with larger, more public, school areas (e.g. auditorium, gyms, orchestra and stage). But it also contrasted with the low-lying landscape, lending the school a symbolic and substantive presence as a site for educational activity. Rudolph's overall design for Riverview also extended beyond school walls and included attention to facilities for playfields, extramural activities, and a 360 space parking lot. Designed to accommodate 900-1,000 students, Riverview High opened just in time for the 1958-59 school year.

Image 8: Riverview High School. Photo: Ezra Stoller/Esto/Courtesy Sarasota Architectural Foundation.

Perhaps most notable among Riverview's many innovative features were Rudolph's unique structural responses to the Florida climate. To control for sunlight, but to still allow for air circulation, Rudolph designed a non-electric, energy efficient system that featured series of sunscreens--or suspended horizontal panels made from precast concrete--which alternated in their top-and-bottom placement. These panels covered the school's upstairs and downstairs hallways, which Rudolph located outdoors. (Rudolph's innovative idea for announcing a structure's pedestrian flow outside instead of inside a building's primary shell would be reprised in Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano's revolutionaryinside-out building design for the Pompidou Center in Paris 30 years later.)

The multiple instructional and administrative buildings that composed the school itself were oriented around a central, open space, which, with the sunscreens extending over the classroom windows and school walkways, gave the interior of the Riverview campus the look of a "courtyard," an architectural element that Rudolph consciously borrowed from Sarasota's earlierMediterranean-style architectural tradition. The courtyard metaphor suggested a sense of intimacy in school life, reinforcing a personal human quality to public space.

Image 9: Riverview High School, courtyard view. Photo: Courtesy of *Sarasota Herald Tribune*.

Over the next few decades, numerous modifications and additions were made to Riverview's original design. The school's expansive glass windows and sliding glass doorways were in-filled for energy conservation; new classrooms and sections were added to accommodate an increasing student population; and retro-fittings for air and ventilation systems were installed. As neighborhoods and housing developments surrounding Riverview increased after the school was opened, local drainage patterns were altered, leading to frequent flooding of the school's exterior hallways. Over the years, Riverview's student population increased to almost 3,000 students, more than tripling Rudolph's original estimate. As John Tucillo (Personal communication, May 26, 2010) has pointed out, this substantial, increased population put severe stress on the building's structural infrastructure, an especially problematic phenomenon for a building noted for its lightness and delicacy in design. By 2000, Riverview was in need of extensive renovation. In 2007, having rejected proposals for Riverview's preservation advanced by a coalition of local and national professional and architectural voices, the Sarasota County School Board voted 3-2 to clear the way for the demolition of Riverview High School by the end of the 2008-2009 school year. When my wife, Lin, and I drove by the school on our initial visual site orientation during the first week in January 2010, we were greeted by the sight of a gleaming, tightly-secure, newly-constructed school, the entrance of which was difficult to find.

Point of View: *April 7 and May 26, 2010. Mollie Cardemone, former teacher at Riverview (1958-1963); former mayor of Sarasota (1996-97, 1998-1999)*

In 1958, I was a brand new teacher at a brand new high school called Riverview. I remember how Riverview High was thought of by most people in Sarasota County as out in the country when it was first built. As teachers, we had a lot of teasing about Riverview being the "cow school," the "pasture school." The school was hidden on a piece of inexpensive pasture land south of Sarasota that sloped down to what is known as Phillippi Creek. The building itself was an unbelievable experience to ride up to because it was, literally, a completely glass building. I had just turned 22 in July, and this was my first teaching job. I'd just been hired by the Superintendent of Sarasota County Schools who had been my

former principal at Sarasota Senior High. My husband was still in the Navy, and my dad and I drove out to see this brand new school where I had obtained my first job – and when we first saw it, we both gasped – "Look at all that glass – it's an entirely glass building!" I remember my dad saying in astonishment.

As you approached the school, there was a covered portico for buses and cars, and then a very lovely inner courtyard. On each side of the courtyard and along the back of it there was nothing but glass – floor length walls and windows of classrooms supported by a little bit of steel and concrete. It was just an amazing sight, because, let's face it – there weren't a lot of really modern public buildings in this area at that time. All of my own previous educational experiences were in mostly closed-type schools in Sarasota – schools whose architectures were mostly in Med-Rev styles, or red-brick Collegiate-Gothic buildings, like Sarasota Senior High. When you stop and think about it, that's what schools were like in those days – closed up places with small windows, or not a lot of windows at all, row after row of rooms opening off long, dark hallways, It was like being trapped inside a box. So to think about teaching in a school that was all windows was just extraordinary. All the windows could slide open so you really had this feeling that you weren't cooped up. The whole building and its construction encouraged you to think – and teach -- as they say, "outside the box."

In some ways, it was a little bit bothersome because nobody really taught school outside at the high school level then, so there were no precedents to plan or teach by. But when you stop and think about it, most Sarasota kids spent most of their time outdoors – or in breezeways – because there wasn't any air conditioning then. Residences were constructed to attract the breezes with great roof overhangs that also provided shade and blended transitions between indoor and outdoor living spaces. It was like children around here know the out-doors and now we're teaching them in a situation whose conditions are like what they've experienced – being out- doors – except that it really was in a classroom.

Not only did the walls open to the courtyard – full-length floor to ceiling glass walls – but the transoms that you'd see over classroom doors in traditional school buildings – the transoms at Riverview ran the length of the classrooms – above the blackboards and bulletin boards. They slid open, too, so you had this wonderful natural air flow that could go in and come back out of the classrooms and hallways. It was like teaching in a typical breezeway which almost everyone had in their homes at that time. I remember how amazing all this was -- it was an entirely different kind of idea for what a school building might look like, how it could be – an entirely different kind of construction in so far as being open and transparent – an all-glass constructed school where you didn't feel closed in. I taught a lot of my classes outside then; and I think the openness of Riverview helped some of us think about ways that we could group some of our classes together when we thought we wanted to try what was later called team-teaching.

Originally, there were these concrete clouds that hung over the inner glass walls and outside hallways as sunshades – a passive cooling system – but air conditioning changed the entire purpose of the sunscreens, and our classrooms and learning went back to the dark, small-window type rooms that air-conditioning worked best in. But before all these changes to the building, we were constantly inundated with people coming from outside Sarasota and one of the most exciting times that we teachers saw was the international attention that was paid to what we were doing at Riverview. Even though travel wasn't as easy in the late 1950s, I remember that an entire contingency of visitors from Japan came to see these new schools in Sarasota – including Riverview. It was a thrill for our students to see the interest in their school from a global perspective and how other people took an interest in what they were learning. I think what our students saw was that they were living a unique experience – one that extended far beyond any conventional lesson plan or school.

I was one of four new teachers hired that summer for Riverview and when we began teaching that first month, the four of us couldn't believe how lucky we were. We learned how to teach our classes indoors and outdoors – to make our lessons seem more real and connected to life – even though we

hadn't been taught how to do so in our own education courses in quite such an open way. The four of us became close friends, and we shared ideas, activities, and teaching experiences -- and I think we did so, in part, because of the openness of the school building itself. The openness stimulated conversation and dialogue among us. So I felt connected [to my colleagues and to my students] in ways I never experienced when I attended school. So it was an interesting situation -- how open spaces created close connections.

This era of school construction in Sarasota, though, was not initially well-received by its residents. The buildings were so far from the normal type of school construction and this made for a lot of criticism – especially at Alta Vista. People said that the design for that school was just crazy, all you have to do is look at the roof – what kind of school roof flies upward? -- and there's nothing but glass underneath. Riverview had its own critics as well because of all the glass and skylights. Many of the skylights leaked by the way, but that was a design problem that was easily solved. As air-conditioning became more important than fresh air in Florida, most of Riverview's original sliding windows and glass doors were covered up. And this created darkness where light was valuable. Air-conditioning was installed, but it was installed very poorly so this created a mold problem Eventually, you ended up with a community that looked at Riverview with disdain. I spent 2 years of my life trying to save Riverview, and I must say it was one of my saddest experiences when the School Board narrowly voted to demolish it just 2 years ago. I give full credit for the destruction of Riverview to a newly-arrived superintendent of the School Board who hated the building, was indifferent to Sarasota's architectural traditions, got the votes to get it demolished, and left town immediately afterward. So we have an interesting situation here of some innovative public buildings that were initially disdained, then became beloved, and finally were destroyed – a history that I'm sure has often been repeated in similar communities when powerful forces push against the public good.

Lessons Learned

In researching the multiple educational perspectives related to the Sarasota County School Building Program during the late 1950s, I've come to learn several important lessons that might be fruitful for educators and architects to consider as they seek to design optimal educational experiences for their students.

The first lesson is that school architecture, for some teachers, students, and educational workers clearly matters at a deeply personal level and is an important, positive variable in their educational life.

John Dewey spoke to this very issue over one hundred years ago as he was formulating the structural and pedagogic outlines for a newer kind of educational practice at the dawn of the 20th century. In his talks to teachers and parents to gain support for the new Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, Dewey (1899/1902) advised educators to be mindful of, and to supply, those "conditions and circumstances" that promote and ensure student growth (Dewey, 1902). For Dewey, those "conditions and circumstances" went beyond the conventions of mere lessons and instruction, and also included the material architectures of everyday school life, i.e., its worktables, its interior design, the school's orientation to the outside world, and how these elements might interact to positively influence individual and social development. I doubt whether any of the Sarasota architects had any formal interaction with Dewey's educational ideas, but in their own varied designs for an even newer generation of educational facilities, it

clearly seems that they, too, were thinking along the aesthetic lines that Dewey was encouraging educators to consider seriously.

The narratives of the individuals contributing to this study certainly provide concrete support for these ideas and suggest the ways architecture matters to individuals on a personal level. Mollie Cardemone's accounts of her initial years of teaching at Riverview High School; Diana Andersen's informed discussion about architecture and community politics; Sandy Atkinson's account of how the Butterfly Wing at Alta Vista lent a sense of community and camaraderie to his educational life--all contribute to the development of an important personal history related to the Sarasota County School Building Program. This history gives the program a richer, more human face. And while it's important to remember that several personal points of view do not a research picture make, it's also instructive to recognize how the added voices and perspectives of students and educators create a more dimensioned narrative of architecture's role in the development of education during those forward-looking years in Sarasota County.

A second lesson is that school architecture can be a positive force in the teaching-learning process--and in educational change.

When I first met Sandy Atkinson at the First Watch Restaurant in downtown Sarasota to interview him for my research on this project back in early April, one of the enduring memories I have of our conversation was his observation that "[T]he design of the Alta Vista Addition created a sense of camaraderie, a sense of community among the students and teachers who attended it--a sense of camaraderie that has continued over all these years. We even had our own special butterfly signal that we'd share with each other then--and now, too, whenever our paths crossed." And then, over his cup of coffee that morning, Sandy demonstrated that signal of camaraderie, of community, to me by interlocking his thumbs with his hands outstretched, wiggling his fingers to mimic a butterfly in flight. A week earlier, when I initially interviewed Mollie Cardemone at the same location, she spoke of a collaborative, community-like "esprit de corps" that the newly hired staff shared in a way that was positive and refreshing, and that reflected an awareness of how Riverview's openness lent a corresponding openness and closeness to their instructional responsibilities. In these school instances, a sense of community was forged among individuals, and stimulated, in part, by a school's architecture.

The architectural designs introduced in Sarasota, exploiting the use of flexible partitions, play between indoor and outdoor learning spaces, and sensitivity to qualities of light and openness, also seemed to break down traditional instructional barriers that isolated teachers and students in confined educational space. These new structural innovations in Sarasota also opened up creative possibilities for differentiated learning space, prefiguring similar practices that would be soon implemented in the broader educational sphere, as other school districts in the 1960s and 70s across the country began experimenting with "innovations" such as team-teaching, the open classroom, collaborative learning, multi-age grouping, and non-graded, continuous progress educational systems that looked outward to an increasingly globalizing world.

And from an environmental perspective, many of the passive cooling systems that were differently introduced in Sarasota's new schools also prefigured contemporary attention to issues related to the ecology of school building design, and to more environmentally sensitive, sustainable understandings of how schools might be constructed. So in many ways, what happened in Sarasota laid a conceptual and structural foundation for a newer generation of

architectural practice in many American schools, and a good argument can be made that such practices were intimately connected to the fresher experimental school forms that were designed in Sarasota County.

A third lesson is that school architecture can be a positive force for broader social change.

A generation or so ago in American life and culture, there was an ambitious belief in architecture's commitment in elevating the lives of ordinary people--teachers, nurses, workers, children. Whether people agreed with these lofty beliefs, and their expression in the social programs that comprised, say, President Lyndon Baines Johnson's "War on Poverty,'' or some of the Modernist architectural initiatives that occurred in Sarasota and elsewhere, they took shape anyway, marked by the courage of their convictions, as well as by their triumphs and failures.

It is probably naïve to expect a renewal of this kind of ambition in architecture today, especially given the trend during the past several decades of architecture's nearly exclusive investment in the private sphere where an architecture of social conscience has given way to an architecture of corporate power, a power that manifested itself in the construction of festival marketplaces, luxury sport palaces, business high-rises, and signature condominium dwellings for the moneyed class.

Perhaps one of the Sarasota County School Building Program's most important legacies might be to refresh architecture's potential role in addressing complex social and educational challenges, in short, to revisit the ambition of an architecture of social conscience. If nothing else, the Sarasota experiment was instructive in detailing how people could forge collective alliances to enrich children's lives and deepen a community's civic fabric. The School Building Program in Sarasota County vividly testifies that individuals from different walks of life, professional backgrounds, and belief systems could collectively accomplish something that allowed other positive things to happen in the public sphere, as well as in people's personal lives. Revisiting this history, even in such a form as this monograph, might contribute, however modestly, to a fresh consideration of some of the social and urban challenges that the Sarasota architects took on half a century ago in designing buildings for the public good.

A renewal of such ambition may not be all that far-fetched. Recently, Nicolai Ourussoff in *The New York Times* detailed some current community projects designed by several renowned architects including Richard Meier and Annabelle Shelldorf. Meier's work is especially timely, since it reprises some of the Sarasota School of Architecture's ambitious engagements with educational life nearly half a century ago. In his design for a "Teachers' Village" complex in downtown Newark, New Jersey, for example, Meier includes many elements that were originally integrated in school design during the 1950s in Sarasota--apartments for public school teachers with open courtyards, smaller inner courts, outdoor terraces and fountains, and interplays of indoor-outdoor spaces that bring light deep into the complex's interiors, conveying an air of weightlessness and grace (Ourussoff, 2010).

A fourth lesson is that the collective work and wisdom that led to the construction of nine innovative schools in Sarasota County, and the possibilities for innovative educational practices, is never a given, but always a tenuous and contingent thing.

As previously noted, Paul Rudolph's Riverview High School was demolished several years ago, despite enlightened public protest. William and Ralph Zimmerman's Brookside Junior High School isn't there anymore, and Booker Elementary School was reconfigured as part of the Booker High School Campus and renamed Building 6. Each of these actions, of course, involved public debate, but it is important to remember that public debate often doesn't take place on equal ground, nor is access to power for such debate equally and fairly distributed among everyone.

So there are no guarantees for today's tomorrow. Indeed, from a contemporary educational perspective, notions of collaboration, team-teaching, and community have been largely replaced by scripted regimes of testing and assessment grounded in ideologies of student, teacher, and school competition where everyone is pitted against everyone else. "Compete, or die," is the unvoiced lesson in many classrooms and schools today as Jonathan Kozol (2005) has bitingly observed. School practices that promoted learning within a framework of mutual respect, civility, and cooperation have all too often been replaced by what Anne Haas Dyson (2010) has called learning "in regulated times," where the school storyline has become "a monologic a list of conventions to be learned, [the] ideological storyline of achieving the American dream."

Thus, the barriers to the kinds of educational innovations envisioned by the Sarasota School of Architecture in the late 1950s should not be minimized. To do so would naively ignore the political realities of current school life as well as the role that the political right has played in the development of a conservative educational and social agenda since the Reagan revolution of the 1980s. But these barriers should not be overstated either. To do this would deny the human capacity for a language of imagination, of "wide-awakeness" (Greene, 1977) to a more nuanced understanding of educational and community life. By continuing to consider concrete experiments like the Sarasota County School Building Program from such inclusive perspectives, narratives constituted by more dimensioned understandings might emerge about what matters in students' and teachers' lives--and why. It is my ambitious belief that these understandings might then help educators build on the successes of the past , such as what happened in Sarasota, as they work with their students to publicly build a better, more civil tomorrow.

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