



Central Park East and Its Graduates: "Learning by Heart" (series on school reform)

David Bensman

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In 1974, Central Park East Elementary School (CPE) in East Harlem opened its doors with a mission to provide inner-city children with the finest educators and pedagogy available. Instead of saying that the old neighborhood had to be torn down and students more rigidly tracked, the reformers dared to ask the question, What would happen if we gave inner-city students the best education the country has to offer? The results of this bottom-up reform were astounding, and to this day, Central Park East is known as one of the most academically enriching schools in the United States. David Bensman gives voice to the extraordinary young adults who emerged from poverty as a result of the powerful educational experiences they received at CPE. A rich compilation of stories, this account establishes the power of public schooling and the value of community.

“With rich data, Bensman carefully details for us what it means to be respectful, thoughtful, democratic, and intellectually demanding—what it means, in short, to be a good school. This is the story of CPE, but for anyone willing to see beyond the particulars, it is also a map of possibility, a guide to what our schools could be.”

—**Mike Rose**, author, *Possible Lives: The Promise of Public Education in America*

“This is that rare thing, a long-term study of the graduates of a first-rate inner city elementary school. This is a school in which democracy and the life of the mind are inseparably intertwined. Policymakers, write that last sentence down one hundred times.”

—**Joseph Featherstone**, Michigan State University

“Was the fame of CPE due to hype or yet another example of wishing trumping realities? This conceptually and procedurally honest research effort clearly answers the question in the negative. We have very good reason to be grateful to Debbie Meier, her CPE colleagues, and, of course, to Dr. Bensman for this remarkable follow-up study.”

—**Seymour Sarason**, Professor Emeritus, Yale University

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