

The Rouge Forum News

Working Papers, Critical Analysis, and Grassroots News

Issue #14



Connecting Reason to Power

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FROM THE EDITOR

Well, despite the glowing prognostications from the financial sector and their allies, the corporate media, it is difficult to find evidence of sunny times in reality: unemployment tipping above 10% (and for workers of color the number is much worse), home foreclosures, factory shutdowns, a health care crisis, widening achievement gaps, and rising personal debt. As the special investigator general seeks more transparency from the banks regarding the use of the bail out money, we are simply assured by the bankers that they are, indeed, lending us (our) money—and, that it would be too complicated to illustrate it for us. Isn't this how we got into the mess to begin with? On the war front, unfortunately, the imperialist invasion in Afghanistan is not going particularly well as deaths there begin to mount (July, 2009 was the deadliest month for US troops since the start of that war). Globally, as a result of neoliberal policies that make the world a marketplace for which capital and (some) products float 'freely' across borders while workers cannot, citizens continue to struggle to live with dignity in the wake of capitalism's hyper-rationalized quest for profit (and more profit). [See "The cost conundrum" in the June 1, 2009 *New Yorker*, "Infinite debt" in the April, 2009 *Harpers*, "Labor's last stand" in the July, 2009 *Harpers*, "[US unemployment rate soars to a 26-year high.](#)" "[Black-White score gaps and Black rate of improvement on NAEP slows under NCLB.](#)" "[Financial Implosion and Stagnation.](#)" and the "Rouge Forum updates" archived at www.therougeforum.blogspot.com]

In a recent address by David Harvey at the Marxism 2009 conference, he opens his talk by pointing out the irrationality of attempting to rationalize an irrational system. He illuminates the fact that we live at parallel moments of huge masses of capital, overwhelming masses of unemployed workers, and massive social need. How can these, he inquires, exist side by side? It is, simply, irrational. So, those who will try to rationalize it (the sunny-minded economists/capitalists) *must* be irrational. For those of us who will continue to reveal the *irrationality* of the system, who will presage the possibility of an alternative social reality, and who will seek to exploit what Slavoj Zizek recently called in *New Left Review* the "antagonisms" within capitalism, we are compelled to seek solidarity.

In the face of this worsening gap between rich and poor, the lengthening fence between the included and the excluded, and the perpetuity of imperialist wars, the Rouge Forum gathered in Ypsilanti, Michigan in May for our annual meeting, to reconnect, dialogue, and analyze the world around us (<http://www.easternecho.com/content/rouge-forum-discusses-youth-education-emu-0>). Thanks to Joe Bishop and his friends, colleagues, and students at Eastern Michigan, we spent the weekend with more than 150 participants. This issue is mainly dedicated to the excellent work shared at the conference. For those of you that could not be there, I hope this may catch you up on some of the very good work of your friends and colleagues. For those of you new to the Rouge Forum, I think you will find these essays and poetry illustrative of the thoughtful creativity and analysis with which I have become familiar in my six years in this organization.

Just to share a thought or two about my take away from the conference, permit me to mention a recent text from one of our keynoters at the conference. As a result of Staughton Lynd's address (what a privilege to have him there!), I purchased his book *Wobblies and Zapatistas*, co-written with Andrej Grubacic. This conversation between a Marxist and an Anarchist provided stimulating summer reading. The authors contend a more hopeful and just future society is dependent upon some twinning of Marxism and Anarchism. They claim we need Marxism to understand the structure of society and to make informed predictions in order to act with greater effect. And, they argue we need Anarchism to anticipate a new society –to live it on the ground here and now.

In my reading, two concepts leapt from the pages as I consumed their work simultaneous to my annual summer work in the Global South. Lynd talks of "accompaniment" while Grubacic talks of "prefiguration." Accompaniment, akin to solidarity, is a way of joining others in the work toward social

justice. Accompaniment often involves the pairing of the relative privileged with the relative oppressed in a Freirean sort of “dialogical action.” In this action, the theoretical knowledge of the relative privileged (of the system and how to navigate it) is connected with the lived experience of the relative oppressed. Prefiguration is a way of being. Anarchist theory holds that social justice is brought to bear by living social justice. If we want democracy, we must live democratically. If we want peace, we must live peacefully. By living it, we create it.

Clearly, in the most optimistic analysis of our international service work in the Global South, accompaniment and prefiguration measure quite prominently in the philosophy and action of the work. Though service-learning is fraught with problematics and, in its most cynical analysis, is exploitative, the intention in the more than ten years of this work has been to join the work of others, leveraging the privilege we have for the benefit of others toward some liberatory goal. Lynd says it this way: “The idea of working side by side with another [is] a common journey. The idea is that when a university-trained person undertakes to walk beside someone rich in experience but lacking formal skills, each contributes something vital to the process. Accompaniment presupposes, not uncritical deference, but equality.” It is at once mutual aid and revolutionary practice. While our work remains far from the liberatory goal and only touching the fringes of a transformative sort of practice, we consistently witness this struggle from as *emic* a perspective as possible and continually hone our analytical capabilities toward more critical action in the future. To this end, Lynd considers the length of this journey, “Sometimes all you can do for another person is stand in the rain with him/her . . . I feel the need for a trade. I feel the natural way to relate to others is by unselfconsciously offering a service of unquestioned usefulness.” So, sometimes we wait for the sunshine, and act the best we can while it’s raining.

Whether standing in the rain or working in the sun, we have also sought a path of prefiguration with our southern partners. Rather than trying to bring about some semblance of community, we try to live as community. Rather than trying to bring about some democratic future with our partners, we try to live democratically, trusting their voice and direction. Rather than seek some future realization of social justice, we try to live justly (as best we can, since we cross complicated borders of nations, race, class, etc.). Grubacic claims, “We need to proceed in a way that builds community. . . . Our conduct toward one another must be paradigmatic in engendering a sense of truly being brothers and sisters.” Further, he asserts, “Without organic preparation, no social and truly socialist revolution is possible The chances of success depend on the extent to the pre-existing constructive capacity.” So, our work has been to build that constructive capacity by trying to live it.

I would highly recommend Lynd and Grubacic’s conversation. It has bolstered the thinking around our work in the Global South and has reinvigorated some of my local work in Kentucky, particularly in schools and with a state-wide coalition which is working to eradicate predatory lending practices.

Along with summer travels and reading, I have also taken up Marx’s *Capital, Volume 1*, again, this time with the help of David Harvey’s lectures online. These can be found at: <http://davidharvey.org>. I would also highly recommend these lectures (and the aforementioned address at the Marxism 2009 conference, also found at his website).

In this issue of the *Rouge Forum News*, we have another provocative lineup of essays to imbibe, digest, and dissect. Leading off from his keynote address at the Rouge Forum, **Staughton Lynd** beckons us by his recollection of the Mississippi Freedom Schools from the summer of 1964. Weaving a tight four-pronged essay that (1) asserts people learn by experience, (2) argues capitalist society allows few apertures through which to imagine a different world, (3) questions how we should introduce young people to new possibilities, and (4) claims that every school be made a freedom school, Lynd offers a crucial conversation starter for teacher educators, teachers, and all those who work on the better behalf of children regarding

what must supplant the technocratic, hyper-standardized, utilitarian philosophy that pervades educational philosophy and practice today.

Next, teacher **Greg Queen**, winner of the Academic Freedom Award from the National Council for the Social Studies in 2008 and keynoter at the Rouge Forum, examines the current social context of schooling. Launching from the dialectical process of “reading the word and the world,” Queen claims that we need to “begin developing curriculum within our communities and classrooms that work toward unveiling capitalist ideology by illustrating its material basis.” Throughout, not only does he frame his argument with Marxist and other critical theory, but Queen also offers his practical experience in the classroom, which provides an ideal *praxistic* exploration of what can happen in the high school history classroom. In conclusion, exuding us to exercise academic freedom, he offers several possibilities to the question of how do you keep your ideals and still teach. Revealing one of them here, Queen suggests that *the cause is right*: “This helps to overcome the fear of challenging the powerful and the drive to protect and extend my freedom in the classroom.”

In “Education through the cracks,” **Cory Maley** takes an anarchist, prefigurative tact and suggests a move toward “mutual education.” Building on the work of Bakunin, Rousseau, Kropotkin, and Suissa, Maley argues that such an education is “a freely chosen relationship between learners and those who have the knowledge and wisdom they seek to engage with one another in an equal relationship for the betterment of themselves and society.”

Travis Barrett writes on the perpetuation of racist oppression in a Northwest Rocky Mountain urban area. Viewing this racism through the lens of his experiences with Burundi refugees, Barrett suggests how this form of oppression is institutionalized: “The one-two punch of negative media portrayals of diverse peoples and the racist indoctrination delivered by beliefs and attitudes held by my community left my peers and me with little (if any) opportunity to learn about and appreciate cultural, ethnic, and religious differences.” Now that his community is receiving refugees from Tanzania, they are ill-prepared to affirm the differences now present in the city. While claiming to eschew racial discrimination, the school board and other leaders of the town are, indeed, engaging in discriminatory practices by separating the refugees (some of the only people of color in the community) into substandard educational facilities with little to no extra-curricular programming. Barrett concludes his resonating essay, stating, “Only through addressing institutionalized racism and radically changing our schools and the community’s beliefs and attitudes regarding diverse peoples will we create a multicultural community where all people, regardless of their ethnicity, culture, and religion are welcomed, embraced, and appreciated.”

In this edition, **Rich Gibson** continues his rich history of challenging educators to come to grips with capital’s schools by providing an investigative exercise driven by four questions: Why have school? What are the key things happening in schools today? What are the key things happening in society? For this analysis, what shall we do and think? Gibson concludes his provocative investigation: “Justice demands organization. Organization must be propped up on the legs of reason and passion in order to win the power all working people need to transform the world system of capital into a social system where all can live freely through mutual care, where creativity can be unleashed, reason celebrated, and sensuality and aesthetics come out in the open.”

In an essay on school reform, **Paul Ramsey** provides a nice historical encapsulation of changes in educational initiatives from the early 20th century forward. Noting the current lament from many educational critics relative to NCLB, Ramsey suggests a little perspective-gathering in order to figure out how to put forth (counter-)reform initiatives that “cannot merely be co-opted watered down, institutionalized, or layered into an already problematic educational system.” Teachers can learn much from the history Ramsey outlines. As well, critics and activists alike will have a little more to put in their toolboxes as they suggest/work toward more socially-just alternatives.

In a critical contribution from **Wayne Ross**, adapted from his keynote address at the 2008 Rouge Forum conference, he cautions on and encourages us to overcome dualistic thinking. [Recall the conference theme for our 2008 conference was Education: Reform or Revolution?] Focusing less on what is the case and urging us to consider what ought to be the case, Ross considers, “[I]f we look at the way the world is, with its injuries of class and the compounded miseries of the injustices and discrimination along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, ability etc. our decisions may not be determined, but what moral standard would allow us to turn away from critical examination of the root causes of the exploitation, subordination, dependence, and insecurity that mark global capitalist society today? Capitalism and the ‘logic of the market’ which guide neoliberal social and economic policies in the world today ratifies, reproduces, and deepens the persistent inequalities of wealth, income, justice, health care, and education we find in North America and across the world today.” He backs this consideration up with unsettling statistics. Ross concludes that “critical analysis of the consequences of our capitalist present will certainly lead most people to the rational choice that our circumstances call for a revolutionary response.” Further, “Building organizations like SDS, The Rouge Forum, etc.; forming alliances with allies to achieve short-term goals; and generally being effective in our work in the social, educational, and political institutions as they currently exist are crucial parts of what it means to engage in revolutionary action.”

Carol Williams, in an essay entitled, “How do we learn and teach to get from where we are to where we need to be,” considers a number of questions: How do our past educational experiences impact our present teaching beliefs and practices? How do we defend against a limiting educational system that is failing a good number of our youth? What do we need to know in order to move forward? Interspersing reflection with analysis, Williams argues “[W]ithout a look inside, we cannot make lasting change.” And, in order to remain as practical as possible, Williams provides us with a bit of a roadmap for consideration on how we do get to where we need to be. Some of the steps include rethinking how we teach, honoring the community, and letting go of control, among others.

I take on the corporatization of (or the neoliberal creep into) universities. Covering a slice of the literature on this corporatizing trend and the potential solutions, I set out an agenda for some reformist/transformational work at my university over the coming year.

Paul Moore concludes our essay section with a provocative editorial on the potential fascist shift within America.

In terms of poetry this issue, readers will be entertained, educated, and provoked by three poets and members of the Rouge Forum: **Sonya Burton**, **Billy X Curmano**, and **Gina Stiens**

Recently, in a Rouge Forum update, Rich concluded with the following:

The many crises grow around us apace. Unemployment and foreclosures mean an eroded tax base, meaning more demands for cuts on education and services, increased taxation of those who have a little, more PR to crush hope in the sense that nothing can be done, more police activity to raise funds and tamp down resistance, and more spectacles. On the war front, more war—for oil, regional control, that is, profits—using the children of the poor to fight the children of the poor on behalf of the rich in their homelands.

What stops the madness? Understanding that the core issue of our time is the relationship of rising color-coded inequality to the potential of mass class-conscious resistance. That has been the project of the Rouge Forum, connecting reason to power, for more than a decade. Please join us and help lead the fight-backs that will come.

I hope that you will join us in this struggle and/or let us know how we can help/join you in similar efforts either globally or locally. The opposition, as Rich and others often point out, is ruthless. We are, indeed, “lambs among wolves.” Our hope lies in coordinated action, critical analysis, accompaniment, and the prefiguration of a transformed society. Subcomandante Marcos remarks, “There is only one desire: to construct a better world; that is, a new one.” This new world, like Marx, Guevara, and others have noted will be constructed upon the old world, imperfectly and imprecisely; yet this is our revolutionary duty, ultimately—making it more perfect and more precise with each new beginning. We anticipate the turning points and fight-backs to come.

As always, we would look forward to your feedback. This issue will not only be posted on the Rouge Forum website (www.rougeforum.org), but will also be linked at our blog (www.therougeforum.blogspot.com). Please feel free to add your comments there or write to me at arenner@bellarmine.edu.

Adam Renner, Louisville, KY

WHAT IS TO BE DONE

Staughton Lynd

Greetings, fellow teachers.

What I plan to do in the next little while is to tell you about my experience in the Mississippi Freedom Schools in Summer 1964 and to offer my thoughts about how that experience might relate to the question, What is to be done?

In my remarks, I shall try to convince you of three things:

First, everything we know about learning instructs that people do not learn by reading Left wing newspapers, nor by attending lectures like this one at which some learned person offers correct theory. **People learn by experience.** And that is especially true if the learning we have in mind is glimpsing the hope that *another world is possible*. People must touch and taste an alternative way of doing things, they must however briefly live inside that hope, in order to come to believe that an alternative might really come true.

Second, capitalist society in the United States offers very few opportunities to experience another world, another way of doing things. During the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe it was possible to create the institutions of a new society in the interstices of feudal society: thus there came into existence free cities, guilds, Protestant congregations, banks and corporations, new styles of painting and making music. By the time an emerging bourgeoisie created parliaments, and sought to take over state power, a network of new institutions had come into being within the shell of the old. This does not seem to be possible within capitalism as the sad history of trade unions teaches us.

Third, how then, are we to help young people to imagine what a new society might be like? As educators we know that we can't do it just by talking, it has to happen through experience. As organizers we know that it is very difficult to provide such experiences in these United States.

I.

So, first: Everything we know about learning instructs that people learn by experience.

I assume that this is a topic about which we are in agreement, and so I can be brief. Let me tell a couple of my favorite stories about Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School.

The Highlander Folk School in Tennessee was created in the 1930s. During its early years Highlander supported the creation of trade unions and then, in the 1960s, assisted the civil rights movement. The civil rights version of "We Shall Overcome" was put together by Guy Carawan and others at Highlander, thereafter they taught it to civil rights workers who came to Highlander for retreats. Myles Horton, the principal founder of Highlander, was the Paulo Freire of the United States, and there is a wonderful book entitled *We Make The Road By Walking* in which Freire and Horton as two old men share their experiences.

One summer in the early 1930s, when Horton was more of a Christian than in his later years, he taught bible school for the YMCA in a remote Appalachian hamlet named Ozone. Midway through the summer the young teacher concluded that this impoverished community in the midst of a Depression needed something more than the Bible. He let it be known that on a certain evening there would be a meeting to address the question of what was to be done.

People walked across the mountains barefoot to get to that meeting. As the meeting was about to begin, Horton realized that he had nothing consequential to suggest. In panic and desperation he said, "Let's go around the circle and see what ideas people brought with them." They did so. A program materialized. The Highlander style of education emerged from this experience.

A second story concerns how Horton dealt with race. When the CIO began organizing in 1935, segregation, disfranchisement, and racism pervaded the South, including its fragile labor movement. As individual union organizers, black and white, arrived at Highlander for a retreat, they would be assigned to cabins in order of their arrival. Sleeping, eating, and discussing were integrated throughout the week of the retreat, but nothing was said about race. Participants experienced the overcoming of racism. At week's end, as folks made ready to disperse, Horton would say something like: "Now, we all know how silly these racial customs are. How are we going to get that across to workers we organize?"

II

Second, and again to repeat: Capitalist society in the United States offers very few opportunities to experience another way of doing things.

When I was a teenager in New York City I rode the subway for half an hour to get to school. I gave myself a radical education. One of the books I read, by an ex-Trotskyist named James Burnham and entitled *The Managerial Revolution*, laid out the way in which the rising middle class in medieval Europe created, first, new institutions, and only second, a revolution, and concluded that nothing like this was possible in a capitalist society. Burnham particularly insisted that trade unions were not prefigurative institutions, that they would never challenge the capitalist economy comprehensively. Their role, Burnham argued, was at best to smooth a few of the rough edges and make capitalism tolerable for those it exploited.

When I got off the subway I hurried to my parents' bookshelves to find the answer to Burnham. I looked, for example, at Emile Burns' *Handbook of Marxism*. I couldn't find an answer then or for decades afterwards.

I tried to respond to Burnham's thesis in a different way at the end of the 1960s.

Those of you old enough to have lived through that time will recall that in those years there again came to the fore the Marxist idea that the working class would lead the way in creating a new society. So I briefly considered looking for a job in a steel mill. A young friend employed at U.S. Steel Gary Works told me that if I did so, after twenty years workers would still say to each other about me, "Let's see what the Professor thinks."

I decided that I might do better seeking to assist those same workers by offering a needed skill. I became a lawyer. I was a Legal Services lawyer for almost twenty years, confronting as best I could the layoffs, plant closings, and bankruptcies of that time. Unfortunately my experience confirmed rather than rebutting Burnham's conclusion that unions were not a force for fundamental social change. I often represented local unions as well as individual workers in trouble. It was the larger structures, the national unions, that repeatedly let down the rank-and-file workers they represented. Bureaucrats at some national headquarters far distant from the shop or school floor drafted contracts that gave the employer the unilateral right to make the big decisions, like closing a facility or cancelling health benefits for retirees. At the same time, national unions acquiesced in a no-strike clause that took away from local unions and their members the only effective way to resist.

Critical as I am of national unions, I do not wish to romanticize the ordinary rank-and-file worker. Much

depends on whether people are encouraged to stand beside their brothers and sisters, risking personal sacrifice on behalf of a shared vision, or instead to base decisions on a calculus of individual self-interest. At the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World popularized the phrase, "An injury to one is an injury to all." Ralph Chaplin, a member of the IWW, while imprisoned during World War I took the old tune to the Battle Hymn of the Republic and wrote the words of "Solidarity Forever." But how many fellow workers do any of us know who still believe that "In our hands there is a power greater than their hoarded gold" so that "We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old"?

I don't mean to issue iron pronouncements of doom for union effort at all times and in all places. I tried for twenty years. In the end I found more solidarity among the prisoners locked in Youngstown's many new prisons than I had experienced in the steel mills that the prisons replaced.

III

That leaves, brothers and sisters, schools. If we calculate 7 hours to the school day, 18 days to the school month, 10 months to the school year, and 12.5 years in school, that comes to 15,750 hours in which a young person who graduates from high school has been in the presence of another human being called a teacher.

I know a man sentenced to death who is writing his autobiography. He figures that despite a miserable, heart-breaking childhood, he kept it together as a youngster who got good grades and had hope for the future until his early teens. His first encounter with the criminal injustice system came when he went joy-riding in a stolen car with several older friends. The judge took note of the fact that Keith had no criminal record and asked his stepfather and mother if they wished to take him home or have him assigned to the juvenile detention facility. Keith's stepfather told the judge, "You take him."

Later, after shooting a best friend in a dispute over drugs and brief participation in a major prison riot, Keith Lamar was sentenced to death. He decided that something out of the ordinary was required and took the name Bomani Shakur, Swahili for "Thankful Mighty Warrior." He asks himself the question I am asking, When a young person experiences next to no support, encouragement, or recognition from everyday life in his community, how can we expect that young person to become anything other than a candidate for life behind bars?

And I am answering, Maybe, just maybe, in a place called "school."

You may be skeptical and, if so, I think I know how you feel. I lost my opportunity to make a living as a teacher when I tried to go all-out to stop the Vietnam war. I took account of all the rules and requirements. I went to Hanoi during Christmas vacation, and practically overturned the world Communist bureaucracy to be back in the States in time for my first scheduled class in the new year. It didn't make any difference. The president of Yale said I had "given aid and comfort to the enemy," a phrase from the law of treason.

But I don't want to exchange war stories, or display our respective scars. I don't want to have an abstract debate about education as a social force. I want to tell you about the Mississippi Freedom Schools, which I had the honor of helping to create, and which I coordinated in the summer of 1964.

Freedom Schools were improvised summer high schools. They did not offer academic credit. For the most part the schools were located in church basements, and in more than one instance the church was bombed or burned to the ground. The students were African American teenagers. The teachers were mostly from the North, mostly white, and mostly women, who lived with African American families brave enough to

take them in. By attending Freedom School the youngsters deprived their families of days of much-needed labor in the fields.

As I assume you can understand, statistical exactness wasn't possible in these circumstances. All studies agree that more than 2,000 youngsters attended more than forty Freedom Schools.

The summer project began with a two-week orientation at the College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. Voter registration volunteers attended during the first week. They left as we who would try to create Freedom Schools arrived. I drove from Atlanta with three students from Spelman College who were summer volunteers like myself. The trunk of my Rambler was packed with copies of the Freedom School curriculum, laboriously reproduced on an ancient hectograph machine in the Lynds' apartment on the Spelman campus.

The day after we arrived at Oxford there came the news that Meridian project director Michael Schwerner, summer volunteer Andrew Goodman, and Mississippi resident James Chaney, had disappeared. They had driven from Ohio, had snatched a few hours sleep, and then had set out for nearby Philadelphia, Mississippi. There the deacons of a local African American church, after lengthy discussion, had voted to let the church be used for a Freedom School. Soon after the church was burned down. Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney went to Philadelphia to find a new location for a Freedom School. Their station wagon got a flat tire. I assume you know the rest of the story. The bodies were discovered the first week of August.

Back at Oxford, everyone was making long distance telephone calls: to Mississippi, to the Department of Justice in Washington DC, to parents. I was invited to a small meeting of staff for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC. Bob Zellner and others volunteered to travel to Philadelphia and go through the woods at night to see if there was underground knowledge in the black community about what had happened to the missing men. I was in and out of larger meetings, talking with volunteers for the Freedom Schools about whether to go home or go to Mississippi. I don't remember anyone going home.

During that week I made an arrangement with a volunteer named Tom Wahman. Tom's wife Sue was a member of the cast of Martin Duberman's play "In White America." They were going to be rehearsing in Jackson, the state capitol. Tom wondered if he too could be assigned to Jackson. I said, "Sure: you go to headquarters every day and answer telephone calls about the Freedom Schools, and I will spend the summer traveling through Mississippi, visiting the schools."

I remember going to McComb, Mississippi. It was just after the Freedom House where summer volunteers had been sleeping, and where the Freedom School had been meeting, was bombed. We gathered on the lawn next to the Freedom House. We sang "I'm on my way to the freedom land," and Bob Moses suggested the verse, "If you can't go let your children go."

One of the summer volunteers, Wally Roberts, was having a hard time getting the Freedom School started in Shaw, in the Mississippi Delta. We talked. The solution turned out to be for the youngsters to do voter registration every morning. Then in the afternoon, at Freedom School, it took on more meaning to learn that in the Reconstruction period after the Civil War there had been black representatives in the Mississippi state legislature.

Alongside my fragmentary impressions the best way I can convey what happened in those schools that summer is to read some of the letters to home written by teachers, and some of the prose and poetry by Freedom School students, and a recollection of one of my students at Spelman who went to Mississippi.

Some teachers were welcomed as heroes. Geoff wrote home:

Batesville welcomed us triumphantly --
at least Black Batesville did.
Children and adults waved from their porches and shouted hello
as we walked along the labyrinth of dirt paths and small wooden
houses
In a few days scores of children knew us and called us by name.

Similarly in Ruleville, in the Delta, the summer volunteers

. . . were given the best of everything,
and housing was found for all of us.
Two people have already lost their jobs for housing us,
and yet in each case half a dozen families
begged us to stay with them.

My student Gwen Robinson was welcomed just as warmly, but much less obtrusively, in Laurel, Mississippi. She recalled:

One of the few things that I was trying to hold onto in terms of thinking **maybe I will survive this** [was] the fact that there were all these white young people going. . . . So when I was told I was being assigned to Laurel with two other people only and both of them were black men and the three of us were going to Laurel because it was too dangerous for white people, I was like, "Well, wait a minute. . . ."

We went and we did have some names of people. One of them was . . . Mrs. Euberta Sphinks.

When I got to Mrs. Sphinks' door, I knocked on her door. I introduced myself She looked at me and said, "Girl, I've been waiting [for] you all my life. Come on in."

Freedom School students in Hattiesburg wrote a Declaration of Independence that said in part:

In this course of human events,
it has become necessary for the Negro people
to break away from the customs
which have made it very difficult
for the Negro to get his God-given rights.
We, as citizens of Mississippi,
do hereby state that all people
should have the right to petition,
to assemble, and to use public places.
We also have the right to life,
liberty, and to seek happiness. . . .
We do hereby declare independence
from the unjust laws of Mississippi
which conflict with the United States constitution.

Naomi Long Nadget, Greenwood Freedom School wrote a poem:

I've seen daylight breaking high above the bough,
I've found my destination and I've made my vow;
So whether you abhor me or deride me or ignore me,
Mighty mountains loom before me and I won't stop now.

You recall that in McComb the Freedom House had been bombed and the Freedom School had to meet on the grass outside. No local black institution dared offer facilities for a school. Joyce Brown, 16, addressed the problem in a poem in which she said in part:

I asked for your churches, and you turned me down,
But I'll do my work if I have to do it on the ground.
You will not speak for fear of being heard,
So crawl in your shell and say, "Do not disturb."
You think because you've turned me away
You've protected yourself for another day.

According to Professor Dittmer, author of a splendid book on the Mississippi Movement, "Moved -- and shamed -- by Joyce Brown's poem, local people soon made church facilities available for the Freedom School."

At the end of the first week in August, the same week that the three bodies were discovered and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party held its state convention, there took place a so-called Freedom School Convention. Sandra Adickes, a professional teacher from New York, says that I suggested it. I have only a visual memory of the meeting of Freedom School coordinators where we decided to do it. The idea was for each Freedom School to send a couple of delegates, accompanied by a teacher, to a ramshackle Baptist seminary on the outskirts of Meridian, and for the assembled delegates to debate and adopt resolutions about the future of Mississippi as they envisioned it. The "1964 Platform of the Mississippi Freedom School Convention," adopted that weekend, includes resolutions on Public Accommodations, Housing, Education, Health, Foreign Affairs, Federal Aid, Job Discrimination, the Plantation System, Civil Liberties, Law Enforcement, City Improvements, Voting, and Direct Action.

The most consequential discussion concerned whether, at summer's end, the Mississippi Movement should attempt to extrapolate the summer Freedom Schools into a comprehensive alternative school system, or whether, instead, these young people should return to their segregated schools with used textbooks handed down from the white schools, inadequately prepared teachers, not enough money, and a curriculum that prohibited African American history.

They decided that individual communities might experiment with Freedom Schools or school boycotts as desired, but as a statewide movement they would go back to their old schools. I believed then, and I believe now, that it was the correct decision. We did not have the resources to create a permanent parallel school system. Had we tried to do so, the effort would predictably have collapsed and students might have had to face the world without even a high school diploma.

But that was not quite the end of the story. To begin with, there was the experience that Freedom School students carried into the rest of their lives. John Dittmer says that he could always tell which of his students had been in Freedom Schools: they did not hesitate to challenge the professor and ask questions, they were comfortable in discussions, and they were not intimidated by white teachers. Dittmer tells the story of one such alumnus, Wayne Saddler. Saddler attended the Freedom School in Gluckstadt, Mississippi. Saddler recalled the night that the school was burned to the ground and how, after the

summer ended, he continued to attend a Freedom School in nearby Canton. Little more than a decade later, Wayne Saddler was the anchor of the state's most widely watched TV news program.

The Freedom Schools also laid the basis for the Mississippi Headstart program, which in summer 1965 served 6,000 children through eighty-four centers in twenty-four counties. I believe that many of the church basements in which the pre-school children gathered had previously been used for Freedom Schools and that many of the African American women who staffed the Headstart program had previously welcomed 1964 summer volunteers into their homes.

And there was also the following. Years later I was making my way through law school. I read the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Tinker v. Des Moines*, the case of a high school student in Iowa who wore a black arm band to school to protest the Vietnam war, and was sent home. The high Court held that what she did was protected by the First Amendment. I noticed that the Supreme Court, in its opinion, repeatedly cited a case called *Burnside v. Byars* decided by an appeals court in the South. I looked it up.

It seems that on the first day of school in Fall 1964, African American students in Philadelphia -- that same Philadelphia where Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney had been murdered a few months earlier -- went to school wearing buttons that said "SNCC" and "One Man One Vote." They were sent home, but the federal appeals court held that what they did was not so disruptive as to outweigh their right to free speech. Thus the action of these black students -- the single most courageous action I remember from that summer of bravery -- protected the right of a young white student in a Northern state to protest the Vietnam war a few years later.

IV

So my proposed solution to the dilemma I posed at the outset is, Let's try to make every school a Freedom School. 15,750 hours in which a young person who makes it through high school has been in the presence of someone called a teacher is a fair chunk of time within which to try to offer young people a glimpse of the dawning of a new day.

Am I saying, Because we did it in Mississippi under these dangerous and difficult conditions, you should be able to do it? No, I'm not saying that. Danger and difficulty gave rise to opportunities as well as obstacles. Who amongst us would not wish to teach with a program for first-time voter registration, or any other kind of popular liberation, going on -- so to speak -- next door?

But I **am** saying, we did do it. And hopefully, knowing that may make it a little easier for you when next you confront the teacher who teaches out of last year's notes but has more seniority; the Neanderthal principal and School Board; or indeed, hostile parents and students who seemingly don't give a damn.

In the face of all that, I say, Let's make every school a Freedom School.

Every school a Freedom School, because how else will young people have the experience of putting the chairs in a circle and sharing as equals?

Every school a Freedom School, because this may be the one time and place, the one island of experience when youngsters experience the possibility of taking seriously ideas and ideals.

Every school a Freedom School, because the military is raiding inner city public schools to recruit for its imperialist wars and we have a duty to help our students resist.

Every school a Freedom School, because this may be a young person's one chance to meet a person whose example will reverberate for the rest of that student's life, namely, yourself.

Every school a Freedom School, because even for those who make it through high school it is very difficult to find a decent job and young people will need whatever inner resources we can help them to develop before graduation.

Every school a Freedom School, because if that aspiration will create risks for teachers, it is a greater risk for our students to grow up in inner city America.

Every school a Freedom School because: If not now, then when? If not here, then where? If not ourselves, then who?

Staughton Lynd is an American conscientious objector, peace activist and civil rights activist, historian, professor, author and lawyer.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOLS

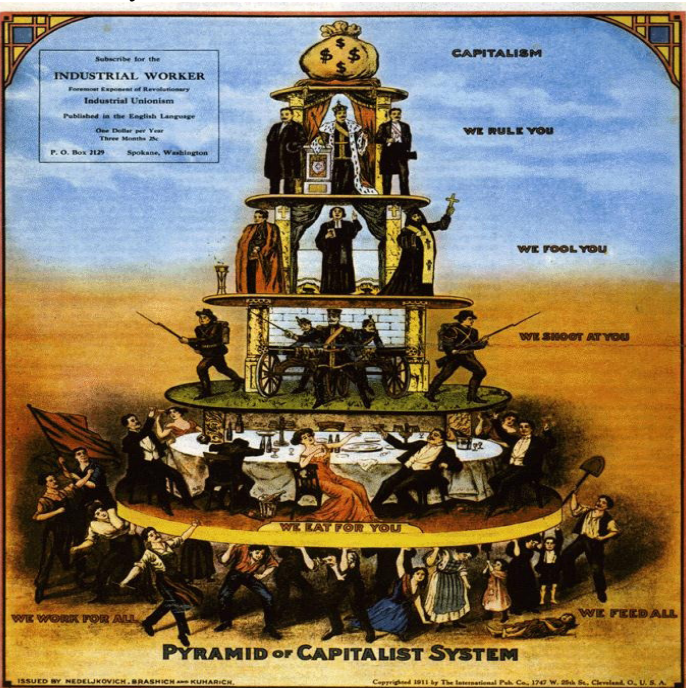
Greg Queen

This year, my oldest daughter started first grade. At curriculum night her teacher said that she wishes that she could just teach reading and math, and skip over science and social studies. It was then, that I knew we were set up for another disappointing year. To me, math and reading are the means to understanding the world in which we live and our relation to it, not the end. Within the first month of the school year, my daughter, who already had a grasp of how to read simply from being read to regularly for years, started to engage in a behavior that we never really taught to her. When she was reading, she started to point at every word she was reading. When she came to a word that she was not familiar with, she would stop and try to sound out the word. This caused frustration for my daughter for the primary reason that at least half the words do not sound out correctly and it slowed/controlled the natural movement of her eyes across the page. We told Grace to not use her finger to point out words as she read because it interrupted the construction of meaning. Secondly, we told her that if she came to a word she did not know, she should continue reading to figure out the context of the word she does not know. The clues provided from the context of the sentence, Grace's knowledge of the world, and the phonic and visual information contained in the lettering of the word, helped Grace glean the meaning of the unknown word. This, I think, provides a lesson. This lesson of how to read can be applied to why and how we learn to read the world. To understand the particular, the word, the child is not being encouraged to look at the totality, or context. This idea, applied to social relations, teaches the child to determine meaning by looking at the individual rather than the social context in which the individual exists. So rather than explain Grace's teacher's pedagogy in isolation from her social context, we need to ask what the social context of schools is.

Now, during the current historical period, particularly that past 30 years, inequality has intensified and define events. Capitalist exploitation of labor is the root of this inequality. The capitalist class controls the means, process and products of production and they desire to maintain and expand their control over these components of the production and reproduction of society. Labor power, AKA the working class, is in a position to resist this control and seek to creatively and collectively alter the social relations between capitalists and workers so the latter is empowered and freed from the control of the capitalist. However, to grasp this concept, to change these social relations, the individual must see the totality, or the context and not just their individual existence in isolation from the context to glean a full meaning of their

particular life. In other words, like reading for meaning, we must glean an understanding of a particular situation (word) by using the context, by knowing what came before, a sense of where the present (story) is going, and by looking at the particulars (lettering) of the present. I believe this illustration is a great graphic to illustrate the social relations of today.

In this illustration created by members of the Industrial Workers of the World in 1912, the pyramid system is dominated by a drive for capitalist profit, or money bags. The capitalist which most intensely exploits the working class will rise to the top. The capitalist does not do this entirely by themselves, obviously, but those below the rulers help them to create and recreate the systems of control. This struggle between the rulers and the



ruled is played out in the field of education. As I tell my students, teachers sometimes play the role of preachers in this illustration. (As a side note, I would add the talking heads of TV to the “we fool you” section) Metaphorically, a teacher who does not teach with context would show the individual parts of this illustration but not the entire picture and the student would not have the full meaning of its individual parts and may just dismiss it. This is similar to breaking education down into individual skills void of context and content in education today as evidenced by my daughter’s classroom. As a result, I think kids learn to dismiss their education as meaningless and/or as only a means to something else. Obviously, it is in the interest of the capitalist for people to not see the whole picture as represented in this illustration but would rather have us be mystified by the invisible hand of the markets and the social relations of this pyramid. A key place where this mystification happens is schools.

If we use the form and content of the social relations of capitalism and analyze today’s classroom, we can see strikingly similar relationships. According to Sarup, in schools, the three directly related participants (or factors of production) are teachers, students and knowledge. Students can be seen both as workers and commodities. Like the worker who exchanges her labor power for money which she uses to buy the objects necessary to live, the student exchanges her objectified labor (completed assignments) for the means (grades) to get a job (where she will subsequently exchange her labor power for the means to life). In the capitalist mode of education, students are “transformed into products, commodities to be sold on the market” (Sarup, 1978, p. 140). The teacher in this factory model of education is both a capitalist and a worker. As a capitalist, she determines the content and methods in the production of knowledge (except, though, the content and methods are increasingly being replaced by Standards Based Education). When the students produce and reproduce this knowledge, the teacher, like a capitalist, appropriates the objects of production from the students and returns to them a wage, or grade. The teacher is a worker whose product of production are students. As an employee, she works for people whose wish is to reproduce society as it is. This places the teacher in a contradictory role; it is contradictory because as a worker, she should be creating individuals who have a critical capacity to understand the capitalists system and the workers role within it, in other words the totality, but as a capitalist, she needs to transform the student into a commodity whose goal in life is to sell herself to a capitalist to (re)create capital and the capitalist and accept this as the natural state of affairs (Sarup, 1978). Shannon (1992, 2001) says that capitalists desire predictable, value-free factors of production (people, raw materials, and man-made objects) so as to more simply and rationally organize production. He says that “Capitalist logic promises that if all of society could be organized in a similar fashion, then society would run like a business, creating the best conditions for production, technological advance and accumulation. The allure of this promise drives the efforts to rationalize more and more aspects of public and private lives” (Shannon, 2001, On line). This includes schooling.

Since the uprising of the 1960’s, there has been a rightist resurgence in education policies. The right-wing is attempting to redefine whose methods and knowledge is considered legitimate. They have been promoting the needs of capitalists as the primary needs of society and purpose of education and they have been attacking teachers and curriculums as the forces resisting this ideology. Peter McLaren explains that over the past two decades the scientific management style has been quite pervasive in schools and is producing a “mechanistic cognitive style within classrooms that appears at times to conform to Henry Ford’s rust proofed assembly lines” (1994, p. 219). Many district administrators have decided to make their teachers use teacher proofed curriculums. This move parallels the bosses of factories who have attempted to devalue and de-skill workers and place decisions making power into a planning department. This scientific management of capitalist production as applied to schools creates a context where the justification for standardized lessons and high-stakes testing become necessary. When science is invoked (such as the pseudo science of teacher proof curriculums and testing), it creates the appearance of objectivity. The promoters of scientifically managed schools claim that the standardized programs are produced objectively without regard for the emotional and social context of any particular classroom, “far from the daily practices of teachers and students” and this is considered fair and equal. This total

rationalization of the education process causes it to appear as though these methods of knowing the world are natural and inevitable, hence unchangeable (Shannon, 2001, On line). Standards Based Education [SBE] is the scientific management of schools today. . . but why?

Standardized programs become necessary to the overall system of production because they “provide the division of function with teachers becoming factors in the implementation of the curricular designs of others; they fix the actions of teachers across classroom, schools, and districts; and they synchronize the actions of teachers and students toward the abstracted exchange value of student test scores” (Shannon, 2001, On line). The test scores are used to determine the efficiency of teachers, to measure the degree of cultural capital attained by the student, and to legitimizing the entire social system. SBE operates under the assumption that the inequalities in our society have been determined by the level of formal education rather than the social relations resulting from the unequal distribution of socially produced resources. In other words, one’s value is determined not by the social relations of capital in the sphere of production but its reification in the form of test scores in the sphere of education. Standards Based Education treats education as an object that is alien to most students and the value of a student is determined by how much of this alien knowledge she accumulates. To measure this value, the students and schools must complete standardized tests and their scores are ranked against other students and schools. The promoters of this scientifically managed Standards Based regimen want us to gaze at particular schools and their test scores and not the social context of schools (in addition to them being able to surveillance the implementation of the regimen). The scientific managers of SBE see schooling as a thing that is separate and sits outside of a social context. Therefore, its promoters can say that the unequal results arise from the particular schools, teachers and students who metaphorically are unable to sound out words correctly and the capitalist class is not to blame for the material results of unequal distribution of social resources which they control but the school, teacher and/or students are to blame. You will get to heaven when you pass the test.

This type of teaching, in the end, tends to emphasize practical and technical knowledge in contrast to transformative knowledge. Secondly, because the dominant ideas of society tend to be controlled by the dominant social class, capitalism is treated as given, the last, best social system known to human history. The knowledge available in capitalist schools is not useful for developing a sense of the world nor an understanding of the essence of capitalist society but rather divides knowledge into particulars and forces students to learn one particular subject outside of its context (if substantive content is even being offered). Thus, the current form of education which mirrors the capitalist mode of production and the lack of content critical of the capitalist dominated society, the social relations of capital remain unexamined and oppression and exploitation continue.

Public schools are centripetally located in society to significantly impact whether the social relations between capitalists and workers are altered. Therefore, they are very important to capitalist in terms of maintaining the existing social relations of society that benefit them at the expense of other members of society. This starts very early. Like learning to read in my daughter’s classroom, future workers have few experience in their formal education to analyze the social/historic context of current events, but are told to look at what is immediately in front of them without context but like reading, we cannot always depend upon what we see (lettering of a word) and need to look at the context to determine the correct meaning. However, kids very early on are not taught this primary method for constructing knowledge. I think the educator should realize their location in this struggle between the social classes and recognize that their actions are partisan.

Collectively, teachers can contribute significantly to the transformation of society towards more freedom, equality and democracy; Or, they can take the side of the dominators (capitalists) who are fighting for increased inequality and authoritarianism and justification of the existing social relations. Teachers can choose the path of SBE which will entrench capitalist control and do little to alter the current social

relation, or they can redirect students to the idea that the source of inequality is the unequal control over the process and products of society. To do the latter, it becomes imperative to create individuals who can become agents of change toward the expansion of equality and democracy and effective resisters against inequality and authoritarianism and to do this learning to read must involve learning the social context in which one lives. Although I think this is the correct course it obviously has risks and they vary depending upon the socio-economic characteristics of the school and the level of class struggle. I think that we need to begin developing curriculum within our communities and classrooms that work towards unveiling capitalist ideology by illustrating its material basis. If students are given an opportunity to see how the processes of capitalism work in the historical and contemporary struggle for control over the processes and products of labor, they will begin to develop an understanding of what makes history move and their role in creating that history. This understanding will tend to develop citizens who see themselves as participants or actors and potential agents of historical change.

Philosophically, Freire has influenced my thinking regarding how we free ourselves of oppression and much of what I am about to say comes from his explanations. We need to facilitate experiences and organize curriculum so that students come to realize that the objective social world is not one which is reified into a concrete, unchangeable thing but is the result of relations between humans and that since the objective social world is the result of relations between humans, these relations are under the control of humans and can be changed. Secondly, students must develop an understanding that the oppressed must struggle towards changing the existing social relations that control them for the enrichment of the oppressing class (Freire, 1993). However, overcoming oppression is more than recognizing the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Although a good starting point is to recognize the source and the methods of domination, it is equally as important to recognize the source and methods for liberation both in the past and the present (Freire, 1993). The oppressed must struggle to free themselves.

The roots of the struggle for liberation exist in understanding dialectical thought, where the world and action are intimately interdependent (Freire, 1993). Freire argues that we should not just be in the world but should be with the world. We engage with the world through organizing ourselves, acting, testing ourselves, choosing the best responses, and changing in the very act of responding. By engaging with the world through a critical and reflective eye, we discover our temporality and recognize the dimensionality of time. Through this process, we realize we are not imprisoned within a permanent today but can emerge and become temporalized, as Freire says (Freire, 1973). It is the normal role of human beings to be creative and want to participate and intervene in reality with the intent of changing it. Freire says that humans want to engage in activity to *integrate* oneself within one's context in contrast to other animals that just *adapt* to the context. Being able to integrate oneself implies not only the ability to adapt to the existing context but the ability to use one's critical capacity to intervene in that context with the intent to change it. An individual who loses this ability to make choices in life and follows prescribed choices is no longer integrated in life but has simply adapted to the context of life. The person who is integrated becomes the subject in life rather than the adapted individual who is an object, a thing, in life. As teachers, we can choose the path of SBE and adapt to the designs of others, the capitalists and their supporters, or we can facilitate the creation of individuals who can successfully integrate themselves rather than adapt to reality (Freire, 1973). To do the latter, it is necessary to know the totality, or how the capitalist system manages itself and how we can intervene to change it to create social relations based upon freedom, equality and democracy.

Marx argues that in the capitalist system, we are not the subject of our own lives creating objects that affirm our humanity but are used by capital and its personification, the capitalists to create and affirm the subject, capital. Marx says that capital is not a thing but is a social relation between people. Lukacs says that the form of this relationship, capital over labor, becomes the dominant form of social relations within society. The parallel made earlier regarding the social relations within schools between teachers

and students is an example. To be the personification of Capital, the capitalist “must” think that they are living according to natural objective laws and not to the laws of a social system created by people. To affirm their existences as personifications of capital, capitalists exploit labor power to “create” the objectification of capital, the commodity, that when sold is transformed into money to enrich and empower the capitalists. Therefore, workers simply are a part of the means of production, a commodity. However, as a commodity, Lukacs says, they play a special role in creating historical change and can only become the agent of change when the worker realizes their existence as a commodity in the capitalist system. Therefore, it is necessary that students recognize that as workers they create the material basis that empowers the capitalists and that this is done through the commodification of their labor. In other words, the workers need to realize that their value is determined by a social relation dominated by the capitalists and not objective, natural laws. Recognizing that the form of social relations in capitalism is capital and labor and the content of that form is exploitation helps the worker penetrate it and become active in its transformation into a relation based upon equality (Lukacs, 1971). Marx demanded “a historical critique of economics which resolves the totality of the reified objectives of social and economic life into relations between men” (Lukacs, 1971, p. 49). Lukacs quotes Marx as saying that capital is “not a thing but a social relation between people mediated through things” (1971, p. 49). “The superiority of the proletariat must lie exclusively in its ability to see society from the center, as a coherent whole. This means that it is able to act in such a way as to change reality; in the class consciousness of the proletariat, theory and practice coincide and so it can consciously throw the weight of its actions on the scales of history—and this is the deciding factor” (Lukacs, 1971, p. 69).

I think that the degree of freedom we have to do this in the classroom is connected to the organizational power of the working class. Although in a capitalist dominated society, one is completely free to teach the ideology of the capitalist class, just look at the semester length courses called “economics,” the degree of freedom to engage in critical pedagogy is connected to the organizational power of the working class. Hence, one of the goals of the Rouge Forum is to not only organize educators but to bring forth the understanding and connections between education and class and that our freedom is dialectically connected to the freedom of the working class. I believe that it is, in part, because of my connection to the Rouge Forum and other like-minded educators that has been developed over the past decade, that I am able to teach content that is critical of the capitalist system. Therefore, I would like to explain how I try to teach using the above understandings, how these have been challenged, and how I have managed to still teach and keep my ideals, to some degree.

Currently I teach high school history. When I think through the scope and sequence of any history class, the primary focus is a history of class relations. For example, in a modern American history class that I teach, I open the trimester length course with students engaging in an activity where they can see and experience the unequal distribution of wealth in the United States and how it has changed since the 1970’s (Ten Chairs of Inequality, Kellogg). Through this activity, students explore their initial ideas as to why this inequality in wealth exists. I begin to introduce the idea of class society. I label the wealthiest ten percent of the US, the capitalist class, and the other ninety percent as the working class and I explain that the working class labor for the capitalist class producing goods and services whose full value is not returned to the working class, but is accumulated in the hands of the capitalist class. I suggest this is a key idea to understand current and historical events because the core cause of many of the most significant events are rooted in the struggle over the value created during the process of production. To provide a link to the lesson about wealth inequality and to evaluate the current historical period, students analyze the social relations of masters/slaves, kings/serfs and capitalists/workers identifying their similarities and differences. This leads into the second theme, a primary theme indeed, capitalism. Students learn that capitalists own the means of production which empowers them to exploit workers to expand the value going to their own class and that because of competition, the expansion of value is necessary and drives capitalists to develop new means or methods of production and/or force workers to accept lower wages, benefits, etc. The capitalists’ need for the constant expansion of surplus value is

primarily satisfied through intensified exploitation of the working class. The working class may recognize common cause and unite as result of this exploitation posing a potential problem for the capitalist class. As a result, capitalists create/reinforce divisions within the working class. One division that has weakened the working class in their struggle against capitalists is racism, the third theme of the unit. Students, through current and historical examples, learn that capitalist benefit when, using race, workers rather than blame the boss, they blame each other for their living and working conditions. The essential idea is that the ruling class benefits significantly through the divide and conquer strategy of racism. Globalization, the fourth theme in the unit, is taught as one process to satisfy the capitalists' need for cheap raw materials, cheap labor, places for investment, and markets. In addition, the lessons show kids ways corporations use governments to create and enforce a global structure that enriches owners of corporations at the expense of local communities. The last theme in this unit is imperialism using the war in Iraq as an example. Admittedly, the context of the five themes is how social relations are based upon the need of the capitalists to exploit labor rather than being based upon freedom, equality, and democracy.

There are risks to “being political” in the classroom. I would advise teachers to earn the trust and support of the community before being too outspoken. I have been teaching for over fifteen years within the district where I currently teach. Students have come to appreciate my “voice” in the classroom. They communicate this to their parents and sometimes, though, parents have raised questions and objections to the content of the classroom. I have never taken their concerns lightly. From my experience, parents are often afraid their children are being indoctrinated because they are being taught a “one-sided” curriculum. (Interestingly, though, these parents do not complain about other teachers who teach only the textbook point of view.) I tell parents that I struggle very hard to create space in the classroom for discussion and a variety of perspectives, and they are usually satisfied.

However, there have been times when parents take their complaints to higher authorities (Dueweke, 2004; Wowk, 2004). For example, during the 2004 election, when I used a satirical dialogue titled *Daddy Why Did We Have To Invade Iraq* (Bunker, 2003), a parent disagreed with the content of this dialogue and broadened his complaint to the entire first unit summarized earlier. His initial claim was that the author of the dialogue had a website that if kids went to it, they might see or read things which were inappropriate for their age. I did not know the website existed because the piece was popular enough to have appeared on at least thirty different websites and was sent to me at as an attachment via a list serve. In addition, the parent was upset with a set of questions that had students analyze the social relations of masters and slaves. His complaint was that I was doing this in the context of teaching about capitalism and that I was trying to get students to compare the social relations of capitalism with slavery. He was correct. Although, I immediately scheduled a conference between the parent, my immediate supervisor, and myself, the parent was not immediately satisfied and appealed to the district Board of Education. Prior to the Board of Education meeting, someone informed the local media of the situation. The event appeared on local news broadcast, and in both a metro-wide newspaper and a local tabloid. Despite having a discipline letter in my personnel file for one year for allegedly “not being balanced in my teaching,” the administration was “supportive.” The building principal advised staff members to support me and the Board of Education president said that although at times I may be outspoken, I was still a good teacher.

Obviously, exercising academic freedom has its risks. It has been asked of me in the past, how did you get the power to teach these ideas in the classroom and still keep your job. Here is my response to that question.

First, I think it is necessary to take the time to get to know your kids, school, community, its history and how it fits within the larger context, paying attention to everything, and being involved.

Secondly, I think that to have the courage and power to take these risks, it is important that we have friends who will show up to support us in time of need, and we need to support others when their academic freedom is challenged, too. For me, it has been The Rouge Forum. The sense of community decreased the amount of fear associated with challenging power.

Thirdly, the premise of curriculum choices I make have the goal of creating a more egalitarian society. Students see this. They may not agree with it, but they see it. However, a curriculum organized around the idea of creating a more egalitarian society is meaningless if the social relations in the classroom are authoritarian. Therefore, I think it imperative to create and encourage student voices in the classroom. In my classroom, students are strongly encouraged to think for themselves, to question the ideas being presented, to realize that all teachers choose the materials they teach, even in the case when teachers are teaching what they are told to teach. In addition, if you allow students to have a voice in your classroom, they are more likely to defend your voice in the classroom when it is being seriously challenged. In the situation I described above, I had current students come to my support at the Board of Education meetings. When past students, even some who had graduated, heard or read about the situation, they came to visit me or actually looked me up and called my home asking if they could do anything to help. It was not just the students who agreed with the goals of the curriculum that came to me to provide me support, but those who regularly questioned the interpretations of history being offered to them in my class. I think that support is result of the non-hierarchical social relations I create in the classroom.

Fourthly, I think that dialogue with concerned parents plays a critical role. The particular incident described above is the most dramatic action taken by parents against the content and ideas being taught and discussed in my classroom. Each year one or two concerned parents contact the principal and/or the Board of Education regarding my pedagogy. I respect the rights of parents to be involved in their child's education and I am more than willing to listen to their concerns. In addition to listening to their concerns, I explain the pedagogical process in my classroom. Typically, after a conference with a parent, the parent leaves satisfied that their child is not being indoctrinated but rather is being exposed to multiple interpretations of historical and current events. Most concerned parents recognize the potential benefits that such experiences bring to their child.

Fifthly, the fact that I teach in a historically working class community, one that is increasingly impoverished, makes what I teach more acceptable. Frequently, it helps them to understand their own current and historical roots.

Lastly, I have decided that the cause is right. This helps to overcome the fear of challenging the powerful and the drive to protect and extend my freedom in the classroom.

Now, back to my daughter's classroom. Because my wife and I were not satisfied with the methods and content of my daughter's teacher, we requested a meeting with the building principal to find out if we can pick next years teacher so that we have a teacher that more closely matches our philosophy. She gave us a form to complete that would have allowed us to write a few sentences for three different questions about our daughter's social, academic and emotional needs. Of course, people have written volumes on this topic, we managed to create a bulleted list. We think that Grace's social, academic and emotional needs would be best met in:

- A classroom where the child does not just get to choose between a, b or c but has some say over what a, b and c will be.
- A classroom where content (social studies, science) is taught by integrating it with skill (reading, writing and math) instruction. In other words, skills are not more important than subject matter but are used in teaching subject matter. In addition, the subject matter is organized thematically and asks critical questions.

- In deciding what, why and how something is going to be learned, the teacher considers the student(s) first, and cares less about state standards.
- A classroom that avoids homework because the teacher assumes the child is engaging in other life enriching activities. In addition, the curriculum is relevant to understanding the world and the child naturally uses outside of school what she/he learns in school
- A classroom that develops an understanding of concepts through inductive reasoning more than deductive reasoning.
- A classroom that promotes creative, open-ended activities and avoids closed, fill-in-the-blank activities.
- A classroom where behaviorism is not the discipline model but mutual respect

If Grace has a teacher who did the above bulleted items, that would be better than one who did not. However, this form of education without the necessary problematizing of the social context of our times is a serious weakness. I think that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to exercise academic freedom especially teaching the ideas I explained earlier and those I expect from my daughter's teacher and school. I realize that the above goals can not be achieved without collective action against the pyramid of the capitalist system: A class struggle of dramatic proportions. We are a part of the class struggle and the time has come to push back the forces limiting our control over the process and products of our labor. To do this, we need to develop within ourselves the necessary knowledge to understanding the origins of exploitation and develop amongst ourselves the power to bring about the conditions where all people can develop their own powers, not just those that benefit the capitalist class. So, we have a lot to do and I encourage us to understand ourselves, our classrooms, our communities by understanding the context of the social relations of capitalism and integrate ourselves individually and collectively to push back those forces of domination and exploitation and exercise and defend our rights to create a more just, equal and democratic society.

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- Greg Queen is a high school history teacher at Fitzgerald High School in Warren, MI. He was the 2008 recipient of the Academic Freedom Award from the National Council of Social Studies.***

EDUCATION THROUGH THE CRACKS: ENGAGING IN DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVES TO MODERN SCHOOLING

Cory D. Maley

From where we stand, at the crossroads of our educational future, we face new directions that seem as likely to confound and paralyze us as to trigger a decisive play for that future; indeed it is the future of American society. It is a common enough fact that the modern school system was borne out of the need for passive labor and willing fodder that it barely necessitates repeating here. I bring it up, however, as a reminder of what the impetus for modern schooling is. I would be remiss to claim that it has not undergone significant modifications over the course of the last century, but it nevertheless remains an implement for shaping students as economic and political operators in order to perpetuate the dominant paradigm rather than as an instrument for expanding the minds of free people who in turn have the tools to shape the social order. As we stand here at the crossroads we have ourselves the opportunity to ask: is our role in our democracy meant to be played out as active participants in the democratic processes of society, or as passive consumers, acting in response to the processes that shape us? Until now, I fear that we have inverted the order of education.

Although a relatively few Americans share the view that the American system is anti-democratic, it is not difficult to argue the case. As Carl Schmitt (1985) puts it, the American system is a demagogic plutocracy, a system largely controlled by the rich, which appeals to the basest natures of those who are not rich or powerful, so as to achieve the ends of those with power. It is not difficult to see why most Americans would find this nefarious description of their system difficult to accept; it plays them the fool. It is precisely because of this collective self-deception that we find ourselves on the fringes of society, both as academics and as people. The difficulty for us then is to appeal to the masses without turning to demagoguery. What hypocrites we should be if we were to do so in championing education that frees and enlightens.

At the moment many mechanisms of power and money are in disarray; people are uncertain about their futures, about the direction in which the country is going, and about the sacrosanct nature of the system as a whole. It is in these moments of uncertainty that people begin to look about, for ideas, for alternatives, for change. It is in such moments of introspection that visionaries must capture the hearts and minds of those who would look for hope. It is not enough to oppose the system, to point out its flaws; indeed this may do more harm than good. I, for one, am tired of hearing about what is wrong with the system, how it is broken and beyond repair. Without a positive alternative to turn towards, what credence am I to give a critic of the only game in town? It is only if the light has a bounty of hope to beckon them that people can be expected to venture out of the dark. That is why it is incumbent upon us as free thinkers, as visionaries, as those who will not accept the status quo, to offer up visions of what our society should be like, and not satisfy ourselves with our criticisms and opposition to the present order of things. If one is to accept the dialectical nature of progress, we must address a confusion that exists in our approach to it. To the thesis comes an antithesis which produces a synthesis; but an antithesis is not an a-thesis. There can be no synthesis of ideas if our proposition is set only in opposition and not as an alternative to the existing paradigm.

Nor, as Paul Goodman put it, can “[a] free society ... be the substitution of a ‘new order’ for the old order” (in Suissa, 2006, p.55). It was this insistence by Marxists that led Bakunin to believe, correctly as it turned out, that their philosophical approach would lead to a new ruling class which “would exploit and bleed the people under the pretense of the common welfare, or in order to preserve the new state” (Bakunin, 1947). There is the sentiment among a number of radicals that Bakunin’s prognostications were irrelevant, and that one must take sides whatever the consequences may be. If one is to be on the side of a humanity that is free, how can one be on the side of an ideological system that is busily trying to take control of the direction in which it should be shepherded? In our approach as educators, it would

seem that it should be as repugnant an aim to impose upon free peoples any ideology, no less our own than those which we oppose. If what we truly aim to produce in our society are free thinkers, people who are free to determine their own direction and contribution to a society wherein each person receives what they need and gives what they can, then we are better off to focus on the smallest of scales. Kropotkin (1902) advises that we begin by challenging the dominant values and to encourage a general sentiment of mutual-aid, cooperation, and a spirit of self government. These are not values that can be legislated or imposed; rather, they must be developed person to person, by the power of our example and the strength of our vision. People cannot, as Rousseau (1968) argued, be forced to be free. They must of their own volition come to see the light, blinding though it may be at first, with little more than the encouragement that the vision is worth the temporary personal discomfort.

What is more, our work should not be aligned in such a way that it aims to destroy the state. “The state,” writes Gustav Landauer, “is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behavior; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving different” (in Suissa, 2006). Indeed, I suspect that violent opposition to the state serves to justify its existence as much as it may limit its reach, and is thus an ineffective means of change at best, and at worst a progenitor of the power it opposes. I offer, instead, an idea put forth by anthropologist David Graeber. I had a brief correspondence with him following his dismissal from Yale, when he described to me the modes of democracy in terms of his studies as ones that fill the spaces in between, in the voids of power wherein people may work together for a common vision of the common good as they see it without interference. In this conceptualization of space and power, which has since been published, I see great potential for change (Graeber, 2007). So much more powerful is the water between the cracks when comes the frost. It is as Goodman illustrates, “the extension of spheres of free action until they make up most of social life” that will provide the most solid foundations for a vision of humanity that can endure beyond the charismatic energies of social visionaries, whose personal manna all too often becomes the sole life force of their creations (in Suissa, 2006).

A Call to Action

If we are to offer a positive vision of what education might become, we must first envision the ideals of a democratic society we wish to live in, wherein people are free, expansive, prolific, and fulfilled. We mustn't shy away from the utopianism that colors this first step, because even though it may be that the vision is unrealistic, the grand idealism of the human mind has forever driven the wheels of change. Without an end in mind it simply is not possible to take the steps necessary to get there. Instead we find ourselves retracing the footsteps that have already been trod, wondering why we've made no progress. Let our vision, indeed visions, of what a truly democratic society looks like guide us toward a model of education that frees rather than constrains and expands rather than limits the boundaries of our children's lives and minds. We must ask ourselves and challenge each other to question how we educate free people. How do we extract ourselves from the confines of bureaucratic education to serve the needs of each individual and still maintain the rigor and integrity of systematic education?

One could argue that the premise of this question is laughable on the face of it; the argument is that the current system lacks in both rigor and integrity. But for argument's sake, let us presume that factory education does present us with a certain degree of both. The mainstream view in this country is that it does, or at least did, and that the structure of education cum schooling is sound, and that its failings come from various different directions – parents, teachers, students, funding, and so forth. The challenge then is not to show that schooling is not working, as that much is obvious. But, it is to demonstrate that alternative models of education, not schooling as we have come to know it, can educate individuals with a rigor and integrity that is acceptable to the general populace. Herein lies one fundamental obstacle in our path.

This, however, is a genuine and important impediment to overcome. For as we approach the creation of a positive new direction for education, the people can be won over in time as we begin to demonstrate that models of freedom-based pedagogy helps young people develop into vibrant, motivated, and confident adults of their own designs. It is by no means a quick solution, nor an overnight undoing of the factory system of schooling, but it is nevertheless the means by which change is most certain to come. The people in this country must, however, be exposed to the fact that these alternatives exist and are not simply education for hippies, but are for free thinkers, for free people.

At the crossroads of the twenty-first century we are fortunate to be in the midst of a period of change in education. The charter school movement is one that promises to be one of great importance, if indirectly. It seems to me that the charter school is functionally little different than the larger schools they are breaking from as they replicate the same dynamics, albeit with more support, as traditional models of schooling. What charter schools have functioned to do is to draw attention to the existence of alternatives to traditional schooling. As charter schools become more prominent in the place of traditional schools, we must support structures and methodologies that free children. As they begin to crop up in our own towns, it is important that we challenge them to approach education differently in mode, not simply in scale. What's more is it allows for greater range of movement for the establishment of educational institutions that not only promote, but practice freedom-based pedagogy.

It is, thus, necessary that we more clearly investigate and advocate for free-schooling models of education which have demonstrated their success both in early childhood, such as Reggio Emilia, and throughout the educational career of our youth such as the Sudbury Valley Schools and the Albany Free School in the United States and the Summerhill School in the U.K. (Miller, 2002). Alternatives are not, of course, limited to these examples [nor should they be seen as panaceas,] but they provide a good starting point for us to pursue free and democratic education.

At the same time, while we seek to institute models of democratic schools, I propose that we also begin to decentralize education to foster a shifting away from factory education toward mutual education, which I envision as a freely chosen relationship between learners and those who have the knowledge and wisdom they seek to engage with one another in an equal relationship for the betterment of themselves and society. While it would be foolish to say that anyone can teach, that does not imply that they should not, with some guidance, do so. There is a great deal to be learned in each community from professional farmers, lawyers, clerks, physicists, nurses, firefighters, and the myriad other professions that make up our community. In many ways, what I envision is not new, but an extension of the sort of collective education utilized by many homeschooling networks, what Bill Ellis (1998) describes as Cooperative Community Life-Long Learning Centers.

If each person who had a stake in the community played a role in the education of our youth, how much more rich would education be? While this notion may be dismissed as Pollyannaish, I would submit, that it is also very practicable if one begins to look at the role of the professional educator as one who connects students with the resources available to them as advocated by Stephen Harrison (2002). I suspect that many, though certainly not all, members of the professional community would benefit a great deal from the experience of sharing in the education of their community's youth. Indeed, it is a mutual benefit. Perhaps this program of mutual education begins as community outreach, bringing people who have a love of their particular field of study who wish to share it publicly in libraries, community centers, pubs, and coffee shops. In time, however, I see that it can grow into a vast network of people sharing their knowledge, learning from each other, and ultimately liberating education from the confines of schooling.

In whichever direction we take this, we must choose it consciously, deliberately, and presently. We must be careful not to prescribe an end, as I do not trust our abilities as prognosticators so much as I do as educators. Let our positive vision drive us instead upon a course toward a freer, more democratic society

where all people are given the tools and the space to become the people they wish to be, rather than as society sees fit. As more students are able to do so, more will be freed from the confines of a system many of us see as confining, both politically and economically. Slow though this process may be, as people become increasingly conscious of the availability of a different mode of education, a successful set of alternatives to the drudgery that many students feel is part and parcel with the contemporary system of public education, more will chose freedom. It is our part to ensure that they have this choice to make.

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Cory Maley is a doctoral student at The University of Connecticut.

FOSTERING RACISM: FAILURE TO EMBRACE DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

Travis J. Barrett

Despite the good intentions of teachers, administrators, employees of aid organizations, and volunteers, refugees being resettled in an urban Northwest Rocky Mountain region community are confronted with institutionalized and overt racism by many of the aforementioned individuals. The racism that they encounter within their schools, work places, communities, and from the very agencies that are there to help them forces refugees to remain isolated in their respective cultural groups. The refugees' strong desire to learn English and United States culture, their desire to participate and to succeed in our society, compels them to learn and work despite the many challenges that they face. However, the overwhelming isolation that they struggle with causes them to look outside of our monolithic, ethnocentric community for teachers, role models, and a sense of community in alternative avenues.

For adolescent refugee students, they often find their teachers, role models, and their sense of community in the media and pop-culture. Once these students have identified their teachers and role models, and the community that they belong to, they begin to develop their new "Americanized" identities. Problematically, many of the refugees' ethnic and cultural groups are portrayed very negatively in the media and in pop-culture. The "ghettoization" of refugee populations on the behalf of the schools, the community, and the aid organizations, coupled with the refugees' media and pop-culture based teachers, role-models, and community foster the creation of seriously marginalized groups of people and gang-culture in schools.

The overwhelmingly ignorant and ethnocentric community is just as susceptible to the media and pop-culture as the refugees are. Due to a severe lack of diversity in the area, many people in the community have never had any exposure to people of diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, etc. backgrounds. Therefore, these community members also learn about people different from themselves by media portrayals and pop-culture images of who black, brown, Asian, etc. people are. The unfortunate, if not intentional, creation of marginalized groups of people and gang culture reinforces much of the community's misconceptions of diverse populations; thus, creating a vicious cycle in which refugees become marginalized minority groups who, in turn, are viewed as an inconvenient problem to be dealt with by the larger community, schools, and aid organizations.

Although I have made sweeping generalizations about many individuals, groups, and institutions, it is my intention to demonstrate the validity of my claims with observations I have made in the past 18 months working with refugee students. From here on out, my argument will rely heavily on experiences I have had working with adolescent refugees (primarily Burundian boys) resettled in an urban, Northwest Rocky Mountain community, from refugee camps in Tanzania. However, I am in no way suggesting that my argument does not apply to other ethnic groups of refugees or voluntary immigrants as well.

Racism

In her book "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria" Beverly Tatum eloquently describes the balance of power and institutionalized racism that subjugate minority groups everywhere. I have witnessed this institutionalized racism and abuse of power in the schools, the community, and the aid organizations. As I previously mentioned, the refugee students fall victim to racism despite the good intentions of the teachers, administrators, employees of aid organizations, and volunteers. I don't believe there is a single individual belonging to the aforementioned groups that would admit to being a racist. Rather, I believe that most of these people would adamantly defend their "non-racism." Yet unknowingly, or ignorantly, many of them are operating within an organization that exercises racist practices. They may not be barging ahead on the racist "moving walkway at the airport" that Tatum

describes, but they have not gotten off and they certainly haven't begun to run twice as hard in the opposite direction (p.11, 2003). This, inherently, affects all minority students.

In the schools in this community I have witnessed specific practices that are racist. The very inception of a Language Academy, which is a separate school reserved for English language learner (ELL) students, is segregation in practice. It is reminiscent of special education in the 60s, when special education students were forced to attend separate schools from the mainstream students. Parents of special education students who witnessed the inequality between mainstream schools and special education schools stood up for the rights of their children and used their political voice to bring an end to the segregation of special education students and mainstream students. Refugee and immigrant parents, on the other hand, often lack the political voice, knowledge of their children's rights, or the language to defend their children.

Segregation, in the sense of separate but equal, does not even fully encompass what is happening in this District. The Language Academy, the building itself, which serves students in grades 7-12, was formerly an elementary school. A site visit to the Academy is testimony to the separate, and unequal education that refugee and immigrant ELL students deal with. The playground equipment is designed for elementary students. Also lacking at the Academy are athletics and extra-curricular activities. In most secondary schools when the bell rings at the end of the day you would witness students hustling to football, baseball, or cheerleading practice. Maybe you would see the environmental club, yearbook staff, 4-H, FFA, BPA, or the photography club meeting with their advisors. Not at the Academy. Students are briskly swept out of the building and hurried to their buses by teachers and security personnel and sent home. There are no student announcements, no band, and no elective courses. During a recent visit with a Language Academy student I was asked, "how we gonna play basketball in winter" because the gymnasium is also the lunchroom—not to mention that the basketball hoops outside are far too low for children their age.

Several teachers and a principal in the district that I spoke with have attributed the creation of the Language Academy to the district's desire to save money. Their idea is that by concentrating ELL resources in one building, the district is saving money. I do believe that there is some truth in this "financial" explanation. Nevertheless, the "financial" explanation is not justifiable. Segregating ELL students to save money is at best unethical, and without doubt immoral. However, I believe that racism, once again, is the real culprit. The same teachers and principal I just mentioned, along with many other teachers, students in teacher training programs, class-mates, and professors have relayed stories of teachers in the district voicing frustration and fear to me when it comes to ELL students in their classrooms. Many fear not being able to effectively and successfully meet the needs of ELL students, while others are simply frustrated with the inconvenience of having to modify their curriculum and instruction to meet their students' needs. In either case, the fear or unwillingness on the behalf of teachers to create multi-cultural spaces in their classrooms is racist. Decisions at the district level about ELL students and the unwillingness on behalf of the teachers have let teachers and administrators "off the hook." The Language Academy has allowed teachers to continue teaching in a way that best serves students of the dominant majority, while ELL students fall to the way side.

Surprisingly, even the non-profit aid organizations that service refugee populations have institutionalized racist practices. While the School District has ghettoized the refugee students' schools, the aid organizations have actually placed the refugees in ghettos. Dispersed in pockets throughout the community you will find enclaves of refugee families living in rundown apartment buildings. Not once have I witnessed a refugee family living in my upper-middle class neighborhood, nor have I seen refugee families living in other nicer neighborhoods in the community. Instead, you will find the enclaves of refugee families living in low income areas that feed into lower performing schools. The justification for placing the refugee families in these areas is financial; by placing refugee families in cheaper housing the aid organizations can stretch their federal monies farther. Also, the aid organizations don't want to place

refugee families in homes that they cannot afford after their federal assistance has run out. An additional justification for placing refugee families is the desire to provide them with a sense of community. However, as was pointed out to me by a colleague, there are apartments in my own neighborhood that rent as cheaply as many of the apartments where refugees are placed.

Another explanation that has been offered to me is that many apartment management companies have developed criteria that are unrealistic for refugee families to meet. They have managed to do this in a way that does not violate the fair housing act. This is still overt racism on behalf of individuals in the community.

Additionally, I have witnessed unmistakable racism directed towards refugee youth in my experiences working with them. In September 2008, I took three Burundi refugee boys (aged 7, 13, and 14 years) to an art museum to see a new exhibit. A Latina classmate of mine, and a young Latina student who was visiting our university, joined us. In the time that we were there we were followed incessantly by three different security guards, all of whom demanded that the kids not touch any of the exhibits, even though not one of them had given the guards any reason to believe that they would touch the exhibits. There were many children in the museum that day—admission was free. However, the guards paid no mind to the other white children. We have had similar experiences in grocery stores, parks, and restaurants.

Volunteers working with refugee populations often victimize the very individuals they help through racist and ethnocentric practices. An example of this is the well-meaning religious woman who volunteers her time to take a recently arrived refugee family to church with her. She thinks that by giving the poor refugees Christianity (or whatever faith the proselytizer belongs to) that she is helping them. Ignorantly, she ignores the fact that these families have beliefs and faiths of their own. She assumes that whatever beliefs the refugees have are irrelevant because it is her faith that will save them. All of the African refugee families that I have personally worked with are now attending a church that they did not belong to prior to coming to the United States. Many of these families were not even Christian; rather they were animists or Muslims.

Isolation & Identity

The constant barrage of racist sentiment and practices that the refugees endure from individuals, the schools, aid organizations, and the community, coupled with their physical location in cultural enclaves, isolates them and sends them the message that they are not *really* a part of our community. They are told that they don't speak correctly, dress correctly, worship the correct god, or behave correctly. It is only after they have succumbed to the overwhelming hegemonic forces that they may be considered for membership in our community. In order to do this they must adopt our language, culture, customs, morals, beliefs, and values.

Refugees are well aware that in the United States, and in this community, they will be more successful and have more opportunities if they learn English and learn how to operate in our society. For many refugees the language, knowledge, and skills that they possess are not conducive to participating, learning, or working in our society, a society that has "white," "middle-class," "protestant" values.

For refugee adolescents, like the Burundi I work with, *Identity development* becomes a central focus. The adolescents, isolated from the rest of the community, look for connections, for community, for teachers, and for role models in alternative settings. What I have witnessed in the Burundi youth is that they first begin to identify with their "blackness". Awad Ibrahim (1999) states that, "North American Blackness is governed by how it is negatively located in a race-conscious society" (p. 349). The students have realized how being Black has isolated them from the rest of the community. Testament to this statement is a comment a 14 year-old Burundi refugee, made to me several months ago. The fall semester had just started and the Language Academy was opening in its own (separate) building for the first time. Having

seen the over-crowded classrooms refugee students were stuffed into the year before I expected this student would be happy with the new school. So, I asked, "How's the new school? How do you like it?" I was surprised to hear him immediately respond negatively to my questions. So I asked why he didn't like the new school and he answered, "You have to be Black to go to Language Academy. You can only go there if you're Black." So, African refugee students know that they are isolated because they are Black, but they don't know how to be "Black" in the United States. Unfortunately, due to the community's lack of diversity, the Burundi students I work with don't even have African American role models to look to in the community.

So, where are these African refugee students learning to be Black? When they arrived, they were the most timid, kind students with whom I have ever worked. They were not in the least bit concerned about stylish clothing or popular fads. They were happy to wear whatever clothes they were given. They loved to listen to African music and loved playing soccer. It wasn't until they began going to school that their style and attitudes began to change. When they started school they went to a mainstream Jr. High that had an ELL program. The ELL students had separate classrooms and had little more interaction with mainstream students than passing them in the hallways. Yet, the refugee students I work with didn't learn to be and act like the mainstream kids, this obviously due to the isolation they felt within the school itself. They still learned to be Black even though the vast majority of students at the Jr. High were white. The kids learned to be Black via the media and pop-culture.

In March of 2008 a fellow volunteer of the refugee aid organization I volunteer for called me and asked me to come to the family's home that she worked with. She asked me to come to fix a smoke detector that she could not reach. When I arrived I found the smoke detector in an upstairs bedroom. The family was downstairs watching television and had the volume very high to drown out the high pitch squeal of the smoke detector. After fixing the smoke detector I found out that it had been going off for three consecutive days. I am not surprised that no one in the family knew how to fix it. What surprised me is that the refugee boy that lives there was showing the students I was working with Soulja Boy videos on YouTube. No one in the family could figure out how to fix the smoke detector, but this boy knew how to navigate the Internet and look up rap videos. The particular video the boys were watching was a video teaching how to do the dance to Soulja Boy's song *Crank Dat*.

Since that time I have paid careful attention to what media the refugee students are exposed to and what they pay attention to. Images of African American males portrayed as gangsters, players, and pimps, and African American women portrayed as objectified sexual objects saturates the music, television, and other media the African refugee students have access to. "Identity formation is increasingly mediated by technological media" (Ibrahim, p.349, 1999). They have learned through the media that successful African Americans are aggressive, chauvinist, associate with gang and drug culture, wear baggy clothes and elaborate jewelry, and play basketball. "Continental African youths find themselves in a racially conscious society that, wittingly or unwittingly and through fused social mechanisms such as racism and representations, asks them to racially fit somewhere. To be black in a racially conscious society, like the Euro-Canadian and U.S. societies, means that one is expected to be Black, act Black, and so be the marginalized other" (Hall, 1991; Hooks, 1992; Ibrahim, 1999). The kids I work with are increasingly aggressive. They wear baggy clothing and "bling" jewelry. Their attitudes towards one another, teachers, parents, and others has become increasingly negative. Many of the boys have begun to associate with gangs, get into fights, and, at best, talk about drug use and drug dealing, at worst, they are using and selling drugs.

Community

As a lifelong resident of this community and state I am acutely aware of general beliefs and attitudes that much of the community hold with regard to peoples of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Until recently, due to the newly arriving refugees, the only substantial diversity was the Native American

population, which were and still are confined to reservations, and the Hispanic population, which primarily resided in rural areas as migrant farm workers.

Growing up in this area I learned about diverse peoples through the media and my communities' publicly held attitudes and beliefs. Suffice it to say that despite being taught the Golden Rule at school and in my home, my social learning taught me that minorities and diverse groups of people were problematic, not equal, and that we would be better off without them in our communities.

The only actual exposure I had to a diverse ethnic group, as a child, was with migrant Mexican kids in my school. Although they were good kids and I liked them, I believed that they were "the good Mexicans" that I occasionally heard people talking about, not the typical Mexican. So even though right in front of me I had Mexican friends who I knew did not fit the negative stereotype cast upon them by my community, I still believed the stereotype.

I learned about all other diverse groups through the media, pop-culture, and the attitudes and opinions of the people in my community. Shows like *Cops* taught me that Mexican and African American males were criminals. MTV taught me the same things that it has taught the refugee boys. My community reinforced these teachings through long held racist beliefs, and attitudes. Reciprocally, the media's portrayal of diverse peoples reinforced my ignorant community's racist attitudes and beliefs.

The one-two punch by negative media portrayals of diverse peoples and the racist indoctrination delivered by beliefs and attitudes held by my community left my peers and me with little (if any) opportunity to learn about and appreciate cultural, ethnic, and religious differences. The vast majority of my schoolmates, till this day, retain much of the racist indoctrination we received while growing up. I was fortunate enough to make a series of decisions that took me away from my home and exposed me to true diversity, providing me with the opportunity to transgress my ethnocentric upbringing. Tragically, I feel that if weren't for the opportunities that I had, I may have remained indoctrinated with racist beliefs and attitudes as well.

Conclusion

The refugee populations that are being relocated to this urban Northwest Rocky Mountain region are entering a community with longstanding racist practices, attitudes, and beliefs. The failure on the part of the schools and the community to embrace and appreciate refugee populations has isolated them and made them resort to negative media and pop-culture to guide them in creating new identities. The ghettoized communities and gang-culture that result from the community and schools' actions reinforces the misconceptions about diverse peoples and racist attitudes and beliefs held by the majority of the community. Together, this creates a viscous a cycle of reinforcing racist beliefs and attitudes held by the community and creating gang-culture within refugees' educational settings and "ethnic ghettos" in the community.

Immediate intervention is needed to avoid this situation. The schools need to use the infrastructure they already have to involve the community in welcoming, embracing, and easing the integration of refugee families and students into our community and schools. Administrators and teachers need to become agents of multiculturalism and inclusion instead of remaining ethnocentric and unyielding to change. Only through addressing institutionalized racism and radically changing our schools and the community's beliefs and attitudes regarding diverse peoples will we create a multicultural community where all people, regardless of their ethnicity, culture, and religion are welcomed, embraced, and appreciated.

I would like to close with a quote addressing oppression and the oppressed from Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. "This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the

oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (p. 44). As much as refugee families and students are victims “of an unjust order”, people like myself have been engendered with violence. “Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. Those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as they were” (Freire, p.61, 1970).

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Travis Barrett is a doctoral student at Boise State University.

WHY HAVE SCHOOL? AN EXERCISE

Rich Gibson

My method of investigation involves three interlocked stages described originally by Karl Kosik:

1. Appropriating the material in detail, mastering it to the last historically accessible detail;
2. Analyzing the different forms of development;
3. Tracing out their internal connections, i.e., determining the unity of different forms in the development of the detail. (Dialectics of the Concrete, p 15).

However, “the last historically accessible detail,” is yet to be written about schools. It follows that my interrogation is somewhat more than an initial reconnaissance but hardly the highest form of human political/historical endeavor.

This exercise begins with a series of questions which can be presented to nearly any education-based group, from the upper-elementary grades to Ph.D. programs. The questions are questions that should be asked in any class, but rarely are. The exercise can usually be worked in a 90 minute period, though around 150 minutes is ideal.

I have a direction that I want the group to take, but every group is different and the initial answers usually need examination from one angle or another. The inner goal is to apply the viewpoint of dialectical materialism to school, to show people how, in ways drawn from their own experiences, they too can do analysis of nearly any situation, comprehend and seek to change the world.

There are advantages to doing this exercise early in a semester. Beginning a class with these questions will tell you a lot about the students, their own experiences, their standpoints. It sets up a point of reference that can be returned to throughout coming classes.

Since each group is different, I will make here only a brief attempt to predict the answers, but offer my own. I don't expect anyone to take on my answers, but I do think the questions are good ones:

***Why Have School?**

***What are the Key Things Happening in Schools Today?**

***What are the Key Things Happening in Society?**

***From This Analysis, What Shall We Do and Think?**

Let us begin with the first question: **Why Have School?**

Depending on your audience, you will get answers ranging from, “to help create citizens in a democracy,” to “teaching people the 3 R's,” to “reproducing the system of capital as it is.”

A presenter can work these answers in any number of ways, by taking them one at a time and interrogating each as you go, or by amassing a list of answers, then making a “counter-list.”

Since school is a profoundly contradictory place, where social control meets profiteering inside a history that comes right out of the Church, it is not hard to find contradictions to replies in hopes of offering people more than a one-sided take on education.

For example, in response to the somewhat jaded, “reproducing the system of capital as it is,” a presenter might respond with, “doesn't teaching people to read have an aspect of liberation?”

It does, of course, but then one must find the dominant side of that contradiction, perhaps in the fact that many slaves were taught how to read in order to keep track of and oppress other slaves. Or, among the most literate societies in the world in the mid-30s were Germany and Japan. Fascism became very popular in both places, fast. Reading may make us more powerful (societies that cannot read cannot produce interchangeable parts for weapons), but there is no direct line from reading to wisdom. Still, literacy is preferable to illiteracy. But then, the police read. A full examination of the potentially liberating nature of literacy would have to include not only what is read, but the methods of teaching reading—as well as stated and hidden purposes.

From another angle, the answer “to produce citizens in a democracy,” a presenter might challenge the very notion of democracy, or citizenship. Where is the democracy in school? What are its limits? How do societies produce democratic citizens who never operated in a democratic arena? What is the relationship of capitalism to democracy? When they meet, which wins, like at work—the most important place of most people’s lives?

To me, the answers to “Why Have School?” lies in this:

Schools are huge multi-billion dollar markets where profit and loss always influences almost everything. Consider the busses, the architects, textbook sales, consultants, the developers for the buildings, the upkeep, the grounds, the sports teams, salaries, etc. Cost is always an issue in school. This is, after all, capitalism (a maneuver drawn from dialectical materialism, abstracting, looking to history—the Church—and locating school in its historical place: *capitalist* schooling).

This answer can lead to other good interrogations like: Is there a single public school system in the US (or wherever)? Actually, there is not. There are five or six carefully segregated school systems, based mostly on class and race. The capitalist market necessarily creates inequality, not only in the pocket, but in the mind.

There is a pre-prison school system in Detroit or Compton, a pre-Walmart system in National City, a pre-craft worker system in City Heights, a pre-teacher or social worker system in Del Cero, a pre-med or pre-law system in Lajolla and Birmingham, and a completely private school system where rich people send their kids, like George W. Bush or Mitt Romney.

Rich schools teach different realities using different methods from poor schools. In rich schools the outlook is: “This globe is ours; let us see how we can make it act.” In the poorest schools, the outlook is, “Tell me what to do and I will do it.”

“Public schools” are, in fact, funded by an unjust tax system that forces the working classes to pay for their own mis-education. These are not just schools but, again, capitalist schools. There is little democratic about them.

It is usually easy to track the role of the market in schools by checking the campaign contributors to school board members. The sources of their power are the Men, and Women Behind the Screen, who have very special interests in determining how schools function.

There is, in schools unlike most factories, a tension between elites’ desire for social control and profitability. This can be seen in the contradictions within elite groups about the privatization of schools. Old guards like the Rockefeller Foundation oppose privatization, perhaps because they rightly see they can exert a great deal of control over tax funded schools, while new entrepreneurs like Bill Gates and Eli Broad pour millions into privatization schemes. Who will win? I bet on the old guard.

In some trendy left education circles it is commonplace to hear the bromide, “schools are contested terrain.” Nonsense. That is tantamount to claiming that the Ford Rouge Plant is contested terrain. It’s not. It’s Ford’s until the workers take it. It becomes contested in the midst of a real battle for the processes and products of work: control of the work place. Such fights are disappointingly uncommon in schools where, for at least two decades, the work force has overwhelmingly been guided by at least four things: Opportunism, Racism, Sheer ignorance, and Cowardice. Schools are, again, capitalist schools until some opposing contest actually breaks out on a broad basis.

Some more answers to why have school:

Skill and Ideological Training

Most groups will come up with a lot of this and miss the role of the market entirely. Under Skill Training we might list, of course, “the three r’s,” along with music, art, athletics, theater, science, etc. That list comes fast and easy.

But Ideological Training is another thing. Most people treat the word “ideology, in ways that most philosophers do not, i.e., as just a system of ideas as opposed to a system of ideas that is designed to deceive. So, a presenter may need to work out with the group what it is they mean by ideology. In any event, Ideological Training would include nationalism (the daily salute to the flag, school spirit, etc.) as well as the training in viewpoints established by teaching distinct curricular substance in the segregated schools, using different methods. Beyond nationalism, one clear purpose of most schooling is to make the system of capital natural, almost invisible, and to present it as the highest, last, stage of human development. Further, students must become so stupefied that they see no real contradiction between nationalism and the other central tenet of capitalist thought: individualism.

Here too a presenter can note that it is illegal in US capitalist schools to teach the central issues of life: Labor (involving the communist movement), rational knowledge (opposing the many Imaginary Friends that people think are in charge), love (tied to pleasure, sensuality, aesthetics, as well as reproduction), and freedom (which does not exist in school life). Or a presenter might begin with, “What cannot be taught, by law, in schools?” Or, “What are the central issues of human life? What *must* people do to live?”

The upshot of capitalist schooling is that many students, surrounded by the unsystematic, incoherent, mystical world views of both the curricula and most teachers, come away learning not to like to learn. Curiosity, a birthright of all children, gets crushed. Parallel to that dubious success, children in exploited areas learn they cannot understand or alter the world. So, people in pacified areas become instruments of their own oppression.

Baby-Sitting, Warehousing kids

Even naive audiences usually get to this if the presenter is patient. Babysitting is a key role played by capitalist schools. One way to find out, “Why have school,” is to experiment, close them. In our case, teacher strikes serve as a good test subject. In school strikes (no sane union shuts down a football program), the first people to begin to complain are usually merchants around middle schools—who get looted. The second group is the parents of elementary students, quickly followed by their employers. (These realities can help demonstrate to elementary educators their potential power—along with setting up kids’ entire world views).

The baby-sitting role is, again, funded by an unjust tax system and serves as a giant boon to companies that refuse to provide day care for their employees—but are able to duck taxes as well.

Schools fashion Hope: real and false

Audiences rarely get to this. However, on one hand it is clear that societies where Hope is foreclosed foster the potential of mass uprisings: France in the summer of 1968 is a good example of what can happen; uprisings starting in school and quickly involving the working classes nearly overthrew the government. Real hope might be found in showing kids we can comprehend and change the world, collectively, and teaching them how. Ask, “Why are things as they are?” every day. Or, in demonstrating that we are responsible for our own histories, but not our birthrights. Must we be lambs among wolves? Does what we do matter? False hope might be the typical school hype: Anyone can make it, all you must do is work hard. Trumpery. Inheritance is, more than ever, the key to understanding that. To the contrarians: there is nothing unusual about elites picking off children of the poor, educating them, and turning them back on their birth-communities as a form of more gentle rule. Obama would be one example of such a success. Skanderberg, the Albanian rebel trained by the Turks, would be a failure.

Schools create the next generation of workers, warriors, or war supporters Automatons or rebels, or something in between, a process with some witting direction. Those workers need to be taught to accept hierarchy, to submit, to misread realities like class war and endorse nationalism (school spirit) or racism (segregated schooling products). They need to be unable to notice why things are as they are; why some live in abundance while others have no work—when there is plenty of work to do—why drudgery is so much part of most jobs. The core project here: obliterate the possibility of class consciousness.

Schools are key extensions of the capitalist democracy (a contradiction in which democracy is overwhelmed by capitalism)

The purpose of the capitalist state and its schools is to preserve and make appear normal the system of capital, what Istvan Meszaros calls “a giant sucking pump of surplus value.” The state and its schools are designed to make the maximization of profits an invisible force and to guarantee class rule by inculcating people with core capitalist values like, “Me first.” Schooling is not autonomous from capitalism, no more than democracy is. These are, at base, capitalist schools. Today, the capitalist agenda is a war agenda, a war of the rich on the poor taking many forms in every nation, accelerating.

Taken in sum, this is the terrific surplus value that teachers create (at issue is: for who?)--and why educators are paid fairly well as the last large group in the US that has health benefits(you might ask, “What value to school workers—a better term—create? How do we do it? (collectively) “How do we control what we create? (In solidarity—with direct action on the job). Who controls what we create now? Why do we not control the processes of our work (inside the market)? Why, when every nation needs more teachers, must we fight with each other for jobs? Why is the school worker force so segregated (90 percent white and growing more-so)?

What are the Key Things Happening in School Today?

It is remarkable that there is such quick agreement about this, from pre-service teachers to students, to profs and all in between.

Standardization

The regimentation of the curricula and teaching methods, what people come to know and how they come to know it via, for example, reading or history standards. How these standards came to be is a good question, and the presenter should know the answer. The core of standardization is described by F. W. Taylor in Principles of Scientific Management. His project can be simply described as replacing the mind of the worker with the mind of the boss (in this case the bosses’ textbooks and test-guides, both written with the interconnecting goals of profits and social control).

High Stakes Testing

Always racist, always anti-working class, measuring little but parental income, race, and subservience, behind a mask of science and equality. Those familiar with Marx's Labor Theory of Value will find a useful analogy. A pretense of equality is established. Every child arrives to take the same test and, presumably, if they work hard they will win. But what of the kid arriving hungry, or angry, or abused, in a room with no heat?

This is like the "fair day's work for a fair days' pay," myth of capitalism which throws the mass of people into ruthless competition for jobs, then never pays the full value of labor—thus the origins of profits. Each fashions an appearance of equality, and an essence of deepening inequality.

Militarization

Since the September 11, 2001, the military invaded schools with a vengeance. Their relentless recruiting is, not surprisingly, running along class lines, enforcing the economic draft, demonstrating that there is an inequitable schools-to-war pipeline.

Privatization

This is a distant fourth, for reasons described above, but the reality of the privatization of New Orleans, as elites moved fast to wipe out poverty by vanishing the poor, cannot be ignored.

Layoffs, wage and benefit cuts, cutbacks in libraries, books, supplies, etc.

Fear

Fear seems to be the core emotional value in schools today. After a long trip visiting schools in about one-half of California's counties, my colleague and friend Susan Harman (a former principal) and I concluded that fear overwhelms much of educational work. It travels down, from superintendents through principals through education workers to kids and parents. It has many secondary sources (secondary to profiteering and social control) like high stakes exams and constant surveillance. Fear also travels horizontally. It's produced by school workers who believe they have more to fear than they actually do. They give in with no struggle, even before demands are made. As they do, fear accelerates as all conclude that no one can win.

And what of the school unions that claim to protect educators rights from academic freedom to job security?

Let us make another tick-list, this time about the school unions:

No leader of any major union in the US believes that working people and employers have, in the main, contradictory interests, thus wiping out the main reason most people believe they join unions. The bosses (for that is what they are) of the two education unions (the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers—AFL-CIO, by far now the largest unions in the USA) openly believe in what former NEA president Bob Chase called "New Unionism," the unity of labor bosses, government, and corporations, "in the national interest." There is nothing new about company unionism, however, nor the corporate state.

Both unions are utterly corrupt

There has been a steady stream of AFT and NEA leaders to prison on charges ranging from child molestation to the more common embezzlement. Top NEA and AFT leaders will make nearly \$500,000 a year in 2009 and can live on their expense accounts. While nothing like the difference between finance capitalists and industrial workers, the union bosses enjoy extraordinary privileges while claiming to represent many people who have to live in trailers. The corruption runs deeper, though, as shown below.

The AFT is completely undemocratic

The NEA, not a part of the AFL-CIO, has a somewhat more democratic structure but no one with a grasp of the “rule of the people,” would confuse NEA with democracy.

The school unions draw on a member base that is about 90% white and reflect the racism that such a base inherently creates. Rather than fight to integrate the teaching force, the unions urge more and more “education” classes, adding on expenses for students, meaning those with the least get shaved out with razor sharp precision—by class and race.

The unions, like all US unions, do not unite people, but divide them along lines of job, race, years of tenure, staff and leaders from rank and file, that is, down to the narrowest interest—capital’s favorite question: What about me?

Unions mirror their industries. Thus, school unions create hierarchies (that reformers tend to mimic) which resemble the management structures of schools. These structures promote the quasi-religious view that someone else will solve key problems that must, in fact, be resolved by the solidarity and direct action of the rank and file—a group that would include parents and students but, since these are capital’s unions, those people do not pay dues and are excluded. The unions promote a vending machine ideology (“I paid my dues now do for me”) rather than solidarity and direct action, thus making the members reliant on people whose interests are not their own.

Union bosses recognize their opposing interests to the rank and file

They learn a variety of strategies to manipulate people and, “protect the contract.” These maneuvers, like grievance procedures, move workers away from the locus of their power, the work place, to geographically distant spaces where “neutral” arbitrators decide on vital issues. But the unions rarely file cases to arbitration and, nevertheless, lose about 2/3 of the cases they file. Union bosses also divert member action to the ballot box—any place away from the job site—where, in the words of one top NEA organizer, “if voting mattered, they wouldn’t let us do it.” But electoral work keeps member volunteers busy and it reinforces the false notions school workers have about professionalism (professionals set their own hours and wages, they determine the processes of work—teachers typically are called professionals by people asking the workers to buy textbooks for their kids), allowing educators to win hollow “respect,” the chance to dress up and rub elbows with Important People, away from school.

Since the mid-1970's, union bosses have supported every measure that elites used to regain control of schools which were, in many cases out of control. The NEA and AFT bosses today support curricular regimentation, high stakes racist exams, the militarization of schooling, merit pay, and charter schools (a key new source of dues income).

The AFT organized the decay and ruin of urban education in the US, while the mostly suburban NEA let urban schooling be devastated, failing to recognize the truth of the old union saw, “an injury to one only goes before an injury to all.” That both unions steeped themselves in volumes of forms of racism (racist exams, racist expulsions, racist segregation, etc) should not go unnoticed or excused.

These are the empire’s unions

Top leaders are fully aware that a significant portion of their sky-high pay is made possible by the empires adventures. NEA and AFT bosses work with a variety of international organizations on behalf of US imperialism. These adventures are frequently deadly as with the AFT’s unwavering support for Israeli Zionism, support for the recent oil wars, and, precisely to the point, work throughout the world with the National Endowment for Democracy, a Central Intelligence Agency front, in wrecking indigenous leftist worker movements. While the AFT has been the spearhead of US imperialism inside the wholly corrupt “labor movement,” NEA has also been deeply involved. There is a long history to this,

back to World War I and the AFL's support for that horrific war. The theory behind it: US workers will do better if foreign workers do worse.

The education unions serve to peddle the wage labor of education workers as a commodity to employers and to guarantee labor peace, as Los Angeles teacher Neil Chertcoff has repeatedly demonstrated. In this context, there is a direct trade off: no strikes or job actions in exchange for guaranteed dues income, the check-off. That is precisely the historical origin of the agency shop. It is also a big reason why union bosses obey court injunctions against job actions; threats to the union's bank account, that is, the union staff salaries.

School unions attack the working class as a whole

The most recent example (May 2009) of this was the support the California Teachers Association and the NEA gave to a series of ballot propositions that would have dramatically raised the taxes of poor and working people while leaving corporations and the rich off the hook, again. NEA and CTA combined spent more than \$12.2 million dollars on the campaigns, and lost overwhelmingly. CTA-NEA demonstrated to poor and working families that organized teachers are enemies—yet those same people are educators' most important allies.

Unlike the private sector where less than 10% of the people belong to unions, school workers are the most unionized people in the country. It follows that it is important for change agents to be where the people are. But one must keep one toe in and nine toes out of the unions. It is as important to build outside organizations, like the Rouge Forum, which actually unite people, urge job actions and freedom schooling, which seek to unite people rather than structurally divide them, and which can take a strategic and tactical plan into the unions to fight for justice.

Still, it is not hard to see why there is so much fear in schools. Although most education workers don't have the analysis of why there is no protection on the job, why the union is always telling people to vote but never organizes anything to prepare for job actions, they still recognize their own vulnerability. They know the union is an opposing force, not their friend.

What Are the Key Things Happening in Society?

Here a presenter may find some very interesting dialogue and dispute. Let us use a re-ordered list from a recent presentation, understanding that the audience was a group of skeptical profs and grad students:

- The Promise of Perpetual War is real.
- Rising inequality, CEO pay vs. mass layoffs of industrial workers.
- Economic crises like the national debt, inflation, mortgage and personal debt crises, booming gas, transportation and food costs.
- A decaying ability of families to hold together with people working more and more hours with less time for kids, divorce, etc.
- Deindustrialization. The dominance of finance capital.
- Rising irrationalism, i.e., fundamentalist churches or the national election when mysticism is a candidate requirement.
- Hyper-nationalism and racism as a backdrop for everything, including the election.
- Spectacles—Super bowls, World Series, or just drunk days like St Patrick's Day.
- A near zipped up relationship of corporations and government.
- Abolition of old labor and civil rights laws like habeas corpus and the construction of outlaw prisons like Guantanamo and secret prisons as well.
- Violence in entertainment like "Cops," or "True TV," or video games.
- Fascination with exploitative sex.

Taken together, these elements add up to a litany of the emergence of fascism.

That will do. Jean Anyon famously says, “Doing school reform without doing social and economic reform in communities is like washing the air on one side of a screen door; it just won’t work.”

Surely this statement nicely sums up a **clear relationship of school and society** that is routinely denied, both by the disingenuous powerful as well as too-kind people who work in schools.

The role of de-industrialization means that school workers are centripetally positioned in a powerful spot: the place where most people organize their daily lives. Schools do not just teach, but in many cases offer food, medical care, meeting places, etc. There are 49 million students in k12 schools now, all with parents, most with siblings. One-half of them are draft eligible in the next four years. Schools produce, presumably, ideas. Perhaps they could be ideas about new and better ways to live. In any case, school workers have incredible potential power. What we do counts more than ever. Since good teaching and organizing are very much alike, school worker potential power is redoubled.

Once people have worked through some of the daily realities of school and social life, it makes sense to ask them to place schooling in its context, to Abstract, or step back and see the big picture again. The big picture, I think, is that this is capitalism, these are capitalist schools, missions for the system of capital, but that education workers, who have more freedom than most workers, can choose whether or not they will be missionaries for the system of capital. Of course, they have to consider carefully how to teach against capital’s motive forces, fear and greed, by gaining the power to do so.

How do educators get the power to teach toward the truth, rather than toward capital’s cruel desires? Clearly, one answer is dedication to the kids, parents and community; teaching well every day. The unions must be overcome, in part by transcending the boundaries of unionism and, beyond that, by violating the norms that keep the union bosses in power. Storm the podiums, seize the union offices. Another is in solidarity across lines of class, race, gender, nation; building close personal ties—tight friendships. And another is direct action on the job, the real battle for control of the work place linked to corresponding freedom schools in the midst of strikes or civil strife.

And this then leads to yet another demonstration of how capitalist democracy, which is a perversion of democracy and not democracy, works. In the schools of capitalist democracy, as with any other form of capitalist government, lies the **violence** that is the iron fist inside the velvet glove of the system. That violence can be portrayed as the kind of drill and skill pedagogy that succeeds in making kids learn to not like to learn, or more graphically, it can be seen in truancy laws. If you do not come to school, you or your parents face arrest and fines: cops.

What Have We Done?

We have used the systematic approach of dialectical and historical materialism via Kosik’s opening guidelines to consider schooling. We have, in limited ways, located schools in their historical and social context. We have examined the contradictions in schooling using, for example, the processes of moving what appears to be to what is, appearance to essence, or the interaction of form (big tests) and content (lies). Our next step is to ask the question below:

What to Do?

Justice demands organization. Organization must be propped up on legs of reason and passion in order to win the power all working people need to transform the world system of capital into a social system where all can live freely through mutual care, where creativity can be unleashed, reason celebrated, sensuality and aesthetics come out in the open. There will be sacrifice to get from here to there, but within that sacrifice we can find our own ways to be fully human.

In our instance, we should recognize that schools in North America and in many other parts of the world are the central organizing points of life. This means that what education workers do matters. Resistance to the demands of capitalist schooling can take many forms, from teaching well despite the tests to forging close personal relationships with parents, students, community people and other educators—especially poor and working people but anyone of good will, and good sense—to building test boycotts or driving military recruiters from campuses to, at best, striking against high stakes exams and demands for concessions (concessions don't save jobs, they only make bosses want more) while, at the same time, setting up freedom schools where students can join education workers in asking key questions like: What is capitalism? What is imperialism? What is racism or sexism? And, importantly, who are we in relationship to others, that is, what are the main things we have in common, or not, and then what shall we do about that?

Your conclusion is, of course, yours.

Up the rebels.

References and Related Materials

Those interested in a further look at dialectical materialism can check here:

<http://www.richgibson.com/diamatoutline.html>, and a longer version:

<http://www.richgibson.com/diamata.html>

Karl Koskik, *Dialectic of the Concrete*, is online at no cost, here:

[http://www.lust-for-life.org/Lust-For-](http://www.lust-for-life.org/Lust-For-Life/DialecticOfTheConcrete/DialecticOfTheConcrete.htm#Chapter_III)

[Life/DialecticOfTheConcrete/DialecticOfTheConcrete.htm#Chapter III](http://www.lust-for-life.org/Lust-For-Life/DialecticOfTheConcrete/DialecticOfTheConcrete.htm#Chapter_III). The book is very hard to find in hard copy form.

Rich Gibson is Professor Emeritus at San Diego State University and a co-founder of the Rouge Forum.

POPULAR SENTIMENT, ELITE CONTROL, AND UNSATISFYING COMPROMISES: THE NATURE OF SCHOOL REFORM IN THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Paul J. Ramsey

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), former President George W. Bush's school reform initiative, has generated a great deal of debate about education in the United States, debate that often captures the polarized views of policymakers, school officials, teachers, and scholars concerning educational reform. For example, NCLB supporters, such as former Secretary of Education Rod Paige, insist that the mandate and its central tenets—standards, testing, and accountability—are just the sort of directives the public school system needs in order to improve the quality of education in America (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). By contrast, critic Gerald Bracey (2004), an educational columnist and researcher, argues that No Child Left Behind has a covert agenda: the privatization of America's schools. That is, the reform mandate, with its unrealistic school improvement expectations, is designed to make schools fail their "Adequate Yearly Progress" measures, which will, Bracey argues, convince the reluctant American public to become more accepting of the neoliberal agenda of privatization reforms, such as school vouchers. With all of this debate about NCLB and with all that is at stake—changes in curricular focus, school funding, bilingual education, testing, etc.—it is imperative to step back a few paces in order to gain some perspective, particularly historical perspective, about educational reform in the United States.

History can be a powerful means for exploring current issues. Although its predictive power is limited at best, history can provide the context for a deeper understanding of a topic, an understanding that is pertinent with a mandate as important as No Child Left Behind. While history does not exactly "repeat itself," as the popular quip suggests, the study of the past does provide insight into how people in other eras have approached public policies, including educational reform, and, thus, imparts a sort of comparative perspective, one that can highlight the assumptions of the present. From a historical perspective, No Child Left Behind is merely the most recent installment of a particular type of educational reform that has been gaining currency in the United States during the last few decades. Moreover, NCLB is actually the reworked name for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that began in the 1960s under Lyndon Johnson. The ESEA, however, was prompted by a different set of social circumstances than those that inspired the current manifestation, and its intention was also quite distinct from that of NCLB. To better understand No Child Left Behind and, more generally, the context of reformist tendencies in the United States, this essay examines the contours of educational change in the postwar decades.

The Nature of Educational Reform

Americans have long had a noble faith in the ability of public schooling to shape the larger society, but they sometimes forget that public schools *reflect* the larger society as well. In the 1960s, educational theorist Paul Goodman (1964) recognized this but suggested that "[i]n fact, our schools reflect our society closely, except that they *emphasize* many of its worst features" (pp. 29-30). This dual aspect of education—that it both shapes and reflects the society—partially elucidates the nature of school reform efforts in the United States. Educational reform in America is often preceded by some perceived social crisis, and the public schools are typically expected to ameliorate the cultural calamity, whatever it might be. Yet, the nature of the reform efforts to address the social ill also reflects the currents in the larger culture; sometimes, the problem and the solution are closely related. For instance, at the turn of the twentieth century, when the drawbacks of modern industrialization were particularly acute, some educational reformers in the United States began to use an industrial model of efficiency in education to "fix" the organization and curriculum of schools (Tyack, 1974; Kliebard, 2004).

While the desire to transform schools is historically precipitated by some supposed threat in the larger society, those who perceive the potential for danger and therefore set in motion the process of school

reform can vary dramatically. Sometimes, the impulse for educational reform emanates from majoritarian currents within the larger population, while, at other times, the seeds of change are cultivated by an elite group of individuals, often specialized experts of some sort. No matter what the source of the desire for transformation—either democratic sentiment or expert opinion—the reformist endeavor often brings to the fore the inherent tension between these two tendencies. The conflict between democracy and expertise in educational reform, for example, was particularly salient with regard to alcohol education during the Progressive period, the upheavals over science curricula that taught evolution (culminating in the infamous Scopes trial in the 1920s), and the battles over textbooks that had a “secular humanist” slant during the 1960s and 1970s (Zimmerman, 1999; Zimmerman, 2002; Hofstadter, 1963; Cowan, 2008).

This tension between popular democracy and expert control is perhaps inherent in the American political system, a tension that could readily be seen in the infancy of the United States. Thomas Jefferson’s Republican Party championed majoritarian sentiment and individualism, while the Federalist Party emphasized elite control and centralization. As the political elites of the new nation increasingly became polarized into these two distinct parties and struggled to set the tone for the nation, “neither side completely triumphed.” Instead, the friction between the two worldviews, as historian Joseph Ellis (2002) notes, was “built into the fabric of our national identity” (pp. 15-16). As part of the fabric of the nation, this tension manifests itself in many realms of American society, including educational reform. Because the United States is, in theory, a democratic nation, the friction between competing groups has to be overcome, at least partially, through negotiation and compromise. The negotiation process of reform—as Stephen Skowronek (1982) shows in his study of the development of a national bureaucratic administration—often involves a compromised position in which new initiatives are simply layered on top of the existing structure. This pattern of negotiated reform, reform that is often not fully satisfying to any of the competing advocacy groups, has been particularly pronounced in the realm of public schooling.

Postwar Reforms

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, there were two fairly significant movements to reform American public schooling: one emanating from the federal government and specialists, and the other coming from popular dissent. Mid-century marked the beginning of a revolt against aspects of “progressive” education. In the early 1950s, Arthur Bestor (1985), a historian at the University of Illinois, argued that the “life adjustment” curriculum—a curricular program promoted by social-efficiency advocates to prepare non-college-bound students for their adult roles in society—was inherently undemocratic and called for a rigorous academic curriculum for *all* students. The perceived need for serious academics became particularly acute after October 1957, during which the Soviet Union launched the first man-made satellite. The Cold War suddenly became a little warmer as *Sputnik* created widespread alarm among political and military leaders. After the launch of the Soviet satellite, the public schools became both a target for criticism and the potential savoir of the United States. Concerned that the Soviet educational system was superior to that of the U.S., Admiral Hyman Rickover argued that the schools were to blame for America’s poor showing in the technological race with the Russians. Additionally, in the wake of the *Sputnik* crisis, the U.S. Congress passed the National Defense Education Act, which promoted mathematics, science, and foreign languages—the subjects that were thought to be necessary for winning the Cold War (Angus & Mirel, 1999; Bestor, 1985; Ravitch, 1983).

The Cold War crisis generated a great deal of educational activity in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As the conservative historian Diane Ravitch (1983) points out, new curricular materials were developed, materials that were supposed to spark more interest in academic subjects such as science. But, reform is a negotiated endeavor in the United States, and, therefore, no single initiative is ever fully implemented because it has to be balanced with other interests and with the structure of American schools, a structure that is somewhat resistant to change. Although Congress and agencies like the National Science Foundation encouraged students to take more rigorous subjects like math and science, David Angus and

Jeffrey Mirel's (1999) analysis of high school course enrollments shows that there were only "modest gains" in these subjects between the late 1940s and early 1960s. In fact, students began to take more "practical" courses, courses that certainly were not the ones academic reformers hoped they would take. Furthermore, James Conant, former president of Harvard, somewhat tempered the Cold War reform effort in the late 1950s. In his report, *The American High School Today*, Conant argued that the public school was structurally and educationally sound for the most part, but, as Rickover had recommended earlier, more attention needed to be devoted to the gifted students in the United States, the students who presumably would become the leaders and scientists needed to win the Cold War. (This focus on only a segment of the student population was significantly different than for what Bestor called and was as undemocratic as the life-adjustment curriculum against which Bestor railed.) The goal, therefore, was to step up the sorting function of public schools, a function that gradually became part of the educational system during the Progressive era. Yet, this focus on sorting gifted students, Conant argued, did not require any dramatic change in the function of schooling because the sifting of students was already part of the existing structure of the comprehensive high school. With such a prominent figure as Conant quelling the educational alarmism, the reform movement fizzled by the 1960s, a decade in which new domestic concerns began to set the tone for public school reform (Angus & Mirel, 1999; Ravitch, 1983; Spring, 1976).

During the tumultuous 1960s, as Ravitch (1983) notes, the Cold-War-inspired reforms were "overshadowed by concern about the needs of the disadvantaged" (p. 233). Social unrest during the decade prompted populist movements to reform public education in the United States. The Black Power movement, for instance, demanded that school officials include more African American themes in courses and textbooks and also promoted the idea that African Americans themselves should control the public schools in black neighborhoods. In order to achieve such demands, African American students in Chicago boycotted schools during the late 1960s. Partially inspired by the activities of the black community, Latinos and American Indians also sought more recognition in the American education system; the passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 would turn out to be a victory for both groups because it allowed for the maintenance of their native tongues in schools. In addition to the revitalized interest in racial and ethnic issues, the 1960s witnessed a new concern for America's underclass, a concern seemingly shared by President Lyndon Johnson (Angus & Mirel, 1999; Danna, 2002; Ravitch, 1983; Zimmerman, 2002).

The socially conservative Ravitch (1983) argues that many of the reform initiatives of the 1960s and 1970s were misguided and dangerous—particularly affirmative action in higher education—because they moved educational policy "from color-blindness to color-consciousness, [and] from individual rights to group rights" (p. 280). But, Angus and Mirel (1999) note that the populist reforms did not alter "the basic structures of secondary education" in the United States. That is, the demands for more African American and minority themes in the curriculum were simply added as electives to many schools and, therefore, confirmed, rather than challenged, the differentiated secondary curricula that "progressives" had been championing since the early decades of the twentieth century (pp. 44-53, 125-128). Jonathan Zimmerman (2002) comes to a similar conclusion about the content of textbooks. New ethnic and racial themes were added to the texts as various minority groups demanded representation, but the additions never challenged "the larger narrative that supposedly bound these 'happy' groups together" (p. 128). Therefore, as with the other reform movements, the populist demands in the 1960s and 1970s were negotiated—this time with school leaders and textbook publishers—and were simply incorporated into the existing structure of public education in the United States.

In 1965, Congress passed Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which provided federal funds to public schools that had to deal with the educational challenges of poverty. Although, on the surface, this new emphasis on low-income students, particularly those of color, seemed rather progressive, there was an undertone to this type of policy that focused on social stability, long an aim of

public schooling. That is, minorities and low-income families, it was believed, posed a threat to the cohesion of the nation, and programs like Head Start and Title I of the ESEA would help youngsters overcome their “deficient” culture by inculcating them with middle-class virtues. Moreover, this focus on low-income children did not require a radical restructuring of American education. The “sorting machine,” as Joel Spring (1976) calls it—which, following *Sputnik*, had been called into action to recognize the nation’s gifted students—was now being used to identify those who came from a “culture of poverty.” The aim remained the same: sort students in an efficient manner so that “manpower” and “consumer-power” was not wasted. Once the “culture of poverty” was overcome, low-income and minority students could serve the national interests either by helping stop the spread of Communism or by helping grow the economy.

It should be noted that during the 1960s and 1970s there were experiments with or proposals for types of schooling that radically broke from the “one best system,” as David Tyack (1974) calls the prototypical arrangement of education. Civil rights leaders, for example, opened freedom schools, which partially paved the way for the counterculture’s experimental open and free school movement. Such schools fundamentally altered the structure and focus of education. Freedom schools, for instance, did not just insert token African American themes into the curriculum; instead, they were permeated with the values of the Civil Rights movement. Inspired by these types of departures from traditional schooling, the liberal counterculture began to reject the tenets of American education and established a host of radical free and alternative schools (Neumann, 2003). Goodman (1964) noted that traditional schooling was “mis-education, socializing to the national norms and regimenting to the national ‘needs’” (p. 29). He, therefore, put forth ideas such as using the city as the classroom, dispensing with compulsory attendance, and using community members as teachers. Some of these innovative and progressive ideas were co-opted (in a muted form, of course) by the educational establishment and, like other reforms, merely laid on top of the existing structure. Public schools with open floor plans were built, but the curriculum did not necessarily have the radical intent that earlier free schools had. Public alternative schools opened, but, later, they frequently evolved into a dumping ground for “problem” students. Moreover, the very notion of viable educational alternatives for which free-schoolers advocated was taken over by the educationists and reworked into a conservative movement for “school choice,” including the neoliberal proposal for vouchers (Goodman, 1964; Neumann, 2003).

Conclusions

No Child Left Behind, like past reform initiatives, has had to contend with the historic dynamics of educational change in the United States and a schooling structure that has a tendency to resist abrupt change, which has led to some, albeit limited, flexibility in the implementation of the law (Dillon, 2005). But, this limited flexibility gives little consolation to the activists, educators, parents, and students who, for a variety of reasons, reject the tenets of NCLB. What this historical overview perhaps suggests is that progressive reformers should not and cannot be content with “tinkering toward utopia,” to use David Tyack and Larry Cuban’s (1995) phrase. That is, palatable revisions of No Child Left Behind, such as those suggested by the philosopher Nel Noddings (2007), would likely be modified and grafted onto the existing system of education in the United States, thus leaving no one particular group entirely satisfied with the changes. Instead, what is needed to bring forth real reform is a movement that is committed to undoing the very rigid structure of education in the United States. The very notion of schooling needs to be rethought, and progressive citizens need to put forth reform initiatives that cannot merely be co-opted, watered down, institutionalized, or layered onto an already problematic educational system.

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Paul J. Ramsey is an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Eastern Michigan University and the author of the forthcoming monograph *Bilingual Public Schooling in the United States: A History of America's "Polyglot Boardinghouse"* (Palgrave Macmillan)

EDUCATION REFORM OR EDUCATION REVOLUTION?¹

E. Wayne Ross²

Dualism of Reform/Revolution

“What do we need to know and how can we come to know it?” This question has been central to Rouge Forum conferences for over a decade and is the key theme for this year’s conference. Do we need to know how to reform education, schools, teaching, or do we need a educational revolution? Do reformist approaches to educational change lead us closer to revolution or are they a distraction? As I contemplate these questions I am haunted by my readings of John Dewey and his consistent attacks on dualisms. Throughout his career, Dewey protested against false distinctions such as: humans and nature, mind and body, learners and the curriculum, and “traditional” versus “progressive” education. He was always searching for an inclusive perspective.

For example, in the early-to-mid 20th century, Dewey tried to mediate the conflict between the conservative defenders of traditional teacher-centered pedagogy and the romantic advocates of child-centered education (see Dewey, 1938). A key distinction in this debate (and one that Dewey argued was false) was over “interest and effort,” with conservatives defending the virtues of imposing mental discipline on students and romantics calling for reforms that would make school more “interesting” to students.

Both groups advocated for external incentives—negative in the case of traditionalists, positive in the case of the romantics—to engage students in their schoolwork. Dewey argued, however, that providing such incentives was not only ineffective, but also pernicious, because it made for teaching and learning conducted for the sake of these external rewards and punishments alone. Educators had to realize that the subject matter of the curriculum was, like all accumulated knowledge, at one time the product of curiosity much like that possessed of active, if undisciplined children.

Consequently, Dewey reasoned, the internal link between the interests of the child and the accumulated knowledge of adults had to be forged through the creation of a problematic, educative situation in which the learner has a question of her own, and is actively engaged in seeking and selecting relevant material with which to answer it (Westbrook, 1991).

Reform, Revolution and Movements for Social Change

This dualism and of interest and effort is deeply embedded in our conversations about what is wrong (and might be made right) in schools. How can we overcome dualistic thinking about our efforts at educational change? This is not a new problem for movements aimed at social change. And it seems appropriate to reconsider the question of reform or revolution now, as it was 40 years ago, in 1968, that the world witnessed student uprisings in France which lead to a general strike of over 10 million workers and the collapse of the government there.

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² Contact information: 2125 Main Mall, Department of Curriculum Studies, UBC, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 4R4, wayne.ross@ubc.ca, <http://www.ewayneross.net>

“May 1968” in France was a revolutionary moment aimed at transforming the social and moral aspects of the “old society” and was focused in particular on educational institutions. Hundreds of thousands of university students and their allies (including high school students, but not trade unions and established left, which took pains to distance themselves from the movement) took over universities and battled with police and the military while invoking Situationist inspired slogans such as:

“Be realistic, demand the impossible”
“No replastering, the structure is rotten”
“The boss needs you, you don't need him.”

1968 saw student rebellions around the world in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Japan, across Europe and the United States. In many cases the state responded violently. In Mexico, police and military occupied UNAM, the largest university in Latin America, and massacred hundreds (perhaps thousands) of students at Tlatelolco. (Two years later, in May 1970, the Ohio National Guard would kill four and wound nine others during anti-war protests and Mississippi police would kill two and wound 12 student protesters at Jackson State College.)

Reform or Revolution: A Moral Choice with Pragmatic Considerations

Revolution as a Moral Choice

The Obama/Ayers hullabaloo in last year's presidential campaign³, the recent establishment of the new Students for a Democratic Society, as well as a spate of books assessing the original 1960s SDS and Weatherman—the small but influential group faction within SDS that eventually destroyed it—also encourages us to consider again the question of “reform versus revolution.” Maurice Isserman, in a review of several such books for *The Nation*, quotes from Elinor Langer's essay “Notes for Next Time: A Memoir of the 1960s” (1973) as part his argument that the student led movement for social change in the US was undone by revolutionaries who rejected a reformist agenda. Langer wrote:

“Because revolution was effectively impossible one did not have to dirty one's hands in compromise, nor mingle much with the hoi polloi (meaning the middle class; the un-Chosen) along the way. And it was also ahistorical and it mistook revolution, a rare historical event, for a moral choice.”

Isserman suggests a corollary to Langer's assessment, that the 1960s New Left's

“impatience with half-measures of liberal reformism, its lack of interest in creating a stable constituency or institutional base, and its promotion of a politics of confrontation and risk...revealed the movement as an exotic but recognizable descendant of the powerful Protestant antinomian tradition of radical individualism”—one whose adherents believed they were released by grace from the obligation of observing the moral law and thus “defied social custom and religious law to follow the inner promptings of God's voice wherever they might lead” (Isserman, p. 34).

In contrast Isserman describes the reformist approach of Carl Oglesby, who was elected president of SDS in 1965, as the unfortunate path not taken.

“[Oglesby] wanted SDS to focus on what it was good at: building campus chapters and opposing the war [in Vietnam], offering a radical critique of American foreign policy while forming alliances

³ Dobbs, M. (2008, February 19). Obama's “Weatherman” connection. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: http://blog.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/2008/02/obamas_weatherman_connection.html

with liberals and even libertarian conservatives, wherever and whenever possible. New Leftists, he thought, “should stop being scared of being reformed out of things to do.” (Isserman, p. 38)

Oglesby himself wrote in a 1969 article “Notes on a Decade Ready for the Dustbin” for *Liberation*, “we are not free to fight The Revolution except in fantasy.” Oglesby believed:

“...it is not causes, however heroic, or martyrs, however fine, that our movement needs. It needs shrewd politicians and concrete social programs. Not theoretical (really theological) proofs that the People Will Win in the End, but tangible social achievements now. Nor the defiance of a small isolated band of super-charged cadre who, knowing they stand shoulder to shoulder with mankind itself, will face repression with the inner peace of early Christians ...” (*Liberation*, August-September, 1969)⁴

So, where does this leave us in regard to our choices of reform or revolution? First, let’s examine the heart of the Isserman/Langer critique (and rejection) of revolutionary thought and action based upon what they describe as its uncompromising stance of revolution as a moral choice. Making a choice between reformist or revolutionary action is certainly a normative question. And as philosopher Paul Taylor has pointed out “the truth of normative assertions depends on human decisions” (1958, p. 248).

In his classic examination of normative discourse, Taylor describes the key differences between the truth of factual and normative assertions:

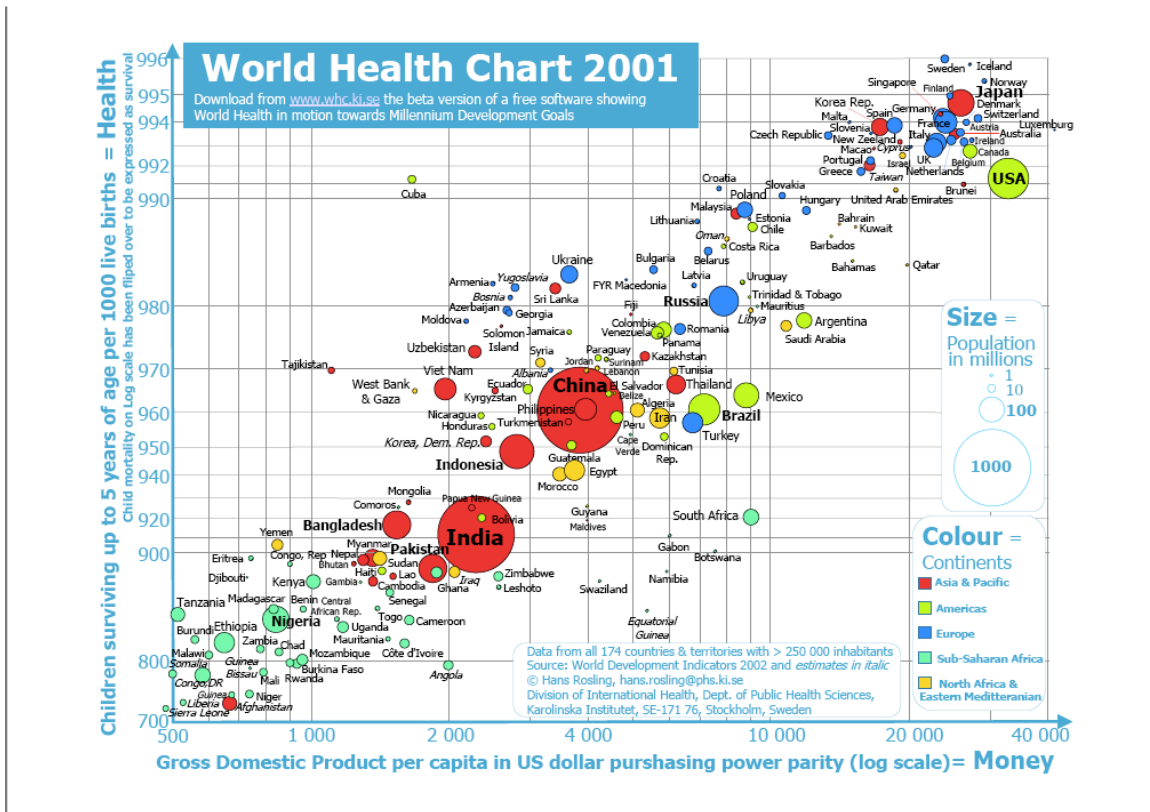
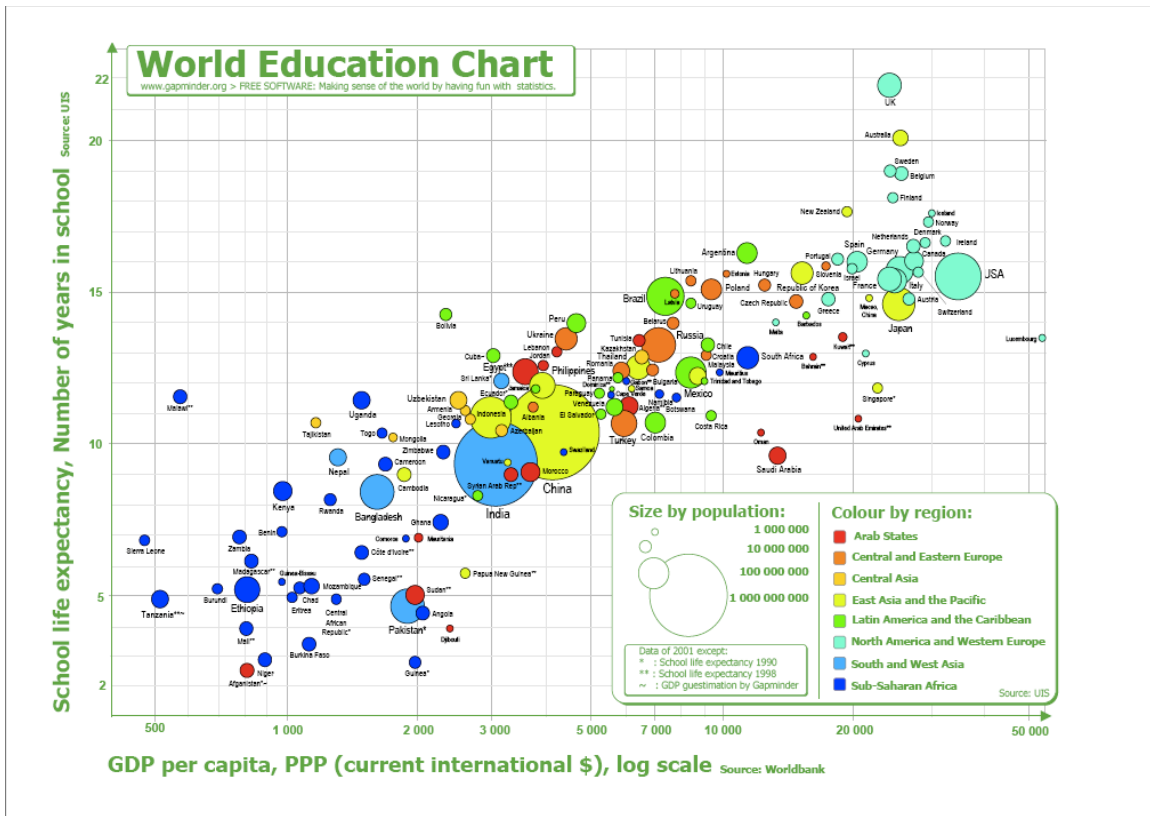
“A factual assertion is true if it corresponds to the way the world is regardless of whether we want the world to be that way ... A normative assertion is true, on the other hand, only because we have decided to adopt a standard or rule as applicable to what we making the assertion about ... And the way the world is does not logically determine what decision we must make. Our adoption of a standard or rule which the truth or falsity of our assertion depends does not itself depend on the way things are. **We must *decide* what ought to be case. We cannot *discover* what ought to be case by investigating what is the case.**” (p. 248)

Indeed if we look at the way the world is, with its injuries of class and the compounded miseries of the injustices and discrimination along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, ability etc. our decisions may not be determined, but what moral standard would allow us to turn away from critical examination of the root causes of the exploitation, subordination, dependence, and insecurity that mark global capitalist society today? Capitalism and the “logic of the market” which guide neoliberal social and economic policies in the world today ratifies, reproduces, and deepens the persistent inequalities of wealth, income, justice, health care, and education we find in North America and across the world today.

Here are some examples of the huge divides that exist across nations from Gapminder.com. The first graph, the World Education Chart, illustrates “school life expectancy by GDP” (<http://www.gapminder.org/downloads/applications/world-education-chart-2003.html>).

The second graph, the World Health Chart, illustrates “child survival beyond 5 years by GDP” (<http://www.gapminder.org/downloads/handouts/world-health-chart.html>).

⁴ The quote continues: “but a mounting fugue of attacks on political crime of all sorts, on all fronts, at all levels of aspiration, from all sectors and classes of the population, so that repression can never rest, never find a fixed or predictable target.”



Although some progress has been made in reducing the racial divides that mark per-capita income, poverty, homeownership, health, and education in North America, these gaps are so large that at the current rate of progress would take centuries to eliminate racial inequities in these areas:

Income/Wealth Divide

- At the slow rate of the black-white poverty gap has been narrowing since 1968, it would take 150 years, until 2152 to close.
- For every dollar of white per-capita income, African-Americans had 55 cents in 1968—and only 57 cents in 2001. At this pace it would takes Blacks 581 years to get the remaining 43 cents.
- Almost a third of Black children live in poverty—32.1 percent in 2002. The child poverty gap would take 210 years to disappear, not reaching parity until 2212.
- Although white homeownership has jumped from 65 to 75 percent since 1970, Black homeownership has only risen from 42 to 48 percent. At this rate, it would 1,664 years to close the homeownership gap—about 55 generations.
- For example, in BC—where the current government is a model neoliberalism in action—is home to both the highest average wealth in Canada and the largest gap between the richest and poorest households. **The wealthiest 10% of family units held 55% of the province's personal wealth** at last count and the top 50% held 96%. **The bottom 50% of British Columbians hold only 4.3% of personal wealth.** Average wealth for the richest 10% is almost \$1.4 million, while the poorest 10% hold average net debt of \$8,126, worse than in any other region except the Atlantic. The gap between richest and poorest in BC is significantly higher than in any other region in Canada.

Health Divide

- Fewer than 40 percent of Black and Latino households have “middle-class levels of health” although 70 percent of white households are middle class or higher.
- African Americans infants are at great risk of death than infants in much poorer countries (e.g., Bulgaria, Cuba, Jamaica, Uruguay, etc.)
- Of all major racial and ethnic groups Latinos have the rates of health insurance coverage and have significantly higher rates of some chronic and infectious diseases including diabetes, tuberculosis, and AIDS.

Justice Divide

- One in one hundred Americans are behind bars now. While one in 106 adult white men are incarcerated, one in 36 Hispanics and one in 15 African-Americans are behind bars, according to Pew's examination of Justice Department data from 2006. Younger black men fare even worse, with one in nine African-Americans ages 20 to 34 held in cells. Of over 2 million people incarcerated in the US, over 63% are Black or Latino, while these groups make up about one-quarter of the population.

Education Divide

- Whites are now the most segregated group in US public schools, attending institutions that on average are 80 percent White.
- Nearly a quarter of the students in the Midwest and Northeast attend apartheid schools—virtually all-non-white schools marked by poverty, social and health problems.
- High-stakes testing is not the great equalizer it is often portrayed to be in the mythical meritocracy of the US public schools. Rather standardized testing puts children of color and children of poverty at a disadvantage. A disadvantage that begins early in the school career of a child and repeats itself again and again. Black and Latino students are more subject to high-stakes testing—tests that have serious consequences attached to the results—than their White counterparts (35 percent of African American and 27 percent of Latino 8th graders will take high-stakes tests compared to 16 percent of White students.)

- In the past two decades in Kentucky, there has been a nearly 10 percent decrease in the percentage of White students in schools attended by Blacks. Despite the decrease, Kentucky has had the highest level of Black-White exposure in schools of any state since 1980. This was largely the result of the racial desegregation plan here in Jefferson County, which as you all know was struck down by the US Supreme Court in 2007.

The struggle to reduce class and racial divides is made more difficult by the widely held, but erroneous belief that these inequalities are an anomaly in the otherwise egalitarian liberal democracy of the US as well as a common refusal to examine their root causes, which are found in the system of capital.

In sum, the moral basis for choosing revolution doesn't rely on the inner prompting of some supposed deity (as implied by Isserman and Langer), rather critical analysis of the consequences of our capitalist present will certainly lead most people to the rational choice that our circumstances call for a revolutionary response.

Beware Reform from the Perspective of Power

Organizing people for change is a key part of revolutionary action, and as Carl Oglesby observed revolutionaries "shouldn't be scared of being reformed out of things to do." Building organizations like SDS, The Rouge Forum, etc.; forming alliances with allies to achieve short-term goals; and generally being effective in our work in the social, educational, and political institutions as they currently exist are crucial parts of what it means to engage in revolutionary action.

But our work within the institutions of capital (whether these are schools, universities, or other social and educational organizations) must be done with a keen eye on how, through our daily activities, we reproduce our social situations, the social relations and the ideas of the society.

Reproduction of Everyday Life

In *The Reproduction of Everyday Life* (1969), Fredy Perlman argues that everyday life in a capitalist society systematically transforms the material conditions to which capitalism originally responded. In considering everyday life, Perlman argues that we must analyze "not only how practical activity in capitalist society reproduces capitalistic society, but also how this activity itself eliminates the material conditions to which capitalism is a response." "The aim of the process," according to Perlman, "is the reproduction of the relation between the worker and the capitalist."

In short, within a capitalist system, people reproduce capitalism and the conditions of their own oppression. For Perlman, this is, at least in part, because the individual members of a capitalist society unknowingly "carry out two processes: [1] they reproduce the form of their activities, and [2] they eliminate the material conditions to which this form of activity initially responded" (p. 3). That they don't see this, and that they continue to participate, relates in Perlman's view to what represents perhaps the two most dominant features of modern everyday life: "alienation" and "fetish worship."

Perlman argues "every time people perform an activity they have not themselves defined and do not control, every time they pay for goods they produced with money they received in exchange for their alienated activity, every time they passively admire the products of their own activity as alien objects procured by their money, they give new life to Capital and annihilate their own lives."

Alienation implies that today the "work" of "laborers" is no longer authentically their own, but instead exists under the control of someone else—its "buyer." To paraphrase Perlman, workers alienate their lives in order to preserve their lives. If people did not sell their living activity they could not get a wage and could not survive. "However, it is not the wage that makes alienation the condition for

survival....It is people's disposition to continue selling their labor, and not the things for which they sell it, that makes the alienation of living activity necessary for the preservation of life."

Perlman argues that the mystification of one's daily activities or what he called "the religion of everyday life" attributes living activity to inanimate things. For Perlman, fetish worship suggests that labor (the efforts of individuals) is a *thing*, and that "things live." Under a fetishistic system, such as contemporary capitalism, people attribute their own power to things, inanimate things, and thus de-actualize/de-humanize their own roles—their own real power—in the (re)constitution of society. Under a fetishistic system, such as contemporary capitalism, people attribute their own power to things, inanimate things, and thus de-actualize their own roles—their own real power—in the (re)constitution of society. Perlman, put it this way:

[I]n other words, people are bought with the products of their own activity, yet they se[e] their own activity as the activity of Capital, and their own products as the products of Capital. By attributing creative power to Capital and not to their own activity, they renounce their living activity, their everyday life, to Capital, which means that people give themselves daily, to the personification of Capital, the capitalist.

To make use of Perlman's work within the context of education, and everyday life, it helps first to locate schooling—classroom life,—within the setting of contemporary global capitalism. We must consider (1) that a product—a thing—is produced, distributed, consumed, bought, and sold (ostensibly "education" or "achievement"), and (2) that the major actors in the processes of schooling represent distinctive social classes—say the capitalist (or ruling, or powerful, or oppressor) class (e.g., school boards, politicians, bureaucratic management, corporations, and so on) and the working (or laboring, or teaching-learning, or oppressed) class (e.g., teachers, students, and parents). (Of course we recognize here the risks of reductionism, oversimplification, and overgeneralization.)

Perlman's work implies, to the extent that schooling is a part of everyday life and that, in turn, everyday life is a part of schooling, that contemporary education is reproductive—schooling doesn't work to transform or even "improve" society. It works to maintain it, to rationalize and mystify it, and to present it (and schooling itself, therefore) as right, natural, and neutral, but not as a means to promote, for example, social justice or radical democracy.)

Revolution of Everyday Life

In *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Raoul Vaneigem (1968/2001), a former Situationist International (SI) colleague of Guy Debord's, argues that it is the dominant perspective of power—"power's perspective"—that under girds all alienation in terms of modern everyday life. In sum, power (i.e., "the rulers") alienates, oppresses, and exploits by demolishing any opportunity for participation, communication, and self-realization. It denies individuals the chance to build communities, to connect to one another, and to become who and what they might become. It isolates and fragments, passes off false relationships as human (i.e., as "real"), and defines subjective persons objectively—all in large measure as everyday life becomes less about joyous and creative and loving and playful interhuman experiences and more about the capitalistic imperative always to consume (if not also eventually to *be* consumed).

For example, the discourse of "social justice" in education (whether based on "liberal" or "conservative" ideologies) has been framed almost completely within the "perspective of power" and as a result offers little or no opportunity for transcending the deleterious effects of the power perspective with regard to the "idealism" of social justice. (In addition, mainstream/liberal" conceptions of critical pedagogy are constructed from the power perspective and thus suffer from the same problems.)⁵

⁵ See, for example, Peter McLaren (2000) on the "domestication" of critical pedagogy.

People may perceive differences among “liberal” or “conservative” visions of social justice, but there is in fact more similarity than difference in our discussion of multiculturalism, class, diversity, race, poverty, difference, equity, social change, equality, oppression, democracy, the collective good, etc.—that is, almost all these views are constructed from the perspective of power whether they represent “liberal” or “conservative” politics. To paraphrase Marx on wage labor⁶ *one form of critical pedagogy may correct the abuses of another, but no form of critical pedagogy constructed from the perspective of power can correct the abuses of the perspective of power.* Although the critical pedagogy that emerges from the perspective of power may, in fact, assist in the construction of “bigger cages and longer chains.”

Perhaps obviously, then, Vaneigem’s “revolution of everyday life” calls for a “reversal of perspective,” one opposed to the hierarchical workings of power, one he designates “The unitary triad: self-realization, communication, [and] participation,” a perspective incompatible with what he calls “survival sickness” and “spurious forms of opposition” or what we might call reformism from the perspective of power.

A Examination of consequences... the dance of the dialectic

My aim here has been to illustrate how the question of reform or revolution does not have to be understood as an “either/or” proposition. The decisions we make in these circumstances are clearly moral decisions—we must decide what ought to be case. And our action plans need to be practical in the sense that they are based upon critical analysis of the consequences we can observe. Moreover, we must always take care that in our work in schools and other social spaces is done with a keen eye on how through our daily activities, we reproduce our social situations, the social relations and the ideas of the capitalist society and resist the perspective of power that would shape our understanding of problems and necessary responses to them, while undermining or blocking self-realization, communication and participation.

Engaging in efforts aimed to transform both education and society is not without risks and as Noam Chomsky has pointed out “asking serious questions about the nature and behavior of one’s own society is often difficult and unpleasant.” It is difficult because:

The answers are generally concealed, and unpleasant because the answers are often not only ugly...but also painful. To understand the truth about these matters is to be led to action that may not be easy to undertake and that may even carry significant personal cost. In contrast, the easy way is to succumb to the demands of the powerful, to avoid searching questions, and to accept the doctrine that is hammered home incessantly by the propaganda system. This is, no doubt, the main reason for the easy victory of dominant ideologies... (Chomsky, 1982, pp. 9-10)

The “Dance of Dialectic” (Bertell Ollman’s representation of Marx’s method of investigating the social world) is a useful strategy for guarding against the deleterious effects of the perspective of power and dominant ideologies on our work:

Step 1—**Analyze:** Look for connections in the capitalist present!

Step 2—**Historicize:** Look for the preconditions of the most important of these connection in the past!

Step 3—**Visionize:** Project major social contradictions forward from the past, through the present, to their resolution and beyond in the future!

Step 4—**And Organize:** Look for preconditions of such a future in the present and sue them to develop your political strategy!

⁶ The quote from Marx is “One form of wage labour may correct the abuses of another, but no form of wage labour can correct the abuse of wage labour itself” (Marx, 1856/1973, p. 123).

Step 1: Analyze

(a) One step to the left,
 (b) Followed by two steps to the right,
 (c) Then one to the left.

Look for connections in the capitalist present!

Step 2: Historicize

One step backward

Look for the preconditions of the most important of these connections in the past!

Step 3: Visionize

Two steps forward

Project major social contradictions forward from the past, through the present, to their resolution and beyond in the future!

Step 4: And Organize!

One step backward
 Finish with a jump
 (we're now on a "higher level")
 and repeat steps to "deepen"
 analysis.

Look for preconditions of such a future in the present and use them to develop your political strategy!

Dance of the Dialectic. (Text and choreography by Bertell Ollman; layout by Fran Moran.) //

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E. Wayne Ross is a Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of British Columbia and co-founder of the Rouge Forum.

HOW DO WE LEARN AND TEACH TO GET FROM WHERE WE ARE TO WHERE WE NEED TO BE? STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX!

Carol Williams

Introduction

Currently, many students and teachers feel trapped within and are suffocating from an educational system defined by an adult-directed curriculum, test scores and controlling school environments. Children, however, do not necessarily fit into this little package of schooling and, as a result, we are failing some of our youth. If we are to truly support learning for all, we must consider education from other perspectives, in particular, student and community voices, models of alternative education and personal, critical reflection.

To set the context for this paper, which reflects my own learning and teaching, I look to my memories, as Eber Hampton (1996) suggests, deepening my awareness and understanding of the reasons and purposes behind this paper. Next, I turn to a discussion of various present-day issues within education. After that, I discuss my vision of where education should be and how alternative perspectives can support movement.

How we learn and teach

“Learning happens when what we hold to be true is challenged by new information that we cannot fit into the schema that we’ve developed to try to explain the world around us” (Earl, 2006).

Over the years, various individuals and experiences have supported a change in how I view learning and education, a few of which I highlight below. Florence Luke, my professor in a reading course, invited students to reflect upon how course readings connected to individual experiences. In my various reflections, I began to understand that my teaching, and hence student learning, was directly related to my perceptions and experiences as a teacher and learner. In a Special Education course, I read an article by Thomas Skrtic (1986), whose ideas opened me up to an entirely new perspective on education and learning. I realized that I had been looking at education through a deficit lens, thinking that I had to “fix” children who behaved or learned differently. I began to notice that many education professionals routinely expected that children needed “meds” to survive in classrooms. In short, I began to see education and learning in a different light.

As I began to question and investigate traditional education, my experiences of success through high marks came to be much less important to me. I realized that as a student I had learned to memorize and regurgitate information. In other words, I had not really been learning. I had not, in fact, learned the importance of questioning and thinking. In spite of my own limited reality, I began to question my practice and myself: Had I been encouraging my students to follow in my footsteps? Was I promoting the status quo? If so, then I wanted, and needed, to look at learning, teaching, and education differently.

My newfound perspective led me to begin a Master’s of Education program and I became more aware of the hidden curriculum (Gatto, 2005; Holt, 2004; Jackson, 1990). Despite my growing personal discontent with the curriculum and education as I understood it, when I first heard about free schools and the unschooling movement from Jeff Haines, a fellow Master’s student, I was skeptical. What could students possibly learn without an imposed curriculum? How would they learn? Was it possible? What about the basics?

Upon reflection, I realized that I had been looking at my questions from the perspective of traditional schooling. Naturally, this perspective made sense, as I had grown up in the mainstream system, believing that a student’s job was to be a good student, work hard and get good grades. As a child, I had in fact done just that. I couldn’t wait for work to be returned to see how close I was to 100%. As a grad student, when Paul Berger, my professor in a research class suggested that he need not put marks on our work, I

jumped at the chance. I knew that marks had become my enemy. I did not need them in order to learn.

It is through personal and professional critical reflection that I have taken steps to think outside of the box of traditional education. In 2008, Ashwani Kumar, in a paper at the Rouge Forum Conference that year, discussed the importance of critical self-awareness:

Critical self-awareness can lay the foundation for actual psychological revolution that in turn can bring about change in the outer world as the latter has come into existence by each one of us through our thoughts and actions... change in one's consciousness is the real foundation for actual visible changes in the structure of the society.

As educators and individuals interested in education, we can certainly work from the outside-in, lobbying the government for educational reform and so on, and it is important to do so; however, we must also be willing to examine and learn from our own personal histories, exploring our perspectives and motives. One can attend any number of professional development sessions and read numerous books about the newest strategies and approaches to teaching. But, without a look inside, we cannot make lasting change.

As a child, I did not realize that I could challenge my thinking with new information. To me, information was something to be absorbed, deposited (Freire, 1970). When I began teaching in 1990, my experiences as a learner directed my teaching. I thought I simply needed to present information to students and they would learn, and that those who didn't learn simply had problems. I was wrong. It is my hope that this paper will challenge the reader in some way and support critical self-reflection. Once we consider learning from outside the box, we can teach others to do the same. It is possible.

Where we are

Back in 1929, John Dewey wrote that, "under existing conditions far too much of the stimulus and control proceeds from the teacher, because of neglect of the idea of the school as a form of social life" (p. 19). This level of teacher control is evident even today. But why does this control persist? What conditions are evident today?

We are, I believe, stuck in a vicious circle – though some have been fortunate enough to break through – propelled by the many political, economic and social pressures upon education in Canada, the United States and around the world. As others have discussed in detail, educational interests are influenced by neo-liberal "market-values" and neo-conservative "traditional values" (Apple, 2006). Time and space prevent me from exploring these ideas in detail; however, to support a common frame of reference regarding "where we are", I turn next to a discussion of the impact of the pressures of the standard curriculum and standardized accountability measures.

Intellectual Dependency and Control

Have you ever considered who writes the provincial or state standard curriculum? Teachers and curriculum experts for sure, but, at least in Ontario, curriculum writing also involves business groups, "people whose main interest [...] is on employability, essentially preparing students for the workplace and being competitive" (Carr, 2006). On the other hand, there are some business groups who are more interested in schools ensuring that students can think and collaborate (Wagner, 2008). Either way, as John Taylor Gatto (2005) emphasizes, adults make the decisions: "The expert makes all the important choices; only I, the teacher, can determine what my kids must study, or rather, only the people who pay me can make those decisions, which I then enforce" (p.7).

Gatto (2005) is right. In the mainstream school, we are directed to teach a standard curriculum developed by adults for children. However, just as we teach our children to question content they find on the Internet, we must question the content of the mandated curriculum. Does it promote systemic inequities

by promoting official knowledge as “distinguished from and given privileged status over other forms of knowledge” (Wotherspoon, 2004, p. 108)? If so, then we are not legitimizing the “lives of the most disadvantaged members of our communities” (Gandin and Apple, 2002, p. 259). We must ask ourselves how the curriculum can be taught to reflect various perspectives, and how education and schooling can support all individuals feeling included and valued.

For John Holt (2004), mandatory schooling teaches that

If we didn't make you come here you wouldn't learn anything... Not only do we have to decide what you need to learn, but then we have to show you, one tiny step at a time, how to learn it.... If you want to learn something of any importance, you must get it from a teacher, in a school.... Since other people will tell you whatever is important for you to learn, your own questions are hardly ever worth asking or answering. (pp. 171-172)

Similar to A.S. Neill's (1960/1992) philosophy of education, Gatto (2005) and Holt (2004) both suggest that children are either not taught to question or taught not to question. In other words, children who are taught that they cannot learn unless directed by an adult will grow up themselves to be adults who think they need to direct children's learning. As a result, the status quo is perpetuated, and the cycle continues, strengthened, in part, by a focus on accountability.

Accountability

As Terry Wotherspoon (2004) suggests, closely linked to a mandated curriculum is accountability through a focus on standardized or large-scale achievement testing. In Michigan, select grades participate each year in the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) (Michigan Department of Education, 2009). In Ontario, students in Grades Three, Six and Nine must undergo testing by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) (Education and Accountability Office (2008). Like Rick Stiggins (2004), I really have no real problem with accountability, in theory; it is the practice surrounding these tests that are problematic (Shepard, 1994; Wassermann, 2001). Along with inherent flaws in any tests, such as question-bias and minority-group achievement inequities (Wotherspoon, 2004), such tests measure test-taking skills (Maylone, 2004), reflect parental income (Brussiere et al. as cited in Wotherspoon, 2004, pp. 226, 228) and can be cross-referenced with real estate (Real Estate News in Toronto, n.d., para.24). The comparison of schools and neighborhood information is even promoted by states and provinces (Michigan Department of Education, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

Finally, and in my mind most importantly, is the over emphasis given to Literacy and Mathematics. Most definitely, ours is a literate world and such skills are important. However, teachers often focus on these areas at the expense of other areas. This must change:

It must be recognized that there are many children who have special gifts in music or art or drama, but who have no particular interest in the sciences or mathematics or academic disciplines. The curriculum must provide for their progress and for graduation with emphasis in their specialties. These children cannot be branded as failures by the fact that their talents lie in special areas rather than in the traditional disciplines. (Ontario Department of Education, 1968, p. 13)

Several years ago in my Grade 3 class, I had twin boys whom I shall call Jeremy and Lucas. Jeremy was skilled at literacy and mathematics and always achieved high marks; Lucas excelled in visual arts but struggled in academic areas. Lucas was eventually put on an individual education plan and was sent to see the Special Education teacher. This may have supported his learning, but it did nothing for his self-confidence. One day I announced that Lucas's artwork would be displayed at the local library for the Board's yearly art exhibit. As anticipated, Lucas beamed at his accomplishment and I secretly cheered that finally, he was getting some recognition; Jeremy on the other hand, shrunk down in his chair in

dismay. His classmates looked at him with concern. Little did I know that Jeremy seemed to see himself as competent because of his high marks; they encouraged him. When he did not attain the top position, he was discouraged.

As Arthur Pearl (1997) notes, it is important that we rethink what it means to be successful. According to Pearl, grades do not measure understanding; rather, they encourage and discourage. Further, the push to get marks leads teachers to do absurd things: In a recent conversation with a teacher she admitted that she was marking her students' Mother's Day cards. It was their "using various materials" project and she needed a mark! My own son, after presenting me with a beautifully handmade Mother's Day card, commented that there were other cards in his class that were better than his. Personal expressions of love being marked, children and young teens feeling like their creativity don't measure up. How has it come to this? Clearly, the conditions that affect educators have also impacted how children see themselves and their world. We cannot stay stranded in this place. But, where are we to go?

Where we need to be

Schooling and learning are about much more than simply acquiring and repeating information. It is "not high test scores but the extent to which all students can gain access to meaningful social opportunities and experiences is the mark of student and school success" (Wotherspoon, p. 256).

So, where do we need to be? Redefining, rethinking, relearning - "What really is education? Schooling? Success?" We need to be outside the box of what we know as education and look from different perspectives, perspectives that may in fact be in total opposition to our own. Paul Berger (2008), in his research with Inuit schooling, writes that, "As long as non-Inuit educators are needed in Nunavut, District Education Authorities should prioritize the hiring of people who are willing to examine their own Eurocentrism" (p. x). Berger's sentiments must be extended to hiring in all educational settings in all districts. The children in our schools are from diverse backgrounds and have diverse perspectives and realities. We must be in a place where educators are supported and safe in their willingness to examine their own perspectives and how they either support or challenge the education of our youth.

So, my vision for where we need to be? The ideal place to be is where students and teachers enjoy learning and teaching and see themselves as both learners and teachers. Further, individuals must not be forced to follow a path designed and dictated by someone else. Though static at times, this place is not permanent; engagement in critical self-reflection is an ongoing process that will move us from place to place, continually challenging our perspectives, actions, thoughts and beliefs.

What is the path to change? I turn next to this discussion.

How to get there

Rethink how we teach

To begin with, we must consider the importance of how we teach the curriculum. Often there is the tendency to fall back on 'old' methods, especially around report card time. Yet, according to A. S. Neill (1960/1992), it is not true learning when curriculum is learned just for a test (pp. 103-104). Similarly, Paulo Freire's (1970) metaphor of the banking method, designed to "encourage passivity in the oppressed," supports the idea that if information is simply deposited, rather than experienced, it is questionable whether or not individuals are really learning (p. 129).

Further, though there are often mandated topics in the curriculum, how students develop skills and concepts is often the teacher's decision. Rather than teachers choosing which books students read or the topic for written assignments, students can be offered choice. "Engage young people around their interests and provide lots of opportunities for them to discover firsthand how reading can help them pursue those

interests more broadly and deeply” (Washor, Mojkowski and Foster, 2009, p. 522). Regarding Mathematics instruction, rather than the “kill and drill” method, we can embrace current research highlighting the conceptual understanding of Math through problem solving (Small, 2008; Fosnot and Dolk, 2001; Van de Walle, 2001). Further, presenting students with opportunities to engage in critical thinking tasks and social justice investigations supports active, authentic engagement and curriculum integration. For example, developing Critical Thinking Challenges (Case, Falk, Smith and Werner, 2004) and linking math and social justice (Stocker, 2008) provide opportunities for students to engage in thinking in rich, meaningful contexts. Gatto (2005) suggests that educators teach “the un-relating of everything” (p. 2); such approaches will support integrating various areas of the curriculum in meaningful ways.

Teach for active citizenship

One particular consideration for rethinking how we teach, is teaching for active citizenship in a democracy (Deuchar, R., 2008; Hershey, S. and Reilly, V., 2009; Maitles, H. and Deuchar, R., 2006). In Deuchar’s study, primary children in Scotland had the opportunity to reflect upon and take action on issues that were of concern to them. Similarly, under the umbrella of homelessness, Grade 7 students in San Francisco researched a topic of interest, shared their knowledge with other students, school staff and community members (Hershey, S. and Reilly, V., 2009). In doing so, these students not only changed their perceptions of homeless people, but also learned the importance of community service activities and community involvement. In their study, Maitles and Deuchar focused on three key elements of active and responsible citizenship: purposeful student councils; participatory, democratic classroom culture; and involving students in meaningful discussions around controversial social and political issues. These studies highlight the rights of children as valuable citizens, worthy of having their voices heard.

I am only beginning to understand and experience what it means to educate for active citizenship. I remember a grade 3 class I taught several years ago – by about mid-January, I was frustrated and exhausted. It seemed that the students and I were constantly at odds with one another. One evening, after a particularly difficult day, I realized that the children were behaving just like me – trying to control the classroom and everything in it! The next day I talked with my group about my revelation. I don’t recall exactly what anyone said, but I do remember that they seemed awestruck that an adult would talk to them, acknowledge them, as equals and consider that what they have to say is important.

Honour the community

Years ago, I taught junior students in Toronto, Ontario. Modest-sized houses surrounded the school, though the majority of children lived in two high-rise apartment buildings about a mile away. The majority of families were single parent, mother led, many of them on social assistance. I was counted among the minority, a white teacher in a predominately black community. I used to think it was my job to “save” the children in my care, just get them to learn the stuff I was supposed to teach and that would secure their futures. I was so busy with my own agenda that I never stopped to consider whether or not they wanted this, needed it or whether or not my way was right for them.

Freire (1970) believes that educators have the ability to make change. However, rather than bringing programs to people, Freire says that change should be created together with communities. He says that through critical dialogue, which is reflection and action, we can “transform[s] the world” (p. 125).

Utilizing the “funds of knowledge” within families is one way to connect homes and schools (Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., and Gonzalez, N., 1992) and bring about change. “By capitalizing on household and other community resources, [educators] can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools” (p. 132). In making such home connections, we see that “children in households are not passive bystanders, as they seem in classrooms, but active participants in a broad range of activities mediated by [family] social relationships” (La

Fontaine as cited in Moll et al., p. 134). In this example, curriculum units were designed around community knowledge, with parents and community members as expert teachers.

I wish I had taken the time to get to know my students and their families to find out what, if anything, I could do to support them. How simple it would have been to talk with my students and their families rather than spending my time trying to “fix” them and in developing units and handouts in which they may have had little or no interest.

Consider alternative schools and perspectives

Free schools such as Summerhill School in Norfolk, England and Sudbury Valley in the United States and other parts of the world engage the community too, and we can learn from their efforts as well. Two noteworthy characteristics of these schools are that children are given equal status in the school and are trusted with their freedom. And, strange as it may seem, children do indeed learn (D. Greenberg, 1995; M. Greenberg, 2004; Neill, 1960/1992; Sadofsky and D. Greenberg, 1994).

In such schools, most controversial for many educators and parents, there is little outside pressure for children to read early. It is important to note that even without pressure children can in fact learn to read.

At Sudbury Valley, not one child has ever been forced, pushed, urged, cajoled, or bribed into learning how to read. We have had no dyslexia. None of our graduates are real or functional illiterates. Some of our eight year olds are, some ten year olds are, even an occasional twelve year old. But by the time they leave, they are indistinguishable. No one who meets our older students could ever guess the age at which they first learned to read or write. (Greenburg, D., 1995, p. 35)

It is not clear how these children learned to read, or what supports were put in place. However, it is important to acknowledge that children do not necessarily need to be forced to read at an early age. In fact, when interested, they have the internal motivation to learn.

My professional background includes teaching literacy and I currently support teachers’ professional development in this area. I know how to effectively teach reading and for several years was an Early Literacy Intervention teacher. Yet with this new information regarding learning to read, I am conflicted. Is it really necessary for children to be forced to learn to read at a young age? I recently talked with a parent whose two children attend an alternative school. Both of her children did not learn to read until they were in grade 3. The one child learned to read because he wanted to, he was ready. The only cost this parent could see was all the books they hadn’t read in grades 1 and 2. We push children to read and write at early ages, but we don’t seem so concerned when they have no interest in soccer or sculpting or playing the clarinet. I think that if we trust children and provide opportunities for them to develop according to their own time clock, they will surprise us, even surpass our expectations.

Alpha Alternative School in Toronto, Ontario trusts children. The school recognizes that “children learn at different rates. No comparisons are made: there are no grades, and no competitions held” (Alpha Alternative School, 2005, para.1). Rather than an emphasis on marks, there are regular parent-teacher-student conferences. Such conferences are one of Alfie Kohn’s (1999) suggestions instead of grades. He says that, “it is the student’s point of view – specifically, a psychologically informed understanding of that point of view – that determines whether real learning will happen and keep happening” (p. 26). Kohn believes, as I have come to believe, that we ought to focus on the learning not the mark it earned.

Engage in a paradigm shift

So, without marks, how do we know how children are doing? We ask them! But, this brings me to the idea of Special Education and its connection to a mandated curriculum. Such a curriculum expects all

children to learn the same material in the same grade and it suggests that there is a problem with children who for one reason or another do not meet the expected standards. Skrtic (1986) would explain that this phenomenon is related to the history of special education. Historically, as discussed by Skrtic, special education has been viewed through a biological or psychological disability or deficit lens.

Skrtic (1986) recommends a shift in special education knowledge and practice. He states that special education knowledge must undergo a multiparadigmatic shift “in the context of a democratized, informed, sustained discourse on the moral, ethical, and political implications of the choice of a frame of reference on the lives of children and youth and their parents and families” (p. 94). He suggests further that this shift must, necessarily, influence general education as well.

Those who experience difficulty learning the academic or hidden curriculum (Gatto, 2005; Holt, 2004; Jackson, 1990) are often sent for special education services and are often regarded as emotionally, socially or intellectually deficient. Traditionally, for students who are not “successful” in special education programs, schools develop “alternative schools or classes for intellectually gifted, emotionally impaired, or learning-disabled students” (Wotherspoon, 2004, p. 268). According to the Ontario *Early School Leavers Report* (Community Health Systems Resource Group, 2005), “Alternative schools are designed to serve a specific population, such as youth with disabilities, or unique learning or behavioral issues, teenage parents, or potential school leavers.... Alternative schooling creates an individualized environment for each student” (p. 78). And, in extreme cases, for students who are expelled, school boards design specific programs. For example, in the Waterloo Region District School Board in Ontario,

The Choices for Youth Program is based on the philosophy and methodology of experiential education in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values. We believe that students learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process through the mind, body and spirit. (Waterloo Region District School Board, n.d., para. 2)

Clearly, educators acknowledge the importance of individual programming. However, individual programming must not be reserved only for those who are traditionally unsuccessful. Does everyone really need to be forced to learn the same material, the same skills and concepts, in the same grade? We must shift our thinking and learn from these special education and alternative programs.

In Ontario, we have a system of leveling work – Level 4 is like an A, Level 3 is a B, and so on. I often hear teachers refer to students as a Level 4 or a Level 1. I have even heard teachers refer to students as ‘stupid’ or in comparison to the mother, the brother, the aunt, the uncle... Such references and comparisons are wrong! Students are individuals with hopes and dreams and interests and challenges. We must challenge ourselves and our colleagues to think differently.

Let go of control

Of course, shifting our educational focus, and indeed, stepping outside of the traditional perspective, require letting go of control. Children learn much from formal schooling, such as who controls their learning, and that learning is about getting good grades and pleasing the teacher (Gatto, 2005; Holt, 2004; Jackson, 1990). Children may learn the material, but they are really learning what Gatto, Holt and Jackson would call the “hidden curriculum”.

Through *The Early Leavers Report* (2005) we get a glimpse into what students think about education and schools:

Early school leavers are more likely to perceive their school environment as unrewarding, have negative interactions with their teachers and experience social and academic problems. The reality

for many youth is that schools are uncomfortable and unnatural places for them to be. (Community Health Systems Resource Group, 2005, p. 67)

The *Early Leavers Report* also acknowledges that children begin to disengage from school even before starting! If schools are unnatural and uncomfortable places to be, we must change that! One teacher, Ann Griffin (1994) did so by giving her students the opportunity to decide what the classroom should look like and what should be in it. She says the only thing she did was attach a sign to the door announcing “Room Under Construction”. Griffin honors “children as the directors of their learning and also as the designers of the actual physical space.”

It appears that Griffin (1994) has accomplished what Neill (1960/1992) believed: “the greatest reform required in our schools is the abolition of that chasm between young and old which perpetuates paternalism” (p. 4). We are adults and with age comes experience and, usually, wisdom. But this does not mean we have to be enforcers or reflect an attitude that says, “This is my classroom and I am in charge.”

I remember back to my first years of teaching. One year I had 35 or so Grade 6 students and constantly reorganized the room, frustrated with the number of desks and how to use the space more efficiently. The students would come in groaning, ‘Oh no, not again!’ and then go rifling through desks to figure out where they sat. The “under construction” idea is one I wish I had known then – it would have saved me time and energy, plus shown my students that we are in this together.

Conclusion

We are in fact in this together – students, parents, community members, educators. Dewey (1929) argued that, “education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform,” to be found in the interaction of child and life (p. 22). Neill (1960/1992) furthers this idea by suggesting that emotions are at the centre of true learning. He believed that “a child’s emotions are infinitely more important than his [or her] intellectual progress” (p. 101). Similarly, Hampton (1996) suggests that teachers spend too much time controlling students’ emotions.

It is time for a change; time that we work together with our students and parents and communities. It is no longer an option to sit alone in our educational boxes, thinking up strategies and contexts and how to get children interested in what we have to teach. We must admit that we do not have all of the answers. And, perhaps, our efforts to align ourselves with radical, out-of-the-box thinkers, will help our system, our colleagues, our students and ourselves to break out of these confining educational boxes.

*When I sent in a proposal for this conference, I wondered what I was getting myself in for, signing up for the **Rogue** Conference! And then, Joe Bishop laughingly pointed out that I had misread the conference name. Despite this new information, for some reason, I kept imagining myself at this conference with a bunch of rogue educators. In an attempt to understand this odd perspective I had created for myself, I turned to the MerriamWebster on-line dictionary. According to this source, a rogue, or vagrant, is a wanderer, one who wanders idly from place to place – in an unlawful manner. When I thought I was aligning myself with a bunch of rogues, I hadn’t thought of rogues as outlaws; rather, I had considered rogues to be those who aren’t quite mainstream, perhaps having different ideas, and most definitely not content with the status quo. And, when I considered the question “How do we learn and teach to get from where we are to where we need to be?”, the simple answer was, “step outside the box”. The idea of looking from different perspectives seemed to fit with being a rogue. I suppose I am a rogue, though one with a specific focus – to move myself, others and the system from where we are to where we need to be.*

“Learning happens when what we hold to be true is challenged by new information that we cannot fit into the schema that we’ve developed to try to explain the world around us” (Earl, 2006). New information has the power to engage individuals in learning, to change our thinking; we ourselves must change, lest we

stay trapped in a box, suffocating our youth with us.

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Carol Williams is a graduate student at Lakehead University. This essay includes some of the thinking and work completed for her M.Ed. She is indebted to colleagues and professors who have provided opportunities for conversations and free thought.

EMPIRE IN THE ACADEMY? THE CORPORATIZATION OF (OR *THE NEOLIBERAL CREEP* INTO) THE UNIVERSITY COMMONS

Adam Renner

Apparently, the place at which I worked so hard to arrive is not the bastion of liberal knowledge and exploration I assumed it might be. While I have, at times, experienced conservative/irrational/close-minded blowback as a university professor, personally, I just chalked it up to the kind of university where I teach, the type of program I teach in, or the region of the country where my university resides. Turns out, the problem is quite ubiquitous, and evolving. The neoliberal agenda of privatization, profits, standardization, and technical rationalities/efficiencies has gripped higher education, forcefully. The ultimate frontier of education has finally been breached. Our *university commons* are now threatened.

I think it unwise to underestimate the neoliberal creep into our universities. The empire has found the academy. I am not alone in this hypothesis. What follows is an attempt to make sense of how I came to see these corporatizing trends, what others have to say about how the empire has gripped our universities, what we can/must do about it, and what I hope to accomplish at my university over the next year.

“What in the hell is going on at my university?...”

...I thought, sitting in my office one day. I began to take stock of the corporatizing trends at my university and in academe writ large:

- (1) **University partnerships with private industry**—what Jennifer Washburn calls “selling off the university.” We have cafeterias run by fast food chains or trans-national corporations (my university outsourced its food services to Sodexo); exclusive beverage contracts (e.g., Pepsi or Coca Cola?); bookstores run by large chains or corporations (e.g., Barnes and Noble); and buildings and academic positions named after corporate entities.
- (2) **Textbook publishers and Testing agencies** (sometimes one in the same)—we are inundated by the same textbook publishers and are overseen by standardizing agencies like ETS.
- (3) **Benefits for employees**—dependent upon outside private enterprise with rates that continue to skyrocket (To my universities credit, they have really tried to keep these in check, though I have experienced them as far too sympathetic to the needs of our health insurance provider during my tenure as faculty compensation chair).
- (4) **Competition for research grants and overemphasis on scholarship**—these can include defense grants and/or general competition for private grants that subsequently reduces focus on teaching and amplifies sponsored scholarship which encourages the *right* answers to the industries that fund their research—Washburn references a 2003 Yale study which concluded researchers were “significantly more likely to reach conclusions that [are] favorable to the sponsor.” In this sort of conflict of interest, business wins and students lose.
- (5) **Online classes and for-profit universities**—the University of Phoenix, for example, has 300000 students and is the largest recipient of federal student aid. Their model like the hybrid model many other universities are embracing creates a general distancing of teacher and student and can encourage the selling of degrees.
- (6) **Accreditation that links business partnerships**—while no official partnership exists, my colleagues in schools of education might appreciate the interesting connection between NCATE and Livetext.
- (7) **Use of contingent/part time/adjunct/“flexible” faculty**—Rebecca Clay in a 2008 *APA Online* article submits that 60% of faculty are contingent. Marc Bousquet, in his recent text, *How the university works*, suggests it is more like 66%. My university, overall, employs contingent faculty at a rate of about 30%. However, plenty of other non-union labor is employed or contracted out: food service, as mentioned; custodial services; construction work; etc.

(8) **Changing purpose of getting degree/education**—more and more I hear from students that the main reason they are in school is to secure a job (so don't bother me with the liberal arts!). Kristin Jensen in a 1999 *Sojourners* essay asks, "For what purposes do we as a society educate? Do we educate to develop citizens who are informed, active, and critical? To introduce as many people as possible to the joys of learning, to intellectual pursuits and the arts? Or, is the sole purpose of a degree to get a job? What is the value we as a society place on education?"

(9) **Student debt-load**—as the cost of getting an education rises (quickly), so does the student levels of debt that they carry with them into their jobs. No wonder the primary purpose of their education is to get a job to pay for the education to get a job...

Clearly, there is much more that can be said about this entire list. But, these were the issues that began to percolate and led me to question just what is happening in universities. Plus, more specifically, I was confronted with the issue of privatization when I organized the 2008 Rouge Forum conference at my university. I was informed that I would only be allowed to use food that was provided by Sodexo, even though I was using no university funds for the conference. Apparently, their contract assures them a monopoly over all food service on campus. While the administration finally gave in days before the conference, I nonetheless planned all meal activities off campus, frequenting, instead, locally-owned businesses. I felt using Sodexo, a trans-national corporation, stood in opposition to the purposes of an organization like the Rouge Forum.

What are others saying and what's the connection?

As noted at the outset, we should look at these corporatizing trends vis-à-vis neoliberalism. Neoliberalism can be defined to varying degrees by its quest for and use of (often scarce) resources, the expansion to global markets for products, privatization, the search for cheaper and cheaper labor, finance-monopoly control by corporate elites, an ideology of inevitability and supposed efficiency, and the further distancing of producer and consumer. This has resulted in the worsened condition of workers (stagnating wages; one-half the world's workers living on \$2 or less per day); conflict (genocide, piracy, war); reduction/destruction of the commons—pollution, private control of fresh water and airwaves; limited/obfuscated democracy; and technocratic policies like No Child Left Behind. [See the [Socialist Education Project](#); Cavanagh and Mander's *Alternatives to Economic Globalization*; and Ross and Gibson's *Neoliberalism and Education Reform* for more.]

Extracting the connections of a couple of these, I worry about an agenda to destroy the university commons. In the academy these might be thought of as curriculum/ideas, academic freedom, and the pursuit of truth from different perspectives—which requires a deep engagement of self. Washburn talks about this as the "information commons"—the free flow of knowledge for the public domain, scientific innovation, etc. So, given the impending demolition of public K-12 education through the mechanism of NCLB, the concern is that the university is the next frontier of control—accomplished through corporatization and market-based reforms.

Regarding the university and neoliberalism, Les Levidow, in Wayne Ross and Rich Gibson's excellent edited volume, *Neoliberalism and Education Reform*, argues "Higher education has special stakes for capitalist rule. Universities define the skills of professional workers for labor markets, reinforce ruling ideologies, and represent the needs of the state and industry of those in society. Chris Hedges, in a March, 2009 *Truthout* essay suggests that the US is in need of a moral bailout, that we have "trashed our universities, . . . turning them into vocational factories that produce corporate drones who chase after defense-related grants and funding."

And, of course, there is some history to this. Dating back to the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, which gave universities the right to profit from their research, James Andrews of the AAUP, submits that there were different circumstances that led institutions to increase their reliance on corporate practices over the past

several decades: a prolonged downturn in the U.S. economy decreased public and private financial support for higher education; alleged abuse by professors of tenure; and domination of institutional governing boards by successful business leaders who favor the application of free market principles. Thus, universities adopted a more corporate model that likens students to customers, professors to commodities that can be exploited and traded, and academic administrators to managers whose decisions make shared governance and due process inefficient and unnecessary. Levidow calls it “academic capitalism” for which “universities must raise their own productivity to survive so we find the rational move to standardizing curricula, knowledge that can be packaged in textbooks, students who become customers for products, and training for employability that leads to qualification inflation [that is, skill levels rise while wage levels fall], and reduction of knowledge to information processing.”

Taking on the role of professors, directly, Philip Kovacs’ 2008 essay in the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* juxtaposes the *neointellectual*—a willing tool who uses power, politics, and fear to perpetuate anti-democratic school initiatives—with the *public intellectual*—an individual using intellect to publicly critique those in power. The neointellectual in Kovacs’ calculus serves power in the face of the people and uses pseudoscience and fear to forward corporate orthodoxy and dogma, sweeping people and issues under the rug as they work to maintain the present social order. They are the products of power attempting to shape the US in corporate-friendly ways. On the other hand, public intellectuals serve people in the face of corporate or federal power, expose the lies of government, and confront orthodoxy and dogma. They rise organically from multiple publics.

Arguing that we are sprinting “toward a dictatorship of the flexible,” Bousquet weighs in on the overuse of adjunct/contingent faculty as a corporatizing trend. He suggests, “In thirty years of managed higher education, the typical faculty member has become a female, non-tenurable, part-timer earning a few thousand dollars a year without health benefits. The typical administrator is male, enjoys tenure, a six-figure income, little or no teaching, generous vacations, and great health care.” That we are overproducing PhDs is an intended outcome of the new corporate model of higher education. The labor of graduate student teaching can be extracted at a cheaper rate than full-time, tenure-track faculty. That PhDs are having a hard time finding a job is also an intended part of the system. Indeed, graduate student labor is sucking up all those faculty lines. Related, the AAUP, in their March-April, 2008 “Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession,” offers, “Colleges and universities increasingly conceptualize higher education as a commodity and attempt to provide it at the lowest cost. They do so by reorganizing themselves as ‘knowledge factories’ in which a variety of internal functions (for example, dining services and facilities maintenance) are outsourced to for-profit contractors who pay their workers minimum wages and in which the central teaching and research functions are outsourced to legions of poorly paid non-tenure track adjunct faculty, post-doctoral fellows, and graduate students.” [For more excellent analysis of this and other academic workplace issues, see: *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* at www.workplace-gsc.com, edited by Stephen Petrina and Wayne Ross).

My connection to these issues and how I participate in the system

My personal connection to these issues incorporate a few of the areas mentioned before. Not only have I come head to head with the administration over Sodexo and their food contract, but I have also encountered the corporate ethos surrounding salary and benefits as faculty compensation chair. Additionally, as the administrator of a large program within our liberal arts core (offering between 50-55 sections each semester), I am constantly managing the issue of adjunct faculty—50% or more of sections are taught by non-tenure track faculty. And, finally, I have witnessed the conservative trends within the university, finding myself in the center of battles to sign a university declaration to denounce the genocide in Darfur only to be told that the university does not hold *university* positions on such issues (at a Catholic school, no less); to appropriately respond to a neo-Nazi on our campus (whiteness leapt to the fore, forsaking the students of color); to bring free condoms back to campus (a struggle resulting from a much more conservative wave of Catholicism moving back to the area), and to offer courses in my

program with content that deeply explores issues of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation (the last of which has created a mini stir; but, to the university's credit, they have permitted all proposed courses).

So, how do we resist?

Scholars do have some ideas about how we might fight back. Kovacs suggests that scholars must participate in social struggle. He holds the main obstacles have been the inaccessible language with which scholars write; overall scholarly duties, that is, the pressure to specialize and publish in top flight journals [which few people read]; a fetishlike worship of objectivity ("pure science"); the various responsibilities toward the academy; and finally, postmodern theory, arguing that postmodernists rarely offer solutions or anything to help the critical voices organize and act. Kovacs claims, "Progressive scholars must find ways to use the collective voices identified and legitimated by postmodern theorists in order to build coalitions capable of working against neoconservative/neoliberal change agents. . . .Scholars must offer, and work to realize, alternatives to the status quo. . . .One solution is for progressive scholars to act publicly, making their voices heard across various publics and privates, as well as before local, state, and federal legislative bodies."

Andrews talks of developing a "new social compact," which will hold ourselves to strict standards with peer review while society agrees to support universities in return for high quality education (and allowing us to not have to compete for and depend on corporate funding). He submits that faculty senates must insist on participating in discussions about all newly proposed faculty positions and institutional operating principles and practices on their campuses, including debates about proposals to establish contingent faculty positions and implement faculty salary incentive plans that give bonus payments to faculty who compete successfully for externally-funded research grants and contracts.

Levidow talks of "counterstrategies" which can link resistance across constituencies and places. He holds that we must link all targets of the neoliberal attack worldwide, circulate analyses of anti-marketization struggles, enhance solidarity efforts, and turn ourselves into collective subjects of resistance. Similarly, Washburn offers potential solutions which include the public exposure of industry–university connections; the public funding of education, period; and stricter conflict of interest rules.

Some theoretical considerations and my own strategies for the upcoming year

We understand that education is, historically, a tool of capital. As well, we note Che Guevara's assertion that we will never be able to dismantle capital with capital's tools. And, we note that what is to come will be built on top of what exists, presently. So, we are left with a dilemma, perhaps dialectic, in the present milieu of education. While it is used as a tool of capital for domination, how might we recognize education's potential as a tool of social progress and humanization for liberation?

In a recent address at the Marxism 2009 conference (www.davidharvey.org), David Harvey talks about theories of social change in Marx's *Capital*. Given our particular world economic crisis he claims the potential for a new society means we must grapple with seven issues, what he also refers to as "moments" – each in a dialectical relationship to the other and none as having primacy over the other. These moments include nature, technology, social relations, organization of production, mental conceptions of the world, defining daily life, and administrative relationships/hierarchies. Specifically, he suggests we must start somewhere, anywhere—as long as we do not remain at any one moment too long; that is, it is an evolving process, ever-changing. For university professors, he submits, we might begin by wresting control of our universities back from neoliberal control and corporate elites. As a result, then, what might we make possible regarding our mental conceptions of the world, social relations, and our treatment/development of nature and technology?

I am reminded, again, of Gibson's conception of the centrality of teachers to capitalism. Teachers provide a main mechanism of social reproduction in the system of capital. On the flipside of the same coin,

however, he also suggests the potentially resistant role they may play. Imagine the walk-out of a nation's teachers! And, as I noted in my previous essay in [Issue 13](#), Glenn Rikowski reminds we workers of our power: "Labour power is the supreme value-creating power on which capital depends for its existence, and it is incorporated within labourers, who have the potential to withhold this wonderful social force (through strikes or leaving the employment of capital) or worse, to use labour-power for anti-capitalist activity and ultimately non-capitalist forms of production."

So, connected to Harvey's point, university educators will need to take back control of our universities in order that the concept of *labor power* may be better understood. Moreover, perhaps this more resistant/revolutionary version of it might be implemented by future teachers. Instead of unconsciously indoctrinating our children with the glitzy allure of consumerism and knowingly or unknowingly foreclosing their full human potential through standardizing and sorting curricula, perhaps future teachers can learn how to expand the horizons of their students and augment their potential as human beings—what Peter McLaren has in mind when he develops his revolutionary critical pedagogy, which prepares students to consider life outside the social universe of capital. As well, it calls to mind McLaren's conception of "critical subjectivity" (in Ross and Gibson's edited text) for which pedagogy becomes "the identification of shared experiences and common interests, the unraveling of the threads that connect social process to individual experience, rendering transparent the concealed obviousness of everyday life, the recognition of shared positionality, unhinging the door that separates practical engagement from theoretical reflection, the changing of the world by changing one's nature."

And, now we begin to weave the theoretical threads of pedagogy (particularly in teacher education) and Harvey's seven moments with the proposed solutions of social struggle, a new social compact, and counterstrategies that demand the demeanor of the public intellectual in order to resist the neoliberal creep into our universities. To this end I am emboldened to embrace the forthcoming school year and consider the possibility of both local and global action, individual and allied struggle. I invite your feedback and your solidarity. As well, I would be glad to know of your efforts and how I might assist.

I see this work as falling out a long two strands: the first a more reformist/ameliorative one, the second a more revolutionary/transformational one. Regarding the *reformist/ameliorative strand*, and how we might work within the given system, I think about my work as an administrator. Relative to the use of adjuncts, Bousquet, Washburn, et al remind us to keep the use of adjunct/contingent faculty in check, recognizing the real struggle of such workers in academic economy. I have already started processes under which adjuncts have opportunities for additional stipends for professional development, multiple opportunities to teach the same courses semester after semester (to bring some stability to their work life), and will begin a program this year for which adjunct faculty may be able to take advantage of travel money from the budget. Also related to the program, we will continue to increase the diversity of faculty teaching the classes as well as the content of the courses. Last year, we increased the diversity of faculty teaching in the program by 130%. As well, we significantly increased the number of courses focused on social difference and social justice, particularly relative to the Global South. These are changes that Kovacs, Harvey, and others might have in mind when we think about interrupting the status quo in higher education.

Also along this strand, I can continue my work chairing the faculty compensation committee as a way of protecting and enhancing faculty benefits and salary. Regarding Sodexo, while we mounted a successful campaign in the past to bring fairly traded coffee onto campus, our future work needs to focus on bringing locally-grown produce to campus. In terms of scholarship, as the game of academe rolls on, it will be necessary to continue to attempt to speak truth to power in the upper tier journals and the more *preferred* conferences. And, finally, perhaps providing a bridge to the other strand, pedagogical practices in the classroom can continue to be sharpened toward an even more critical analysis of our current crisis, the historical forces/events that led us to it, and a reasoned/structural hypothesis for how we should move

forward from here. While working within the system of programs, courses, and faculty governance, perhaps we can employ some counterstrategies and work to create more democratic administrative relationships.

Regarding the **revolutionary/transformativ** strand, Kovacs' urging to seek the position of public intellectual resonates. To some degree, the academic games will need to be forsaken, seeking more popular audiences for this work and analysis. This might take many forms, of course, from critical service learning; to public protest; to culture circles among my partners in the Global South, my colleagues (sympathetic to the issues of social justice), and my students. Similar to McLaren's and Andrews' conceptions, respectively, this creates the possibility for a more critical subjectivity and a new social compact. Like the force of neoliberalism, this community building action should not be underestimated. Already, some faculty have begun to organically organize themselves, meeting on a regular basis outside of school to discuss crucial issues facing our academic lives (such a meeting with adjunct faculty is also about to occur). As well, such meetings have also begun with students, breaking bread twice/month off campus in order to discuss current events, sharpen our analyses, and plan critical/resistive action. This work embodies a revolutionary pedagogy for which we come to understand our centripetal location in the system of capital. Transformative action can emerge from our evolving mental conceptions of the world.

I invite your feedback, stories, and possibilities for allied resistance to this neoliberal creep.

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Adam Renner is an Associate Professor at Bellarmine University, the community coordinator for the Rouge Forum and editor of the Rouge Forum News.

By way of addendum, I think the AAUP provides a nice checklist to consider whether or not your university is succumbing to corporatizing trends.

A Corporatization Checklist (AAUP)

Does your institution exhibit any of the telltale signs of creeping corporate influence? If you recognize more than one or two of these signs, you need to act immediately. Is your college or university:

- Hiring low-paid, non-tenured contingent faculty to replace departing tenured and tenure-track faculty?
- Decreasing financial aid based primarily on the prospective students' need?
- Increasing merit-based scholarships?
- Paying high corporate-level salaries (especially when compared with faculty salaries) to academic administrators?
- Increasing reliance on academic search firms—expensive and inadequate substitutes for an appropriately constituted, well-directed, and faculty-dominated search committee?
- Devaluing the faculty's teaching and service contributions while increasing emphasis on externally funded faculty research?
- Decreasing health and retirement benefits for faculty in an environment in which the costs of health care and retirement are rising rapidly?
- Eliminating currently unpopular courses and curricular programs formerly regarded as essential to a college education and establishing for-profit courses without regard to long-term educational value?
- Increasing emphasis on intercollegiate athletics as a selling point for admissions and fund raising, complemented by increased spending on teams (not matched by increased spending on teaching, research, or financial aid).

EDITORIAL

When AIG got its credit default swaps in a bunch, they were not shut down and reconstituted by the US Treasury Department. They were invited to back a truck up to the US taxpayers vault and shovel dollars into it. They made several trips. What is it now, \$180 billion? What were the performance bonuses for AIG's failed managers and traders, \$454 million?

When Citigroup, Bank of America, JP Morgan, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs and others were driven into insolvency by reckless banking and investment practices they were not shut down and reconstituted by the US Treasury Department. They were invited to take over the US treasury and to run it themselves. And if there was not enough in the American people's vault, the Federal Reserve offered to print more money for them. What was the bank bailout, \$700 billion in its first installment?

In the wake of the bankruptcy filing by General Motors, it is widely reported that the "US taxpayer owns a 60% share" in the failed automaker. But the chief representative of the US taxpayer, President Obama says, "What we are not doing — what I have no interest in doing — is running G.M." So, majority ownership apparently entitles the US taxpayer to cough up another \$50 billion and stand by and watch. When the company fires enough workers, closes enough plants in the US, and kills the health care and pension benefits of enough retirees it will emerge as "the new GM."

One of the central features of the fascist state is the melding of corporate power and finance capital with governmental power. Sometime before the Italian people left Benito Mussolini hanging on a meat hook, he uttered one truism, "Fascism should more properly be called corporatism because it is the merger of state and corporate power."

Nascent fascism explains the US Department of Education diametrically opposite treatment of the public schools. The attack on public education gathered steam throughout the Reagan years and then was formally launched through the Business Roundtable's Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1989. The ball has been carried in the years since by corporate forces--Gates, Broad, the Walton (Wal-Mart) Family, and others. But in this moment of declining economic fortunes in corporate America (Bill Gates' personal fortune reduced by \$18 billion, Warren Buffet's losses total \$25 billion, Eli Broad's KB Homes and stake in AIG both in decline) the US government must step into the breach.

Enter US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and the plan to use billions of taxpayer dollars to rescue the flagging corporate plan to shut down and reconstitute the public schools in the most depressed American communities and build the charter school movement as a viable replacement education system. Duncan's objectives are described by Sam Dillon in the New York Times (link below).

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/02/education/02educ.html?hp>

If recent developments do portend a fascist America there are certain facts that public school workers and their allies should know. A full blown fascist state has no use for teachers unions or unions of any kind. Indeed, the corporate state has no use for universal public education at all. It's education for the privileged few, slavery for the rest.

Paul A. Moore is a teacher at Miami Carol City High School

RESPONSE TO SOCIAL DARWINIST BS

Gina Stiens

All that is natural has been corrupted by that which is social
Evolved to compete, to consider individual interests
rather than humanity.
Humans have the ability to empathize, sympathize,
feel remorse,
and desire at the deepest level
but socialized to fight for the top
ignoring such emotions
stunted by artificial desires for power.
It's easy to go beyond meeting basic needs
when we are consumed by greed
a sad justification for a racist and patriarchal distribution of power

I challenge us to evolve in our ability to connect
to look one another in the eye
and see ourselves
rather than the other

Perhaps we have become more like parasites
whose survival is dependent on the suffering of another
but parasites are small.
Consumers of media, one sided histories,
propaganda, quick fixes,
and hate filled sermons
where greed is key
where hate is the means
With sad attempts to justify one's self-righteous position
without consideration for the cost
It's easy to come out on top in a game that is rigged
in a game formulated to fulfill the functions of this capitalist agenda

I challenge us to evolve in our ability to connect
To look one another in the eye
And see ourselves
Rather than the other

Gina Stiens is a social worker and an adjunct faculty member at Bellarmine University.

WHY CAN'T YOU SEE ME?

Sonya Burton

Why can't you see me?
I'm standing right in front of you.
You say you stand for me and
In the same breath you ignore me-
By breaking me-
Down
Down to a single set of statistics
Test scores
And generalizations
You don't know me
You choose not to know me
Because knowing me
Would be too difficult
Knowing me would mean
That you are doing things all wrong
That maybe I belong
To a different song
A tune
Not so subdued
A tune with music that has nothing
To do with you
I am not your next article
Or your next book
I am not your next experiment
"let's see what happens to the poor kids if..."
You talk of my survival
While killing me
Slowly
Silently
Stripping me
Of my culture,
My self-esteem and most
Important, my humanity.

Why can't you see me?
You talk of building community and then you teach me
To assimilate
And participate
In multiple systems you have in place
Hoping I won't recognize
That hidden under your disguise
is not democracy and I am not free-
This is your legacy-
Built on whiteness
Sameness
& difference as a deficit
because difference is dangerous.
You are capitalism

Dressed in a suit
You determine what I need
Just by looking at me
On a piece of paper
Non-white- check
Below the poverty line- check
Illiterate- check
Your answer w/out
Even knowing the question
Is to feed me a one size fits all
Program
My indoctrination
To a schooling where there
Ain't no mental stimulation
So I ask, "When do I get my education?"
I'm not talkin' about education in a box
Where textbook publishers decide
Whose values are worthy
And whose are not
To the point that these values
Are stuffed down my throat
Day after day, until I choke
on my own tears
because everything I know has been obliterated
has disappeared

So don't act like you know me
You only know what you want me to be
I am your dutiful soldier
Following orders
never questioning
The reality you bestowed on me
The world on my shoulders
You train me to believe
if I just work hard
I too, can achieve
the American Dream!
Dominant culture's most effective
Strategy
Depositing in us all-
"the national myth of
Equality, democracy"
In the land of the free

Yes, I too have the opportunity
To exploit the poor
And give to the rich
A backwards
Robin Hood
A "kleptocratic" witch
But what you did not bank on

In this misguided system
Is me
Finding knowledge
My own re-invention
A knowledge
From experience
A Dialogue
With others
Transformation of an unjust world
With love and
Humanity at the center

Love so strong
Cultures come together
My goddess to your god
sisters and brothers
a multi-cultural celebration
A beautiful truth
So, why don't you see me?
Because I see all of you!

Sonya Burton teaches at Bellarmine University, instructing courses on critical literacy, social studies methods, and general curriculum and instruction. She is completing her Ph.D at the University of Louisville.

PSYCHO INC.

Billy X. Curmano

Per-son-al-i-ty ...never meant that much to me
'Til I took a bath ...with a psychopath.

*And uh oh psycho
An Oh No psycho
And uh oh psycho
An Oh No psycho (REFRAIN)

But wait ...what's that ...the 14th amendment was hijacked
Written to protect the backs of emancipated blacks.
Corporate lawyers got in the act
Stealing human rights for their corporate packs
Making corporate inalienable rights, in fact
The corporation as a person is just plain whacked.

Corporation ...domination ...legal individuation
Life, liberty, property and limited liability ...Intergenerational tyranny

No morality ...is what we really see
An it makes you think ...it's Psycho Inc.

*(REFRAIN)

Multinational corporations bring salvation to 3rd world nations near
starvation.
But when the wages rise as workers try for that bigger prize,
The corporate guys just say, "bye-bye".

An' it's
Trickle down economics, Mac.
Trickle down
Trickle down
Piss on you, Jack.

When everything become just a resource,
To rape and pillage and plunder of course.
The EPA may set tolerable limits to enforce,
But when the cost to comply over rides the fine
Corporate profits follow their bottom line.
...Rape now and pay later.
Externality ...transports costs to you and me
For pity Pete sake ...we pay for their mistakes.

*(REFRAIN)

“A man could no more sell land than he could sell the sea or the air
that he breathes...

One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk.” – So say,
Chief Tecumseh

Common lands became private property ...then commodity,
Commoditized and privatized ...the earth, the sea and the skies.
In Cochabamba Bechtel even tried to tax the rain, but the people rose
up and said that’s insane.
Their own government replied, “Corporate rights trump human rights.”
One hundred seventy five were injured and six died on the peoples’ side.
But that Bolivian fight won back their water rights and the gangsters
of capitalism went off to hide.

Intercede to stop their greed ...make them follow the medics’ creed
Do No Harm. An’ Do No Harm. An’ Do No Harm.
Reading, writing, and arithmetic become
Reflection, rage and rebellion when the people speak as one.

The terminator gene can be plainly seen as a doom machine and patents
on life itself won’t help.
Corporate power increases every hour.
No head to put on a plate. No body to incarcerate.
But all activity has responsibility
And as the queen once said
Off with their heads.
And as the queen once said
Off with their corporate fucking heads.

(Sings)

Big brother watchin' me.
Big brother watchin' you.
Big brother can't you see,
Who, Who-Who Who-Who Whooooo.
(Roughly shouted)

Terrorist! Terrorist! (Repeat)

(Spoken Word)

Who the fuck and what is up
And now they got me pissin' in a cup! (Repeat)

(Refrain)

We are not criminals! (Repeat)
We are your sisters and brothers and fathers and mothers.
We are not criminals! (Repeat)

(Spoken)

We have the largest incarcerated population in the western world
And most for non-violent, victimless crimes
That break up families
Tear out breadwinners.
I grew up believing the commies did that.
Looks like the tables are turned and now it's us.

(Refrain)

(Sing/song)

Free our brothers
Free our sisters
Free our fathers
Free our mothers
Free them now ...free them now ...free them now, now, now

Revolution Revolution
We will win or tear it down.

Call for steering committee

The Rouge Forum a group of educators, students, and parents seeking a democratic society. We are concerned with questions like: How can we teach against racism, nationalism and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals AND teach? Whose interests do schools serve in a society that is ever more unequal? We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring those into practice.

Needless to say, work toward these goals in the spirit of justice, demands organization. The Rouge Forum is now more than 10 years old. Over the first decade of its existence, members have built an international network of around 4500 professors, teachers, students, artists, and other social service workers. We have engaged in actions, put on conferences, written papers, and built the capacity of our community. We have done these things with no attachment to any hierarchy or any official organizing strategies. Wanting to keep the horizontal nature of such a network while also desiring to better coordinate our actions, the RF is currently accepting nominations for the 09-10 Steering Committee.

Members of the Steering Committee will be expected to actively promote the 2010 conference and attend where possible, help develop and actively participate in Regional RF Chapters, attend the Fall Steering Committee retreat, promote the RF at other conferences, seek out like-minded people and organizations to link the RF with, provide essays for the Rouge Forum News where possible, and build the capacity of our community by support of its members.

In particular this steering committee will be crucial toward the formation of Regional Chapters, mentioned in the list above. We would like to see regular meetings of the regional chapters and work toward some type of coordinated action (e.g., a one day freedom school, a teach-in, a one-day retreat for teachers, an evening panel/speaker on a coordinated topic, a protest action, etc. as a lead up to the 2010 conference and as a preview of more focused, coordinated, and regular actions in the future). Perhaps in organizing more locally/regionally, we can spend more time face to face, as well as enacting nation/world-wide coordinated actions. Please send your nomination to Adam Renner at arenner@bellarmine.edu by September 1, 2009.