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Introduction

Contemporary Educator Movements: Transforming Unions, Schools and Society in North America (Part 1)

Teacher Learning In/Through Social Movements

Rhiannon Maton

State University of New York at Cortland

Erin Dyke

Oklahoma State University

Lauren Ware Stark

Bowdoin College

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The present issue of *Critical Education* constitutes the first of four issues in a special series, Contemporary Educator Movements: Transforming Unions, Schools and Society in North America. This series has been assembled by us in an effort to bring the history and current character of research on teacher organizing and activism to readers both familiar with and new to such work. The focus of this issue is “Teacher Learning In/Through Social Movements,” and it will be followed by another three issues of *Critical Education*, themed on “(Anti)Racism, Democracy, and Social Justice Unionism,” “Understanding the 2018 Statewide Walkouts” and “Education Labor Movements Across the Americas.”

Educator activists and their unions have increasingly been the subject of daily news in the U.S. and beyond. They are making headlines in their efforts to protest and resist neoliberal profit-driven and privatization agendas for public education and to articulate the ongoing role of systemic racism, economic marginalization and structural inequity in limiting the lives and opportunities of children (Weiner, 2012). Educator-driven social movements are perhaps most visible in the recent Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action (e.g., Jones & Hagopian, 2020; Morrison & Porter-Webb, 2019) and the ongoing teachers unions strikes in various regions extending across the U.S. and beyond (e.g., Blanc, 2019; Dyke & Muckian-Bates, 2019). This issue of *Critical Education* considers how learning underlies and informs such educator-led activism and organizing drives.

Learning is embedded throughout social movement activities. As individual people engage in social movements, they undergo learning processes that allow them to make sense of their identities and relationship with broader systems of power, alongside designing and honing methods for triggering change (e.g., Choudry, 2015; Chovanec, 2009; Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Freire, 2004; Stark & Maton, 2019). Organizations, including unions and educators’ grassroots groups, learn to design and mobilize effective strategy and tactics that align with their values (e.g., Maton, 2018; Taylor, 2001). Movements themselves may be construed as pedagogical spaces of learning through contestation (e.g., Foley, 1999; Hall & Clover, 2005; Stark, 2019; Tarlau, 2014). Learning is embedded within and across the individual, organizational and movement levels, and the growth and success of change-making efforts are in part dependent upon the ability of people and their organizations and movements to develop and refine their thinking and practice over time.

The three articles and interview in this initial issue together present an image of how educators are drawing upon and making sense of knowledge resources in their quest to push for an equitable public school system. In the first article in this issue, Tricia Niesz argues that learning processes are central to contemporary educator movements. Niesz examines how a range of international case studies show that activist educators build “knowledge bridges” between social movements and public schooling in the effort to trigger justice-oriented educational change. In the second essay, Kathleen Riley demonstrates the value of creating intentional pedagogical spaces within educator-led organizations. Through highlighting the example of a summer book series run by Philadelphia’s Caucus of Working Educators, she shows that pedagogical spaces can support the membership growth, strategic analysis and tactical skill of grassroots educator-led organizations and their allies.

In the third article, Dana Morrison discusses how past social movements continue to inform the social justice unionist movement today through examining the reflections of four teacher organizers from Philadelphia’s Caucus of Working Educators. Morrison emphasizes that educational justice organizing is historically situated and cannot be separated from movements of the past. In the final publication, Jessica Shiller interviews Keysha Goodwin, para-educator and organizer with the Baltimore Movement of Rank-and-File Educators Caucus (BMORE). Shiller

and Goodwin discuss motivations for involvement in union organizing, ongoing advocacy campaigns for members and communities of color, and the significance of a social justice union caucus winning union leadership positions. Goodwin's experiences suggest the significance of BMORE's racial and social justice lens for analyzing and collectively responding to the city's educational policies, and how such a commitment "keeps us going" and "keep[s] the fire burning."

Taken together, the four contributions in this issue expand our knowledge of how practitioners learn across time and place, and the diverse range of texts and historically-situated experiences that union organizers draw upon in the process. As the articles by Niesz and Morrison suggest, while there is literature examining learning in social movements writ large, there is little attention paid to learning and knowledge sharing within contemporary educator movements. Riley, Niesz and Morrison together provide in-depth views on what learning looks like within particular educator-led activist and organizing groups. Together with Shiller's interview of Goodwin, these contributions demonstrate how increased attention to learning and knowledge sharing in and among contemporary educator movements can expand and strengthen their relations and praxes.

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