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Teaching Labor Unionism in Schools Towards Economic and Social Justice

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Abstract

Despite efforts, education has failed to provide meaningful solutions to the global inequality crisis. In response to the crisis, education policymakers remain committed to human capital approaches among other flawed policy paradigms. This paper advocates for explicit teaching about labor unionism in schools as a tool for enabling young people to combat wealth and income inequality. In an analysis both “of” and “for” policy, it mobilizes international evidence to show that participation in labor unions leads directly to lower rates of wealth and income inequality among a variety of other positive social and economic outcomes. Suggestions that teaching about labor unionism in schools poses an ideological dilemma are rejected, as fields of enterprise and entrepreneurship education show that education systems are already engaged in the promotion of specific types of economic behavior. With a broad focus on the (dominantly) English-speaking democracies, selected programs for teaching about labor unionism in schools are surveyed and their potential for scaling and replication is discussed. The paper is intended as a critical policy analysis for consideration by a diversity of education policy actors, including unions, schools and teachers themselves.



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Introduction

Despite efforts, education has failed to provide solutions to wicked economic and social problems. The global crisis in wealth and income inequality is well-documented (Atkinson, 2015; Bourguignon, 2015; Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2015). Without serious reform, this crisis is likely to worsen and become further entrenched (Piketty, 2014). Rising income and wealth inequality are linked to a range of harmful social phenomena, including higher rates of interpersonal violence, high rates of imprisonment, declining public health, substance abuse, youth pregnancy, even threats to democratic processes and institutions (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; see also Stiglitz, 2012; Taibbi, 2014). Overwhelmingly, efforts to address the international crisis in wealth and income inequality through education have been amiss. Despite its promises, the global expansion of access to education has not reduced inequality, nor is there clear evidence that it has affected any significant change in the structure and outcomes of labor markets. Nor have education systems shied away from promoting specific forms of economic activity in pursuit of social aims. As national education systems seek to develop ‘enterprising’ citizens with ‘entrepreneurial mindsets’ in all areas of their lives, these ideas are even sold as solutions to inequality, poverty, and related problems, even as they risk perpetuating them through conciliation with neoliberal economic values. While economic wellbeing is recognized as a goal of schooling internationally, the question of what education systems can do to counteract the inequality crisis deserves fresh attention and new direction.

This paper argues that programs for teaching and learning about labor unionism in schools can be a way for education systems to promote genuine economic and social justice, an idea that has been the subject of some recent discussion (see for example Perry, 2018; Preston, 2018; Hawkes, 2018; Queensland schools unions; 2018). The paper mobilizes existing research, policy analysis and policy texts, public data, media and other literature in a critical policy analysis to support the presence of labor union programs within schools. Critical policy analysis (sometimes called policy sociology) is a diverse category unified primarily by a commitment to moral values and social change (Ball, 1997; Torregano & Shannon, 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Lize, 2015), ‘set apart from other policy work’ in that it is ‘favourably disposed to the critique of oppressive social practices’ (Gale, 2001, p. 148). The article is intended as an analysis ‘of’ and ‘for’ policy, critiquing existing policy and promoting a space for alternative action (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009). As Ball (1998) discusses, a tension in all policy analysis is “the need to attend to the local particularities of policy making and policy enactment and the need to be aware of general patterns and apparent commonalities or convergence across localities” (p. 119). Rather than analyze the specificities of policy change within local contexts, this paper addresses patterns and opportunities that exist broadly across the major (dominantly) English-speaking democracies, namely the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

Critical policy analysis considers ‘how education policy shapes practice, while at the same time retaining theoretical explanations of complex patterns of causation from a political economy approach [...] including critical theorists’ commitment to equality ideals’ (Rata, 2014, p. 348). In this instance, the proposal for labor union education programs in schools derives from evidence that labor unions are essential to socioeconomic equality and other forms of economic justice. The decline of labor union membership internationally has paralleled rising income and wealth inequality closely, along with its attendant social problems. Programs for teaching about labor unionism in schools already exist internationally, and there is clear potential for their expansion and proliferation, even if support is lacking at the level of policymaking and enactment. Teaching about labor unionism in schools can be a means for the renewal and rejuvenation of labor unions as a vital step

towards economic justice, as well as a mechanism for schools to intervene directly in the socioeconomic crises confronting the societies they are intended to serve.

Critical policy analysts have also stressed the significance of alternative actors within a broad conception of policymaking and enactment. We might consider a further tension in policy analysis—that between policy work likely to be taken up by state policy actors, and more critical work that risks being overlooked due to lack of political enthusiasm or political opposition (Hogwood et al., 1984). As discussed below, labor union membership has declined internationally in recent decades as a result of deliberate policies. Governments and policymakers responsible for these policies are perhaps unlikely to embrace the teaching of unionism in schools. While education policymakers and official actors should be exhorted to support the teaching of labor unionism in schools, independent actors such as academics, civil society groups, activist teachers, and labor unions themselves have already achieved much in the area. Critical policy work should be “connected to society by an umbilical cord”, including “the associations, movements and publics that [are] outside both state and economy”, such as labour unions (Burawoy, 2005, 24). It is hoped the analysis below will have significance beyond state policymakers, including those already active in the field.

The paper is divided into four sections that relate to the need for teaching about labor unions in schools. Firstly, it surveys and critiques prevailing ideas regarding the relationship between education systems and inequality. Contrary to widely held beliefs, simply improving the quality of and access to educational credentials will likely have little or no impact on economic growth or wealth and income inequality. This reinforces the need for educational programs that aim explicitly to disrupt inequality, such as teaching about labor unions. Secondly, the paper reviews evidence showing the vital importance of labor unionism to the mitigation of rising wealth and income inequality. Though seldom recognized, evidence showing the importance of labor union membership to economic justice is conclusive. A third section explores the field of enterprise or entrepreneurship education to argue that education systems are already engaged in the teaching of certain types of economic behavior, and that, rather than alleviating inequality, entrepreneurship education may instead serve to augment it. What is more, the widespread popularity of entrepreneurship education among policymakers problematizes the criticism that labor union programs in schools “politicize” education. A final section canvasses selected existing programs for teaching about labor unionism in schools internationally. Though many of these programs lack robust political support from government and policymakers, there is nevertheless potential for scaling and replicating them. Many, for example, are implemented successfully by labor unions, academics, schools and teachers.

Clarifying the Relationship between Education and Inequality

Internationally, a number of false ideas inform education policy and practice in relation to economic affairs. Some of these ideas serve as a distraction from certain facts of the relationship, as well as from meaningful alternative solutions to enduring economic problems. In recent decades, various schools of thoughts have promoted the idea that education (in the form of educational credentials) is crucial to economic growth and wealth redistribution. Human Capital Theory, New Growth Theory and other endogenous growth models, and ideas of a global “knowledge economy” have popularized conceptions of economic development deriving from investment in education, as well as the idea that by improving access to educational credentials it is possible to alleviate income inequality. Indeed, “the increased centrality of education policy in relation to questions of economic competitiveness and social justice is premised on the hope that education and training will

improve competitiveness of industries, but at the same time lead to a greater equality of income” (Allais, 2011, pp. 255-256). Similar hopes within the general public have helped to stimulate massive increases in higher education enrolments across the West since the end of WWII (Chang, 2010; Pritchett, 2001). In the present, the belief that higher education leads to high-income, secure work continues to drive huge numbers of young people into higher education, despite the fact that “college can help only a few of us resolve our labor market difficulties” (Tannock, 2006, p. 45). Indeed, the possibility that improving educational quality and expanding access “can lead to economic and social and individual salvation” has been “an article of faith” among policymakers and publics akin to an “Education Gospel” (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004, p. 1).

Despite its popularity, there is no clear evidence to support the idea that greater levels of education lead to wealth and income redistribution (Allais, 2012a; 2012b; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Chang, 2010; Brown & Lauder, 2006; Pritchett, 2001; Wolf, 2002; 2004). Certainly, it has not been borne out by the facts of the global explosion in higher education enrolments, a trend that has not been matched by associated increases in incomes (Pritchett, 2001). The notion of a globalized, job-rich, high-income labor market crying out for “knowledge workers” has been described, rightly, as a myth (Lauder & Brown, 2011). Rather, inequality has worsened significantly across the West in the decades since the emergence of a global discourse around the global “knowledge economy”. In the UK and elsewhere, the proliferation of low-income jobs populated by highly educated individuals has led to the emergence of what is described as emerging “educated underclass” (Roth, 2019).

Enduring belief in the power of education to alleviate economic problems can be attributed in part to misunderstanding. Certain observational truths, such as that people with higher levels of education tend to have higher incomes, contributes to confusion. Numerous research studies prove the positive correlation between level of education and personal income across various data (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008; Harmon, et al., 2003; Mincer, 1958; Rindermann, 2008; Weede & Kampf, 2002). This “microeconomic” impact of education, however, does not show that overall levels of education lead to higher levels of economic growth or to more equal distribution, in what has been described as the microeconomic-macroeconomic contradiction (Pritchett, 2001). Some studies fail to distance their microeconomic claims from macroeconomic implications, or confuse them, pointing to microeconomic returns to education as evidence of macroeconomic value (see for example UNESCO, 2013). Analytical work advancing these and related ideas has been described as promoting “simplistic theories” (Wolf, 2004) and even “amateur sociology” (Krugman, 2013).

Similar conflation has been made for political or ideological purposes. The famous report on education in the United States, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), is an early example of a discourse of educational failure being mobilized to explain alleged economic problems. This discourse has endured at the level of global education policy, evident, for example in former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair’s exhortation that “education is the best economic policy we have” (Blair, 1998, p. 9) and in similar claims by successive UK governments (Granoulhac, 2018). An emphasis on education provides an effective distraction from the fact that income and wealth inequality is often an outcome of economic structure. Accordingly, “the reason why income inequalities have grown is not explained as a ‘structural’ problem—that the proportion of high-skilled, high-waged jobs is limited by the occupational structure—but due to the failure of the education system to make a larger proportion of the workforce employable in the global competition for high-skilled, high-waged work” (Brown & Lauder, 2006, p. 27). In other words, “the ‘market of qualifications’ approach rests on a notion of ‘choice’ and of ‘employability’ which is at heart about blaming individuals for the lack of

jobs.” As such, “education, and particularly vocational education and skills, becomes part of how policy makers avoid addressing structural problems in the economy” (Allais, 2012b, p. 639). The obsession with “employability” is inevitable if educationalists focus exclusively on reforming education systems as a response to problems such as poverty and income inequality.

Despite the enormous expectations placed on education systems, claims that economic growth can be promoted simply by improving the quality and accessibility of education are not supported by evidence, fraught with “assumptions about how unmeasurable things affected other unmeasurable things” (Krugman, 2013). The global expansion of access to education and efforts to improve education quality do not provide solutions to the crisis in wealth and income inequality. Materialist critiques of liberal educational goals have sought to draw attention to the structuralized nature of economic inequality within capitalist economy—rather than caused by differences in educational achievement, patterns of income and wealth inequality are determined by the system of economic relations, perpetuated primarily by property arrangements, policy decisions, and market forces (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). These facts should prompt an urgent, evidence-based reappraisal of what contribution education systems can make towards the mitigation of socioeconomic inequality.

Economic and Social Justice: The Evidence for Labor Unions

Though seldom recognized by political leaders, policymakers and dominant media, the evidence for a positive relationship between labor union membership and lower levels of income and wealth inequality is conclusive. Since the 1980s, declining labor union membership has been one of the most significant contributors to rapidly escalating socioeconomic inequality internationally across developed countries (Dromey, 2018; Farber *et al*, 2018; ILO, 2013; ISSC, IDS & UNESCO, 2016; OECD, 2012; Onaran *et al*, 2015). Some have argued that deunionization has been “the most important single factor” in determining equity levels in developed countries (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). As a result, policies designed to encourage workers to join and be active in labor unions have been specifically recommended by a number of international agencies, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2013), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD & ILO, 2018), and Oxfam (Oxfam, 2018). Even the International Monetary Fund, often criticized as a proponent of neoliberal structural reform, affirms that “deunionization is associated with less redistribution of income” such that, internationally, “about half of the increase in the Gini of net income is driven by deunionisation” (Jaumotte & Buitron, 2015). Despite its equally questionable record on deunionisation, the World Bank has long confirmed in its own research that “union density correlates negatively with labor earnings inequality and wage dispersion” (Aidt & Tzannatos, 2002, p. 11). Overall union density within a workforce has been shown to lift incomes not only for unionized workers but for non-union workers, through factors such as upward pressure on wage and salary levels across industries and firms, downward pressure on executive salaries, even improved access to public services through union lobbying (Farber *et al*, 2018).

Deunionisation has not been a natural process. Rather, it has been a hallmark of global neoliberal reform since the 1980s (Hogler, 2015). Arguably, rather than entirely new to neoliberalism, policies to constrain labor union activity represent a sharpening of historic antagonism among employers and sympathetic governments towards organized labor. Across developed countries, the introduction of individualized employment agreements and laws to curtail collective bargaining and other forms of industrial action have sped the decline of union membership. The erosion of workers’ collective bargaining power has created a power

imbalance between workers and employers, particularly for mid- or low-skilled workers who would otherwise lack power in labour markets (Dromey, 2018; Ryall & Blumenfeld, 2016). Take the example of New Zealand, whose radical neoliberal reforms between 1987 and 1999 were described as a world model for structural adjustment (Kelsey, 1997). New Zealand “led the way” in the deregulation of centralized wage bargaining with the introduction of its 1991 Employment Contracts Act, provoking protests of unprecedented scale and resulting in a “plunge in union membership and density [...] far more pronounced than in virtually any other OECD member country” (Ryall & Blumenfeld, 2016, p. 1). Between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s, income inequality increased more in New Zealand than in any other country (Rashbrooke, 2013).

The tendency continues internationally to the present. In the US and Australia especially, efforts by governments, state officials, and private sector organizations have sought to deter public sympathy for labor unions. In the US, the landmark 2018 Supreme Court decision, *Janus vs. AFSCME*, in which a Republican-leaning Court ruled against the right of the public employees’ union to extract agency fees from non-union members, has been described as “the culmination of a decades-long, well-financed campaign by conservative foundations and business groups to demonize public workers, teachers in particular, and their unions” (Paarlberg, 2018). Around this case, a powerful network of private sector-funded advocacy groups has emerged to organize public support for anti-union (“right-to-work”) legislation in California and other states (Urevich, 2019). The decision is predicted to sharply weaken unions’ collective bargaining power (Liptak, 2018). In Australia, the ruling Liberal-Coalition Government has introduced several anti-union policies. Most recently, the Ensuring Integrity Bill, which would allow for easier deregistration of trade unions and the banning of union officials from union work, has been condemned as draconian by legal advocates, including the Britain-based International Centre for Trade Union rights (Marin-Guzman, 2019). These campaigns generate misunderstandings about labor unions, such as that union dues and agency fees impede the “right-to-work”, or that unions are associated with criminality and moral impropriety. They further create the need for popular education programs that will engender fair and balanced conceptions of labor unionism within the public.

Reports on public attitudes towards labor unionism problematize suggestions that workers have chosen to leave unions due to anti-union sentiment in recent decades. Recent research in the UK suggests that a significant majority (77%) of adults perceive unions as important to economic justice, particularly young people (Dromey, 2018). Similar results have been shown elsewhere. In the United States, where rates of union membership are low relative to other developed nations, 62% of workers approve of labor unions, while 39% support unions having a greater influence (Saad, 2018). Older workers are much more likely to be union members than younger workers in the US (Schmidt, 2018), UK (Dromey, 2018), Canada (Statistics Canada, 2014), and Australia (Gilfillan & McGann, 2018). This is due in part to employment differences by age, but also to a lack of positive exposure to labor unions among young people. This has been a claim made by labor union organizers and educators. Representatives of the “Unions in Schools” program in the UK, a leading project designed to expose secondary students to labor unions, report positive attitudes to labor unionism among young people, many of whom did not know what labor unions were prior to the program (Sayer, 2018).

Enterprise & Entrepreneurship Education

Presently, entrepreneurship education (sometimes called enterprise education or by other nomenclature) is a global policy paradigm with unclear definitional boundaries. Entrepreneurship education is often defined as programs for the teaching of entrepreneurship or business start-up, as well as the inculcation of skills, values, and attitudes favorable to private enterprise generally. A range of international agencies, governments and other policy actors endorse entrepreneurship education for its alleged role in promoting economic growth and wellbeing (Ania, Marie-Pascale, & Jari Matti, 2016; OECD, 1989; 1998; UNESCO & ILO, 2006). Countries are encouraged “to create and strengthen an enterprise culture” by “pursuing the development of entrepreneurial attitudes, through the system and programmes of education, entrepreneurship and training linked to job needs and the attainment of economic growth and development” (ILO, R189, 1998). Education is directed towards encouraging “entrepreneurial attitudes” and “entrepreneurial spirit” in young people (Salzano, Bahri & Haftendorn, 2006). Governments support forms of entrepreneurship education through direct funding of programs in perhaps all developed nations. In recent decades, entrepreneurship education has featured within official curriculum documents—“enterprise” appears in the front material of the New Zealand curriculum, for example, framing the outcomes and intentions of the curriculum as a whole (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007). The explosion of entrepreneurship education within schools since the 1980s has contributed to a fetishization of entrepreneurship on an international level (Peters, 2001). The “entrepreneurial self” has been used as a term to describe the emergence of a new type of citizen perceived as an entrepreneur in all aspects of their lives, and new social dynamics in which a variety of types of non-economic activities are perceived as entrepreneurial (Bröckling, 2015).

From a political economy perspective, entrepreneurship education has an obvious orientation to market capitalism. It has been described favorably as preparing young people to take advantage of a “flexible market economy” (Jones & Iredale, 2010, p. 9). Its principles, which include free markets, free trade, and entrepreneurial freedoms are staples of neoliberal thought. As such, a founding proponent of entrepreneurship education in the UK notes that its objectives “do not [...] sit easily with those of certain ideological persuasions”, cautioning that “the ‘goodness’ of enterprise therefore needs to be considered carefully in respect of the various stakeholders involved” (Gibb, 1993, p. 26). Historical examination of the largest global provider of entrepreneurship education, the Junior Achievement Worldwide network, which claims to educate 10,000 million students annually (About Junior Achievement, 2019), reveals it to be an aggressive ideological actor, “saturated with the rhetoric of waging war for the hearts and minds of American youth, and of the need for corporations to attend not just to selling their products, but also the overall system in which they operate, produce, and sell” (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2009, p. 773). Organizations delivering forms of entrepreneurship education, typically enmeshed in networks of private companies and corporations, have been shown to be deliberately proselytizing the virtues of market capitalism to the public (Carey, 1995; Beder, 2006; 2006b; Fones-Wolf; Oldham, 2017; 2018). Other historical research into entrepreneurship and enterprise education actors has described them as engaging in “the deliberate promotion of neoliberal ideas to the public” (Oldham, 2018, p. 88).

With the widespread explosion in popularity of social enterprise since 1990s, demand for social entrepreneurship education has increased, with increasingly large numbers of courses and facilities being established to provide training and education for social enterprise development (Brock, *et al.*, 2008; Brock & Steiner, 2009; Pache & Chowdhury, 2012). Social enterprise is defined as “a process by which citizens build or transform business institutions

to advance solutions to social problems, such as poverty, illness, environmental destruction, human rights abuses and corruption, in order to make life better for many” (Bornstein & Davis, 2010, p. 1). One might point to the role of private enterprise, deregulation and privatization, marketization, and related phenomena in contributing to wealth and income inequality, problematizing the suggestion that the proliferation of new “social” enterprises are enough to disrupt it. While social enterprise is a diverse category, it remains difficult to see how it will be able to address problems of low-wages, poor working conditions, and casualization in existing firms. Often, the goals of social entrepreneurship education blur with those of entrepreneurship education generally. The largest provider of enterprise and entrepreneurship education in the UK, for example, aims to “eradicate youth unemployment” (Young Enterprise, 2018). Precisely how this is supposed to occur remains unexplained.

Entrepreneurship education, like labor union education, represents the teaching of certain values, attitudes, and forms of economic activity intended to serve specific economic and social aims. Frequently, it is connected to economic growth. Despite its popularity, there is no research confirming the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in promoting economic growth or even individual entrepreneurial success (Rideout & Gray, 2013). Moreover, reflected in calls for inclusive growth is the recognition that new enterprise development, profit, and GDP do not contribute to income and wealth equality without specific policies directed toward this aim. Despite the claims of entrepreneurship education, it is difficult to see how it might contribute to reducing levels of inequality. Contrast these points with the overwhelming evidence around labor union education. It is difficult to see how labor unions are not already taught.

Entrepreneurship education, when properly understood, should negate suggestions that education must be somehow “neutral” or “impartial” on issues of economic affairs. It is difficult to understand how entrepreneurship education is somehow more political or ideologically “neutral” than labor union participation. Despite this, union education programs in schools have been criticized as politicizing education by conservative organizations. In the UK, *The Sun* described comments by Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn to the effect that schools should teach the values of labor unionism as “class war” (Hawkes, 2018). In Australia, an initiative to facilitate teaching about employment rights in schools, including the right to join a union, was described as “indoctrination” by the state’s conservative Liberal Party, resulting in a possible backdown (Queensland school unions, 2018). Criticism of this nature is rarely if ever directed towards entrepreneurship education by policymakers. When the Liberal Party Premier for the State of Queensland was questioned about “similar classes run by the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry”, he “drew a distinction”, saying the business advocacy group was not an “external body of a political party” in reference to the support of some labor unions for the Australian Labor Party (Queensland schools unions, 2018). This is despite the history of large-scale and overt public relations campaigns by the Australian Chamber of Commerce “to promote free enterprise” (Carey, 1995, p. 112). It is hard to avoid the conclusion that such criticism of labor union education is driven by political motivations rather than by legitimate concerns with “indoctrination” within education. While students in schools should be protected from indoctrination by external agents, it is worth reflecting on the probability that politicized educational work cannot truly be avoided in any real sense. Even the most fundamental purposes of education, such as the promotion of economic growth or the development of civic virtues, are “political”, and progressive educationalists have long insisted that “there is no such thing as a neutral educational process” (Shaull, 2005, p. 34). These are concerns that must be addressed in relation to individual education programs, however.

Teaching Labor Unionism in Schools: Spaces for Action

Programs for teaching and learning about labor unionism already operate in schools internationally. Many developed countries have small-scale programs operating in secondary schools, often delivered by labor unions themselves, and typically including exposure to labor unionism within a broader range of teaching about basic employment rights, including education around employment agreements and legislation, workplace health and safety, discrimination and harassment, as well as the role of labor unions in employment relations and society. Examples of such programs include the Unions into Schools (UK), the Regina V. Polk High School Program (USA), the Young Workers' Centre (Australia), the Young Workers' Hub (Australia), Young Workers' Awareness (Canada), the Young Workers' Resource Centre (New Zealand), among others. Most of these programs receive funding from labor unions in their respective countries or regions.

Across several of these programs and others, students are exposed to forms of labor organizing and activity such as collective bargaining. In Scandinavian countries, it is common for unions to provide information to young people in schools and universities, and even “to recruit student members at nominal subscriptions or without charge” (Bernaciak *et al.*, 2014, 22). The various high school programs of the De Paul University Labor Education Centre in Chicago are particularly noteworthy for encouraging union organizing and collective bargaining. Through the Regina V. Polk High School Program, the Centre delivers labor union education curriculum to high school students throughout the US state of Illinois. It hosts a “Union Summer School”, a one-week union summer school program in which “Chicago area high school students learn about labor history, collective bargaining, and how organized labor is critical to achieving economic justice” (DePaul, 2018). This program even delivers “Collective Bargaining Simulations” (mock labor negotiations) in high schools, “providing students a chance to engage in and experience contract negotiations in a one-day simulation that brings the process to life” (DePaul, 2018). These simulations mirror longstanding exercises in entrepreneurship education. Mini-enterprise simulations, in which students form mock or real companies and run them, have been staples of entrepreneurship education in schools since the emergence of the field (Carey, 1995; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2009; Author, 2018).

Other programs, though valuable, expose students to labor unions as part of educational packages around broader employment rights, stepping back from explicitly promoting labor union membership. In response to criticism, the State Government of Queensland (Australia) has stepped back from claims that the Young Workers' Hub initiative would encourage union membership after criticism from opposition political parties, insisting instead that it provides information about employment rights (Queensland council of unions..., 2018). Here can be seen the effect of political opposition in obstructing the potential of forms of labor union education programs in schools. Given the evidence, programs that explicitly encourage young people to join labor unions should be prioritized. Little research exists to compare schemes such as those above internationally. Likewise, no research exists into the outcomes of existing labor union education programs. As noted, a similar absence of definitive conclusions exists in the field of entrepreneurship education, where, despite a large amount of scholarship, no clear evidence exists to show that entrepreneurship education leads to entrepreneurial activity or success.

Internationally, few labor education programs receive direct Government funding. In a notable exception, the Scottish Government provides funding for the “Unions in Schools” program directed by the country's Trade Union Council. Interestingly, the Scottish Government includes the program within in its entrepreneurship education package,

“Determined to Succeed”, promoting entrepreneurship education alongside labor union learning in Scottish secondary schools. In another example, the State Government of British Columbia (Canada) has in the past provided funding to an initiative of the Teachers’ Federation and Federation of Labour, “Youth, Unions, and You” within secondary schools. An important source of support for this sort of activity may exist in teachers’ own professional unions, members of which are likely to have broader support for the goals of labor unionism. In an important example, the California Federation of Teachers’ (CFT) Labor in the Schools Committee facilitates teaching about labor unionism through levels K to 12. In contrast to these and other limited examples, governments of most developed countries have policies to finance the teaching of entrepreneurship in schools. Equivalent funding for labor union education should be a clear and important policy consideration for state policy makers.

In most cases, labor unions, activists, and teachers have successfully implemented labor education programs in schools without direct government funding or support. The collective programs of DePaul University represent a leading example. A further model exists in the form of curriculum resources designed externally for use by teachers within schools. Examples in the United States include the Zinn Education program, the Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA), the Greater New Haven Labor History Association, among others. No country in the major developed democracies specifically mandates teaching about labor unionism in official curriculum frameworks (perhaps with the exception of Scandinavian states). However, there is often space for teachers and others to include teaching about labor unionism within more flexible official curriculum frameworks, adapting pedagogy and content to fit in an approach described as “teaching in the cracks” (Page, 2017). These interventions in policy and practice depend heavily on the activism of rank-and-file teachers and others.

Discussion and Conclusion

Intentionally or otherwise, schools are sites for the transmission of political, economic, social, and cultural ideas. As such, they may serve either to condone and perpetuate prevailing conditions or problematize and disrupt them. Across the major Western democracies and beyond, there exist expectations that schools should be devoted to forms of economic and social justice, including the reduction of socioeconomic inequality. This expectation, however, has often resulted in misguided conceptions and ineffective policies and practices, some of which may even unwittingly perpetuate the conditions they are intended to reform. It can be seen particularly that certain myths prevail in understandings of the relationship between education, economic growth, and equity. The relationship is more complicated than is sometimes suggested, but there is little evidence that the global expansion of access to educational credentials results in either economic growth or more equitable distribution of wealth. Rather, these are due to patterns that are set within economies themselves.

In education policy, the expansion of labor union education in schools is a process of joining the dots. If education is to promote genuine economic justice, it must *explicitly teach tools and strategies for achieving it*. Towards this end, the evidence for labor unions is conclusive, and various programs for teaching school students about the potential of labor unionism are already in practice internationally. At the very least, the global proliferation of programs like these would serve as an important counterbalance to entrepreneurship or enterprise education, a paradigm that may even exacerbate inequality despite claims to the contrary. The charge that labor union education programs in schools represent efforts at indoctrination or politicization of education is one that has been advanced by conservative

actors, though these claims can be quickly dismissed when the reality of entrepreneurship education is acknowledged. Given the devastating social nature of income and wealth inequality, the importance of labor union membership should also be perceived in relation to a wide range of positive social outcomes.

Though political enthusiasm for labor union education in schools may presently be lacking among state policymakers, it is important to reiterate that programs for teaching about labor unionism are already being implemented by various civic and other non-state actors such as unions themselves. The example of DePaul University's Regina V. Polk High School Program, in which students learn how to engage in collective bargaining, is one such example worthy of recognition. Activists, progressive educators, and other concerned parties can therefore be encouraged to act independently and innovatively in the field. In doing so, it is hoped that they may forge an alternative educational paradigm in the interests of genuine economic and social justice.

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