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## YEAR ONE AS AN EDUCATION ACTIVIST

### Introduction

There have been challenges for me, both as a former public school teacher and current teacher educator, with reconciling my role as practitioner and fledgling intellectual. Education begets a culture of compliance, which is valued over critique. Meekness is perpetuated by very legitimate fears: losing one's job or becoming besieged daily by unwelcome encumbrances from a chagrined administration. These are two opposite ends of the same spectrum, and educators are trapped between them. A null possibility, where one can gainsay mandates without reprobation, does not seem to exist at present.

Here I will discuss an evolution from a relatively mild-mannered elementary educator (although some would disagree with the mild-mannered part, but former classroom teacher, nonetheless) to a novice education activist. I do my best to cover the significant signposts of my personal transformation, while at the same time conveying the crushing institutional structure that squeezes what little professional judgment and autonomy left for educators, particularly as teachers in public schools.

The publication *Radical Teacher*, for instance, has doubtlessly covered what it means, as the title suggests, being a "radical teacher." Articles from Fox (2012) and Vincent and Mayer (2007) emphasize teaching students skills to take activism outside of the classroom. Karp (2003) offers a scathing critique in the early days of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), arguing that the policy replaces equity "with a conservative agenda of punitive high stakes testing, privatization, and market 'reforms'" (p. 32). On a similar track, Scott (2004) counters the inevitability of "centralized curricular control and testing" in K-12 education.

Another important subset of literature in this area deals with conservative attacks on higher education that create a chilling effect on some radical teachings, or even instruction that challenges conventional wisdom. Both Schrecker (2006) and Chamberlain (2006) summon in the same issue the anxieties and fear wrought by largely conservative attacks on the academy. Shor (2006) chronicles his experiences with radical teachings at the university before and after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. "War, lies, and fear make these hard times to dream and to teach in this country" (p. 35). Finally, Entin (2005) details specifically the struggles of contingent and adjunct faculty who conduct most of the teaching at many universities. Reducing tenure-line faculty and replacing them with lower-cost adjuncts and lecturers, positions that do not require health or retirement benefits, is commonly used to make deep cuts to public higher education.

My contribution to this publication, and perhaps others like it, is not necessarily on transformative pedagogies or curricula, per se. It is about living as a radical educator in an education reform climate that values complacency over critique, following before leadership, and staying on message versus writing one's own. This is ultimately a defense of public education and a defiant practice of a radical intellectualism.

## A Turn Towards the Radical

Before commencing with the signposts, I need to elaborate on some of my own inspirations for activist critique. Public school teachers and even research-trained teacher educators must constantly be aware of lay intervention in their discipline. And this is not necessarily an aspersion casted towards parents and community members who have every right to involvement in public schools as a public good. My concern resides with opinion-makers, policy wonks, legislators, and members of the “punditocracy” who assume once being a student qualifies authority over teachers.

I have always treated education as an intellectual profession, even when overwhelmed with tasks that did not involve the mind, like cleaning the scum out of our class lunch bin or chasing a Kindergarten fugitive down the hallway. Because of these immediate demands on an educator’s time and mental resources, professionals are separated, in broad swathes of time, from the intellectual core of their work. Outsiders thus fill in those spaces. As Said (1994) observes:

Once an intellectual’s circle is widened beyond a like group of intellectuals—in other words, when worry about pleasing an audience or an employer replaces dependence on other intellectuals for debate and judgment—something in the intellectual’s vocation is, if not abrogated, then certainly inhibited. (p. 68)

As I engage in my teaching work, now and in the past, I always intend to act as a buffer between the desires of management and students, ensuring that the best interests of the latter are primary. Intellectual connectivity with my profession is sacred in order to guarantee access to the body of knowledge that improves it. Enacting the buffer is necessary to protect students from malpractice; Said thus avers that allowances for educators to question and challenge must be defended.

The intellectual has to walk around, has to have the space in which to stand and talk back to authority, since unquestioning subservience to authority in today’s world is one of the greatest threats to an active, and moral, intellectual life. (p. 121)

I did not become an educator to behave. Although, we do follow certain conventions to preserve some semblance of order. The reason for many to become a teacher is not to read a script written by another. The reason for my activism at least is to free educators, and in turn students, from such restrictions. That way, teachers at all levels are permitted to meet the ends of students and not the ends of others. “As soon as a teacher recognizes that this is, in fact, the reason he became a teacher, then the subversion of our existing educational system strikes him as a necessity” (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 206)

With these ideas in mind, the remainder of this essay presents significant signposts directing me towards a less conventional, more activist scholarship and teaching at the university. I am probably drawn to it for some personal reasons that are the subject of another essay. But there is a serious need for educators of all kinds to stand with our sisters and brothers in public schools to prevent the tragedy that will surely affect us all if this institution also falls to privatization.

## On Leaving the Classroom

Classroom exit narratives are fairly common. Online blogging definitely permitted their proliferation. Prominent education blogger for *Education Week* Nancy Flanagan lightly mocks these perorations in a June 2012 entry.<sup>1</sup> Hardship tales of disappointment and disillusionment from everyday classroom life

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<sup>1</sup> *Not Another “Why I Left the Classroom” Story*. Retrieved February 2013 from [http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teacher\\_in\\_a\\_strange\\_land/2012/06/not\\_another\\_why\\_i\\_left\\_the\\_classroom\\_story.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teacher_in_a_strange_land/2012/06/not_another_why_i_left_the_classroom_story.html)

typically precede rebirth as a precocious young education reformer bent on cleaning up our failing school system, of which Flanagan is critical. I can promise the reader that my departure was not at all dramatic.

I actually do not have much to say about it. I taught fifth grade during the first breaths of NCLB, at which time a steady increase of test practice and preparation was palpable, including a complementary decrease of minutes spent in untested subject areas, namely social studies, science, and specials (e.g., music, art, physical education). Like many teachers I have met over the years, I was so cloistered in my classroom that the full context of what was happening to education lingered unappreciated. Frustrated by new mandates and overnight approval of 700-page curriculum manuals, of which I was required to teach without question, I simply left the profession after four years looking for more answers. For an alternative narrative to Flanagan's exit narrative, the reader can view a piece I wrote on actually returning to the elementary classroom, which I did recently for three successive summers in a Washington, DC public charter school.<sup>2</sup>

### **Entering Doctoral Studies**

I approached doctoral study in curriculum and instruction with a strong sense of optimism. As a classroom teacher, I was not getting the intellectual challenges that I craved. Fortunately, I was tapped to teach elementary social studies methods and supervise pre-service teachers throughout my entire experience so that I could stay connected with the classroom. It was also serendipitous that social studies became my *métier*; as a general classroom teacher in my former life, I taught all subjects. Social studies had become a serious underdog in the curriculum wars that followed NCLB. What is not tested is not typically taught, at least to the same degree as math and reading, the primary subjects on high-stakes standardized assessments. So, along with my faculty mentor and a few other graduate students, I became embroiled in a defense of the social studies against time, its greatest enemy.

Even with a customary six-hour school day, time is a very limited quantity. Educators were forced to prioritize to become more effective post-NCLB. As a result, minutes spent teaching science and social studies were dramatically reduced in favor of more time in math and reading. It's the latter two subjects that factor heavily into a school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Our little study group spoke with dozens of teachers, asking why social studies was so rarely taught. Despite the opposite inclination, teachers felt compelled to reduce the amount of time and effort in social studies and other untested subjects in order to boost state assessment scores. Even principals' and superintendents' hands were tied.

I partly owe my evolution to education activist to the fact that I spent all of my years in doctoral study advocating for a discipline that was marginalized by the predominant trends in education reform: choice, competition, accountability, and high-stakes standardized assessments, all shibboleths of NCLB and now its rebranding as a Race to the Top (RTTT). There is nothing like rooting for an underdog that gets one's "radical" roots showing.

Through this lens of defending social studies from continued marginalization, I was more sensitive to education reform trends. The rural Midwest, however, detached me somewhat, even if based strictly on physical location from the epicenters of reform that tend to rest in major American cities like Washington, DC, Philadelphia, New York City, Chicago, New Orleans, and Los Angeles, to name several. These are the primary battlegrounds. I thus left graduate study for a ride on the tenure-track at a public university in Baltimore, Maryland, with a sense of urgency intact.

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<sup>2</sup> *Back to Elementary School*. Retrieved February 2013 from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/08/19/johnson>

### **In the Faculty Workroom**

Impatience and ineffectualness: two words that describe my dealings with the academy and education reform. It is my impatience with the structure of universities in being responsive to current conditions in schools. The career currency of higher education is the journal article, with another mode of professional communication as the conference presentation. In my experience, it could be somewhere in the ballpark of eight to 12 months from presentation to publication. Tracking the conversation on education reform online in such a time frame reveals a tremendous amount of debate and activity that typically goes unnoticed. State legislation is passed, think tanks publish policy documents, pundits give their opinions on various mainstream news networks, and innumerable educator bloggers and education journalists vigorously type their commentary, sometimes in 140 characters or fewer. All the while, the academician puts on blinders and focuses on a specific data set.

I do not suggest that this type of educational activity is meaningless; radical educators do rely on solid research to oppose the paltry excuses for “reform” these days. But there is a great deal of misguided energy on research that is redundant and meaningless, thereby broadening the theory-practice divide rather than bridging it. Given the assaults on public education and the teaching profession from large private foundations, political leaders, “AstroTurf” advocacy organizations, and financial managers who operate charter management organizations (CMO), more energy should be spent on defending children and communities from for-profit exploitation. We would expect this from those who know a thing or two about education, and those with an informed opinion about what is happening to public schooling in America. I personally expect this from many who claim to be critical educators or scholars of education with a vested interest in public schools for their own research activities. Yet, few names come to mind and even fewer are devoted to translating phrenic philosophies to applicable actions. They stop just short.

### **Creating New #edreform Media**

In academia for roughly four months, I decided to create my own media. I exploited a two-week disruption of my normal schedule due to a series of large snowstorms to create a new education blog and online radio show called *At the Chalk Face*.<sup>3</sup> I had no experience with blogging, podcasting, or other types of social media platforms, other than a personal Facebook account. Relative to everyone else out there, it seems I was getting in rather late to the party. Preliminary investigation online proved my main thrust: few academics with qualified backgrounds in education and actual classroom teaching experience were making their voices heard in alternative settings, let alone the mainstream outlets. Journalists, policy-wonks, and a slew of very dedicated teacher bloggers dominated the online debates about teaching, curriculum, and schooling; yet few academics had the time or the wherewithal to put their money where their articles were and enter this contentious space.

Participation in this online environment is now an essential part of my work and an integral chunk of my daily routine. Establishing credibility and an audience online requires a great deal of maintenance. Yet, I do not think higher education and the larger scholarly community know how to deal with this line of inquiry. Again, the peer-reviewed journal article, preferably in so-called “top-tier” publications, is the true currency of academia. This intellectual economy, at least within educational disciplines, has very little exchange value in institutions to which scholars should ultimately serve (e.g., public P-12 schools). That is, unless the scholar’s ultimate goal is to serve him/herself and a small cadre of subscribed readers, or perhaps fawning graduate students.

I want to emphasize once again that I am not directly challenging the integrity of scholarly research or the peer-reviewed publication. My *métier* is to also participate in this conversation. The threats, however, to a free and equitable system of public education are not being dealt a proportionate response by actual educators, let alone scholars of education. Reasoning for this comes definitely from higher education’s

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<sup>3</sup> *At the Chalk Face*, <http://atthechalkface.com>

inability, maybe unwillingness, to draft a calculus of value for this kind of intellectual activity. Activity is certainly the operative term because it is precisely these kinds of efforts that lead to activism. Here is how it worked in my case.

### **The Save Our Schools (SOS) March and Conference**

Astride my commentary online, I followed the organization *Save Our Schools* (SOS) that was planning a conference and march on Washington, DC in the summer of 2011. The SOS movement is primarily concerned with, according to their website, “the preservation and transformation of public school education.”<sup>4</sup> Prominent education leaders and activists attended, like Jonothan Kozol, Diane Ravitch, and Deborah Meier. It was brutally hot on the open grounds of the Ellipse; attendees were cooled by water and fans provided by the Washington DC Teachers’ Union (I believe that was the extent of union support). The highlight of the event seemed to be Matt Damon’s speech, for obvious reasons, whose mother is a longtime educator and professor of early childhood education. As a side note, a brief conversation Mr. Damon and his mother Dr. Nancy Carlsson-Page had with a right-leaning news network achieved modest “viral” status in the weeks after the march.<sup>5</sup>

For those of us not directly involved with the organization, the culmination of the event in Washington, DC nearly ended the conversation. Typical Internet buzz abounded for a few weeks afterward. The start of a new school year, however, left many of us wondering what to do next. I continued discussing the march through online commentary for my own website and a few other forums. There were some conversations with teacher education colleagues; yet, the event did not ripple very far within my own circles, even though some of the organization’s prominent organizers were local.

### **United Opt Out National (UOO)**

A very small group of six educators from around the country, myself included, dovetailed around the specific issue of high-stakes standardized testing. To the six of us, there needed to be stronger opposition to one of the most crucial levers in contemporary education reform: the annual collection of test data. It is indeed a sacred time for many educators and leaders. Bulletin board paper covers classroom walls, additional staff is pulled to accommodate, doors are shut with clearly posted signs against any and all hallway distractions, and district leaders are seen making uncomfortable visits to classrooms.

There would likely be differing opinions as to how the group began. Rather than offering my own interpretation, let us go to the group’s humble beginnings as a Facebook page. Abbreviated heretofore as UOO, the group primarily concerned itself with the prominence of high-stakes testing and the many days and hours preparing for them at the expense of more meaningful activities, such as science, social studies, the arts, and, in more extreme cases, recess. UOO endeavored to answer a very simple question: what if a test was given and no one was there to take it?

Many educators, parents, community members, and students are becoming increasingly suspicious of the test-driven hysteria, which ostensibly began with NCLB and perseveres with RTTT. Public school advocates do not acknowledge their voices being heard; thus, UOO experimented with the idea of “opting out” of state exams. If prominent education reforms, represented by large corporations, hedge fund managers, and various philanthro-capitalists, will not listen to the concerns of others before closing schools and disrupting communities, then the coveted data will either be held hostage or simply not collected.

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<sup>4</sup> *Save Our Schools (SOS)*. Retrieved February 2013 from <http://www.saveourschoolsmarch.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Although many are available, the exchange can be found here as posted by the *Reason TV* network (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ7icVvDK9I>).

The prospect of opting out of testing is a fearsome one. Its full implications are unknown; the legal ramifications are unclear. Some states like Pennsylvania offer opt-out provisions based on religious exemptions. Many other states make no mention at all of the possibility. When education officials are pressed on the matter, the response is typically that Federal law requires that all students take tests. Additionally, officials warn that non-compliance could result in schools and districts losing valuable Federal education dollars.

The protest potential of large-scale “opt outs” of state testing or other similar mandates has yet to be realized. There is some evidence, however, that small pockets of parents in various locations throughout the United States have opted their children out of testing. The local media usually picks up the story, with the added possibility of a profile in a prominent online source such as *Education Week*.<sup>6</sup> Well-regarded education scholar Yong Zhao notes repeatedly that crossing a roughly six-percent opt-out threshold in a single school or district is enough to “invalidate” test scores (Tempel, 2012). That is, a critical mass of students not taking the state tests would be enough of a disruption so that the results would not count.

There is a risk that schools would not meet AYP and suffer negative consequences as a result, such as loss of funding, the firing of staff, or closure. It is relatively clear what happens to a school or district when it fails to meet certain benchmarks, but it is unclear from various state or Federal laws what would happen after an opt-out invalidation. Public school advocacy groups argue that it is now time to call some bluffs on this matter to get an accurate picture of what could happen after an invalidation. Or, to get a sense of how far officials are willing to punish educators for what appears to be an act of civil disobedience. A group of parent and community activists in Indiana do believe their non-compliance with certain aspects of state testing resulted in the controversial and sudden revocation of their small school’s charter.

### **“Occupy” the Department of Education**

Once the UOO group formed online in August of 2011, we started to chat every Monday evening via Skype. These conversations began with managing our many fledgling social media accounts and organizing various actions to educate the general public about standardized testing. We then constructed a more formal website and put ourselves to work attracting membership.

The Occupy Wall Street protests dominated the news media throughout the fall. Occupy-inspired events popped up all over the country. Folks were even “occupying” ideas or claiming that an “occupation” was something as simple as a critical dialogue that did not require the inconvenience of actual presence, which is what Occupy appears to be about. So, in addition to cities, people were “occupying” the brain, boardrooms, and the Hood. References to Occupy and the 99 percent were ubiquitous by the winter; there was genuine concern that these protests, especially those based on actual, physical occupation would not survive the cold weather.

Many of them, of course, did not last and sputtered out either by forcible removal from law enforcement or simple disinterest. The main Wall Street groups maintained some prominence manifest by a resurgence for a May Day General Strike on May 1st, 2012, coinciding with International Workers Day. This event endeavored to raise consciousness about numerous injustices worldwide, from immigration, workers’ rights, and debt, just to name a few. Even as a strident supporter of the many messages of Occupy, I was even unsure of the endgame. What was there left to do if Occupy proponents were not interested in pulling traditional levers of power, like running for political office? This has been a longstanding critique of the cause.

The organizers of UOO wanted some kind of main event to bring attention to “corporatized” education reform that focused primarily on standardized testing. For a group that had very little marketing acumen, it made sense at the time to plan an occupy-inspired event for education as a way to ride the coattails of a

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, *Living in Dialogue*. Retrieved February 2013 from [http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2011/09/the\\_slekar\\_family\\_stands\\_up\\_an\\_1.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2011/09/the_slekar_family_stands_up_an_1.html).

movement for which many in UOO were politically sympathetic. Sometime in the winter, the group decided to plan an “Occupy the Department of Education” in Washington, DC. But when? After much deliberation, April Fool’s Day 2012 seemed like a good date considering how many have been fooled by the slick promises of prevailing education reformers. We were too clever by half.

Over the next several months, speaking entirely online, our gang of six contrived an event that would blossom into four days instead of one. Volunteers for teach-ins at the Department of Education streamed in until entire days were filled. Special events like a film screening and a musical revue at a local coffee house topped the days off. Our final meeting on Maryland Avenue ended with an hour-long visit with Department officials, including the Secretary himself, and an energetic march to the White House. In preparation for the four days of Occupy the Department of Education, UOO secured all the necessary permits. About a dozen police officers loitered all four days looking bored more than anything else. No one slept outside in a tent; honestly, several participants stayed at a Hilton. Although, free lodging was available for the event at a local church.

If there were no confrontations and no one slept on the grounds of the Department of Education, what then was this event all about? If I were to hazard a guess, as one of the event’s organizers, I would say that it represented an occupation of the conversation on education reform. Without billions, or even millions or thousands, of dollars to grease the wheels of legislative bodies and school district bureaucracies, all that supporters of children and public schools have, as radical educators, are online publications and social media. Traditional media still rely heavily on pundits that, from our perspective, promote a pro-corporate education reform agenda. To support UOO’s strong online and social media agendas, the Occupy protest gave us something more tangible: a necessary physical manifestation of the multitude of grievances with current education reforms. The UOO group could make live connections with participants, put faces to names, and experience a flesh-and-blood representation of all the activism that, for a significant number of months, were only words on websites.

### **Of Blogs and Boycotts**

Like a fish out of water flailing on a boat deck: this was the UOO group post-occupy. Rather than jumping back into the safety of water, UOO needed to transform into its new role as an organizer of a live protest event, footage and writing of which was spreading online. Members and sympathizers could now associate UOO with something more tangible than online editorial and commentary. There was a live and in-person bluster to go along with it. Maybe it was a fledgling activist credibility. Whatever the occupy event did or did not accomplish, it at the very least ushered in a new phase of radicalism for the group that opposed what it saw as a corporatization of public schooling. In-person connections could enable UOO to mobilize membership, or to draft occupy participants as local representatives, to lead local actions like boycotts, editorial writing, or community outreach.

Many dedicated participants in the event fanned out to create blogs and other social media accounts of their own. In time, the website I created, *At the Chalk Face*, acquired several new authors and a co-host for the weekly podcast. Our education show is broadcast on national radio out of Madison, Wisconsin and may soon be up for wider syndication. Specifically for UOO, we are increasingly interested in aligning with other activist organizations that have the similar objective of preserving a free and equitable system of public education. Our continued online conversations signal our desire to become a sort of education activism brand specifically focused on resistance to reforms currently undermining public schools.

In the process, we have, for example, aligned ourselves with the striking Chicago Teachers’ Union. UOO created a packet of information, brochures, and handouts that fellow public school advocates can download, copy, and distribute should anyone want to hold an informational session on high-stakes testing. Ultimately, the message continues to scatter online and on various social media platforms, which for now, without costly access to legislators and other public officials, are the best tools we have.

## One Final Admission

Does the kind of activism I discuss have a partisan bias? Perhaps, but not necessarily so. Neoliberalism has a tendency, on many issues, to favor political conservatives in the United States. But the two major political parties espouse very similar education policies with little daylight between them. Even with the election of President Obama, neoliberal reforms and policies actually increased in prevalence, namely high-stakes standardized testing, performance pay scales, school choice measures like charter schools, for-profit corporate influence, and scripted curricula. As a matter of fact, it is more difficult than ever to track the political orientations of perhaps the most significant education reform “celebrity” in the United States, former Washington, DC Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee. As Ms. Rhee demonstrates frequently with her fundraising and other political activities, neoliberal education reforms transcend trite partisan boundaries.

I want to forestall any criticism of my views and activism as simple partisan “hackery,” yet another “liberal” member of the professoriate infiltrating higher education to shape younger minds in his or her own image. A simple Google search will unfortunately reveal that I found myself at loggerheads with an ultra-conservative commentator after I used a regrettable choice of words on my personal Twitter account. I saw that this commentator made a rather vile comment about women in the military and I responded as a worked up and outraged private citizen. This by no means excuses my use of the word “douche,” common derogatory slang that falls somewhere between “ditz” and “dweeb” in the category of “D” words. But it does explain it somewhat. After a little back and forth, I was contrite and apologized. This is where I thought it would end.

As it turns out, our exchange was picked up by a blogger affiliated with the late firebrand Andrew Breitbart whose journalistic tactics were, and continue to be, very controversial, to say the least. Not only did this individual blogger raid my social media accounts for a useable picture, ultimately choosing a candid shot of me with a chicken at a local urban farm, they also made numerous other really wild accusations that do not merit mention. It went one interesting step farther. This individual actually phoned my academic Department Chair at the time and reported the conversation on their website. Another individual posed as a parent and called our Department secretary and stated in very forceful terms that they were immediately withdrawing their daughter from the university. Another individual wrote a letter to the editor of the campus newspaper affirming their outrage. Finally, this letter was then photocopied, affixed to my door, and placed under the doors of colleagues with adjacent offices. All of this occurred within the span of a week. Ultimately, I weathered this squall by laying low for a few weeks and took a brief hiatus from engaging in any conversations online. I have heard nothing of it since.

All along I have been assured that my mistake was well within the boundaries of my First Amendment rights. Beyond the righteous indignation that comes with most free speech defenses, a few things are now very clear to me. One, despite the numerous benefits, social media is a very dangerous place with mistakes or lapses in judgment very easy to make. But in order to remain relevant, faculty members must find ways to engage with social media regardless. Two, along these lines, there are individuals out there who are perfectly willing to take disputes to some next level. Take the almost automaticity of what happened to me as an example.

The third and final clarification merits its own paragraph. An incident such as this or a political bias should not disqualify one from debates on education reform. Controversies I have weathered do not detract from my work as a faculty member or academic. For this incident, I have been adequately contrite and apologetic. I continue to learn but I refuse to be bullied or mobbed into thinking that this was somehow a significant betrayal of my responsibilities as an intellectual and educator. For a brief but salient period of time, certain individuals tried very hard to convince me that this I was an awful person and completely incapable of performing my job. In my deep personal disappointment at the time, which has now abated, I was nearly persuaded. I can, however, admit two things simultaneously: there is a lot we can all learn from my experiences on social media and that I have personally learned enough. It is time to continue doing what I feel is in the best non-partisan interests of children.



## Conclusion

There is only one central question for this work: when is it time to do something? Teacher educators and affiliated faculty members in schools of education rely heavily on local public schools for teacher training and research endeavors. But all of this could end without faculty knowledge or consent lest efforts in inquiry shift to direct advocacy. The intellectual economy of higher education, whose currency is traditional forms of scholarship, has no metric for activism. It is typically lumped into one's service responsibilities. Yet, does saving one's community and its public goods, which includes schooling, constitute service? No, it is necessity.

The work of prominent labor scholar Stanley Aronowitz has been very helpful in my understanding of radical intellectualism. In higher education, it seems that "internalized conformity is often the condition of long-term survival" (1998, p. 210). Yet, those with actual experience in schools are not writing the erroneous narrative of persistently "failing" public schools. It is largely members of the business community, with the assistance of bi-partisan enablers, who need public schools to fail so they have permission to privatize. So, how can I sit back and watch this occur?

Aronowitz is on many occasions very critical of liberals and progressives who have for the last several decades been ineffectual against conservative backlash. "They stubbornly cling to a piecemeal approach toward societal problems and disdain coherence because it might get them labeled as ideological. But they have a seemingly infinite capacity for compromise" (2006, p. 14). All the while negotiation and reconciliation is sought, educators' abilities to defend their profession are attenuated.

The result is that many of the educational reforms appear to reduce teachers to the status of low-level employees or civil servants whose main function is to implement reforms decided by experts in the upper levels of state and educational bureaucracies. (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 23)

Only these "experts" tend not to be educators; alternatively, they are often influential capital managers determined to transform public education to job training. The autonomy of the teacher is an obstacle to this transition. Thus, "the teacher is transformed from an intellectual into a technician, the long-term intention of educational conservatives is to make the classroom teacher-proof" (2008, p. xiii). A "teacher-proof" classroom is a democracy-proof one as well. This struggle is therefore one for "radical teachers" to live by and encourage anew "radical citizenship."

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#### AFFILIATIONS

*Shaun Johnson*

My position within education has evolved. After four years in higher education, I left to go back to the classroom. I am now teaching Kindergarten in Southeast Washington, DC.

*At the Chalk Face*