The Pep Talk: Today We Do the Work

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I learned from my mother not to be afraid. She was a very courageous person, and I could see her in action doing many things. There, on Pomeroy Street, she had a way of telling you you were a person, and she never afraid of anyone, and she wanted you to be able to stand your ground regardless of where you were or whatever happened.” (p. 71)

“A lot of people are worried about the things that are happening today. I’m not because out of the chaos, I feel we come great thinking.” (p. 33)

“Collectively, and in ongoing relationships with the people in our community, we wanted to provide a center for higher education and cultural life to institute and maintain public school and public housing enterprises and to investigate and improve the conditions in the urban districts of Chicago.” (p. 33)

“Reflecting on the early years of the Hull-House reveals me of the essential narcissistic of everything: the perpetual moving on to something greater which will supersede the present. It is that paradox of destruction of the past which endures us and the same time ground for deeper and for endless and varied anticipation.” — Jane Addams (p. 33)

“Nevertheless, the certain number of women persisted.” (p. 136)

“I was too much of a head with a controversial leader, and I couldn’t get any job before.” (p. 37)

“Septima Clark”
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As one might expect, antagonisms will at times cause children and students to adopt resistant positions, defiant of any but dictatorial, or authoritarian. But it will also lead to oppression.

Excessive obedience, uncritical conformity, lack of resistance against authoritarian discourse, self-abasement, and fear of freedom.

Letters to those like Dave Tjos, Fourth Letter, p. 209

"The easy way out in dealing with the obstacles posed by governmental constraint and the prevarication of antidemocratic authorities is the fatalist resignation in which many of us feel ourselves. One might say 'what can I do? Whether they call me teacher or coding mother, I am still underpaid, disrespected, and uncared for, let it be so.' In reality, this is the most convenient position, but it is also the position of someone who suits the struggle, who suits victory." Fourth Letter, p. 209

I can see no alternative for educators to unite within the diversity of their interests in defending their rights. Such rights include the right to freedom in teaching, the right to speak, the right to better conditions for pedagogical work, the right to pass students for continuing education, the right to be coherent, the right to criticize the authorities without fear of retaliation (which entails the duty to criticize truthfully), the right to the duty to be serious and coherent and to not have to lie to survive." Fourth Letter, p. 209

A Nation At Risk, a 1983 report about education under Republican Reagan, started a forced neoliberal attachment to public education. The Democratic candidate Bill Clinton did nothing to disavow the two. In fact, Clinton’s lifetime reforms called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996 solidified the idea that individualistic neoliberal economic policies would be preferred by both major parties in the U.S. In 2000, after welfare as a necessary social safety net Clinton implied dehumanized discourse of personal responsibility for economic poverty and public education would be at the disposal of privatized corporations.

These four paragraphs may appear to be a description of how we are as a nation. It included Republican George W. Bush and then-Bush in 2009. A move made by Barack Obama was enacted a federal education grant in 2009. Race to the Top fund went to states and to penalties of competition, rewards, punishments, and more spending to the “winner” of efficiency rather than to those who needed resources.

David Tjos in 2020, Republican Donald Trump who has a healthy disrespect for education, who was explicitly anti-public education, who has a green light for private education for corporatization and privatization.

And here we are, in 2023 wondering whether people, schools have access to universal public education and if we do assume that universal public education is necessary, many of us are wondering how we will ever be able to fix a system after such political and economic devastation.
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And yet, this is our moment. Out of chaos comes great thinking out of uncertainty comes innovation. Educators have been positioned as a problem that needs to be solved to neoliberal fundamentalism for decades, but they are standing themselves and organizing unions, disrupting texts, teaching outside the standards, and standing up for themselves and public education as a bedrock of democracy.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Emerging from decades of neoliberal hell, there is a groundswell of movements against racism, against neoliberalism, and for justice. Many of these movements (including the Alberta's Teaching Network's fight for $15, Water Protectors' Healthcare for All Black Lives Matter in Schools; #StopAsianHate; March 4 Our Lives; Standing Rock) protest against, to name a few, are substantively connected to, supported by, and inspired by Black Lives Matter.

These four examples of educators working for justice and expanding what is possible in the face of crisis and even potential authoritarianism, and racism during their time can inspire contemporary thinking in teacher education.

Nicholas, a student, discourse that has shaped so much of the last forty years, the United States, brings new challenges with it, but also opens up possibilities for ruptures, for standing up and speaking back.

So how do we teach people who want to be educators right now, when there is so much uncertainty and nothing that has been used in the last forty years makes sense anymore?

Our four-decade-long neoliberal experiment of producing docile, submissive, passive teachers who are easily controlled by others has failed. Not only are teachers resistant to such positioning, but they simply won't put up with it anymore.

Young people coming to education will have lived through a global pandemic, experienced overwhelming sadness and despondency at the violent killing of Black men, women, and transgender people by the state, suffered hunger and homelessness, struggled to discern fact from fiction, fought with politically polarized family and friends, and watched in horror as extreme white supremacists attempted to overthrow the democratic election of a president. They will find joy in doing hard things and creating different ways of thinking and being in learning as much as they can because they know that they need to in order to affect change.

It's funny how that happens, how history turns on itself. Once, Margaret Thatcher wanted "There Is No Alternative" (TINA) to a neoliberal capitalist market economy. Today, young people who wish to be creative educators engage in the work to undo a violent neoliberal society because they know that there absolutely has to be a preferable alternative.

We can support them, in their pursuit of philosophy, theory, and creative making spaces, and encourage their ongoing joy of learning to make bread, make music, study history and economics and politics, do documentaries, paint, sculpt, hike, build, plant, and Otherwise find more humanizing ways of being in relation with the world.

We can create on evolving teacher education for architecture, improvisation, creativity, and justice. Today we do the work.
References


