

# Worth Striking For

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## **The Context of *Worth Striking For***

Isabel Nuñez

I WAS A FIRST GRADE TEACHER in Southern California in the early 1990s, and it was the most fulfilling work I've ever done. This was back in the days before curriculum standardization—or even standards; my first graders took one standardized test a year and the results were only used to help us teach them better. I spent 5 years abroad and returned to an educational landscape that was nearly unrecognizable.

My current students, who are teaching now, have a hard time imagining what this was like: the freedom and autonomy that I enjoyed in my classroom. My graduate students will sometimes ask me ‘What did you do at staff meetings?’ Well, we did have staff meetings, and we did

complain about how long they were, but we did NOT analyze test score data. We had the luxury of talking about students as people, not as numbers.

From No Child Left Behind to the current push for teacher evaluation via test scores and ranking, it has been a really tough decade or so to be an educator. Every few weeks brings another devastating discovery, whether a new round of school closures or a ridiculous-sounding idea from a conservative think tank—which by now we’ve learned is likely to turn up as a serious policy proposal. I used to laugh at these, but now I tremble.

Watching all the dots connect has been worse still: It’s not well-intentioned error; it’s a strategic assault on public education as an enterprise. Most recently, the offensive has been targeted at teachers themselves. I’m already seeing the signs of despair in my graduate students as the public discourse casts teachers as enemy number one—even while high-stakes testing makes it harder to actually teach. The efforts to undermine teachers’ unions and tenure, programs like Teach for America which ask just a few years’ commitment to the classroom: All of these point in one direction. If the reform movement is successful, teaching will no longer be a career, but a job—and a low-paid, temporary one at that. Since for most teachers, neither of these is an adequate descriptor for what is truly a vocation, the struggle in which we are now engaged is for our very survival as professionals.

I was feeling demoralized, disillusioned, and dangerously close to despair in 2012. There is very little exaggeration when I say that the Chicago teachers’ strike saved my life. Being in Chicago then, as the city’s teachers took to the streets, was transformative. The summer vote by Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) members authorizing the strike garnered more than 90% of Chicago teachers’ approval. It flew in the face of a statutory requirement that 75% of members authorize a strike—a legislative move that was designed to be debilitating to teachers’ unions. In fact, Jonah Edelman, the astroturf reform group Stand for Children CEO, had bragged in Aspen that he’d succeeded in ensuring that the CTU would never strike. He envisioned a state-by-state capitulation that would neutralize the power of unions nationwide. Well, the teachers had something to say about that.

During the strike itself, teachers showed incredible courage and dignity, never flinching in their support of their students and their schools—this despite the threat to their bank accounts and the attacks on their already battered reputations. One of my own students shared how she cried as she read the callously critical comments on the strike from some Facebook ‘friends’ – until just then she saw herself on the news in front of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) headquarters and was re-energized. As the strike came to a close, CTU president Karen Lewis explained that this is not just about teachers, connecting the event to the wider struggle for basic fairness to workers, a fight that is only intensifying.



Pamela Konkol, Gregory Michie, Simeon Stumme, and Isabel Nuñez, Chicago's Union Park, September 15, 2012.

This was our inspiration for writing *Worth Striking For: Why Education Policy is Every Teacher's Concern*. Pamela Konkol, Gregory Michie, and I initially proposed a book of education history on the strike to Teachers College Press. Their response asked if we couldn't make it a textbook instead—and so we did! The 2015 published volume is a policy primer for in-service and pre-service teachers that uses the strike as a framing device for presenting education policy through its impact on the lives of teachers and students. It is a call for teachers to be aware of and engaged in the public conversation around education policy, and it highlights the following policy areas:

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners**

From the renaming of the federal Office of Bilingual Education to the Office of English Acquisition, to the quiet disappearance of or targeted attacks on multicultural education, schools have moved away from nurturing the differences that make for a vibrant democracy. In states such as California and Arizona, where education policy has been made by referendum, teaching a student in their native language is now against the law.

### **School Integration**

Housing segregation has traditionally been blamed for the difficulty in achieving the integrated schools mandated by *Brown*. Yet, the very school choice policies that once seemed promising with regard to lessening segregation have in fact exacerbated it. Charter schools and voucher programs further isolate poor and minority students.

### **Diversity of the Teaching Force**

A variety of policy shifts have resulted in a whiter, more middle-class teaching force in the past several years. Higher cut scores for licensing exams have made it more difficult for Black and Latino/a candidates to enter the field. The closures of schools in struggling communities have disproportionately impacted non-White veteran teachers.

### **Testing**

Tests allow us to make limited inferences about student learning; they should never be the sole gauge. Yet, the equation of test scores with student learning and the framing of ‘accountability’ around whether teachers are doing their jobs has led to an almost completely test-driven curriculum in many schools and classrooms. This has led to a dramatic decline in breadth and depth of student engagement with content.

### **Common Core**

While proponents would argue that the new Common Core State Standards are the best means through which our shared culture as a nation can be preserved and passed down, the likely continuation of high-stakes and low-cost testing is as likely to result in a shallow level of engagement with those traditions. Also, we are in danger of losing the opportunity for the innovative, creative teacher/student-developed curricula that have enabled U.S. cultural traditions to flourish.

### **Teacher Deskilling**

Curriculum design is just one area that is being taken from the hands of classroom teachers. The deprofessionalization of teaching can be traced from top-down control of teaching practices to the forced use of scripted curricula, from the prevalence in some areas of Teach for America-style novices in the classroom to proposals in some states that teachers need not have college degrees.

### **School Funding**

Since the 1973 Supreme Court decision that held it constitutional to fund schools through local property taxes, the matter has appeared to be settled. However, I would argue that the benefits of schooling are shared by society as whole, rather than flowing only to the local community.

### **School Accountability**

The widely repeated narrative on schools’ lack of accountability, itself open to debate, is often used to justify the further under-resourcing of an already overburdened system. Worse, it is presented as a reason to remove the enterprise of education from the public sector altogether. While an abiding faith in the market may well be the motivation for many who make this argument, the evidence suggests that it is already moving public money into private hands without improving educational outcomes for children in the United States.

### **Top-Down Control**

It is probably not a coincidence that this transfer of wealth has happened alongside an increasing concentration of power at the top of school systems—and sometimes out of the hands of educators altogether. The work of teachers, once self-directed, has come under closer scrutiny from school and district-level administrators, whose own decisions are guided by often appointed boards.

### Value-Added in Teacher Evaluation

The confluence of high-stakes testing and calls for accountability has resulted in an unimaginably destructive approach to evaluating teachers, one that will mean regular random turnover in the profession. While there is a common-sense appeal to using test scores to rate teachers—if one makes the mistake of equating scores with learning—the statistical models that now exist are so riven with error that the largest professional bodies of statisticians, mathematicians, economists, public policy experts and psychometricians (the people who know the math) have all denounced the practice, which is nevertheless law in many states.

### Teachers Unions

The vilification of teachers generally has been especially vehement where teachers' unions are concerned, and many in the public conversation have latched on to the story of unions' primary purpose being to keep bad teachers in the classroom. However, the proliferation of charter schools, which are not required to hire union teachers, provides a predictive picture of the most likely outcomes should teachers' unions be destroyed: rapid turnover of overworked and undercompensated teachers.

Acknowledging just how busy teachers are, the book asks something critically important: Set aside some time and space for policy. It doesn't have the immediacy of some of the issues teachers face on a day-to-day basis, and the topic isn't as sexy or fun as some of the other areas where excess professional energy might be spent—if such excess indeed exists. In the past couple of decades, the landscape of public education has changed so dramatically that policy work for teachers is a necessity. If teachers do not have voice in United States education policy, there may no longer be a vocation of teaching. *Worth Striking For* explains how large-scale policy decisions have an impact on individual teachers' lives and work, and how teachers can have a stronger collective voice in the policy debate.

### A Manifestación

Ligia (Licho) López López

I read *Worth Striking For* as a poster in the streets, from teachers to teachers, in an effort to forge professional collaborations in the struggle for public education. This poster that is the book is necessary, concise, well-founded, directed at particular sensibilities, and effective. This response is in the same spirit of “striking,” a culture I am familiar with as a child of Latin America, and which I continue to live here as an academic, and at a distance through my younger brother in Colombia as he and his classmates strike to defend public higher education and educational access for the most marginalized at Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín. Strike, in the Spanish I know, is *paro*. Stop!—Stopping action to stage a *manifestación*. *Manifestación* is a disagreement, an objection, an expression of disensus (Rancière, 2010) aspiring to make a curricular impression. This response is a *manifestación* whose commitment is to solidarily support the efforts in *Worth Striking For* while expanding the set of concerns we need to be addressing as a curriculum studies community and with teachers.

One last note. In Latin America I learned to be suspicious and to question fearlessly. This is what I will attempt to do here.

Let me begin with two clear and provocative propositions in the book:

“Whether we believe that schools nurture individual growth, impart a common culture, or actually prepare all children for success, we need to preserve and **protect public education.**” (p. 107)

“Still, the need for some kind of **radical and dramatic change** is undeniable.” (p. 108)

It is difficult to disagree with these two statements. And yet my sense of suspicion takes me to the four purposes of schools, as defined in the book: to enhance democracy, to instill a common culture, to facilitate social efficiency, and to inspire social change.

### **Democracy—Common Culture—Social Efficiency—Social Change**

Would it be worth an intellectual, political, and educational exercise to invite us all including the teachers we work with, to zoom in on these four elements and conduct an archaeological analysis to ask: How did these become possible? In relation to what problems and governmental problematics? We may be confronted with the horrendous atrocities that have been committed against particular bodies and ways of being which have been set aside and sent into oblivion. By means of what intellectual technologies did “democracy, common culture, social efficiency, and social change” become so essential to education? Would it be worth examining what these four have been able to produce, and hinder, and how they are being mobilized, away from just conservative, and progressive parties, to order children, societies, and us? These four elements revolve around the orbit of the state, a fabrication of particular “Western” enlightenment ideas that constituted and constitute particular enlightenment aspirations such as progress, success, ... [which, by the way, are enveloped in the book]. These aspirations were made possible on templates of inclusion, exclusion, and abjection of people, and ways of being, dying, and everything in between and beyond. Aspirations for a radical and dramatic change would require suspending some of the very ideals we hold so dear and so close to the ways we have been socialized and ordered to think.

Common culture comes up again and again throughout the book and travels—immune—through the discussion of the importance of multicultural education and diversity. I will return to these later on. One of the key demands of the Chicago teachers’ strike of 2012 for art, world languages, and PE was justified with the reasoning that it “ensured that schools are able to *transmit* the rich and cultural heritage of the *United States*” (italics added). That the task of school is the transmission of culture requires a *manifestación* of its own at another moment. Understandably the nation-state is strategically mobilized to ground the demand in the strike for creating spaces beyond the narrowing of curriculum based on reading and math solely. And yet, what can the nation-state or the United States with the very turbulent history of its making and re-making offer those who by the very invention of the state must be outside of it, those who are impossible for the state to exist without. I am talking about the “native American,” the “Black,” the sexually and morally “deviant,” the “Mexican,” the “Hispanic,” the “disabled” that messes up the nation’s scores before international comparisons such as PISA, the “non-English speaker,” the “refugee,” the “immigrant,” the “illegal” who as abject “disturbs identity, system, order, [... disrespects] borders, positions, rules,” (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982, p. 4) and whose very presence threatens the perceived stability of a nation-state powerful and orderly. What would a demand for widening “the band of skills” look like if the nation-state were to be suspended? If the abject in its multiple differences, as an arrivant (Derrida, 2000) were to alter not only the border of the state but the borders of curricular subjects as a function of the state? What would an exploration of “heritages” be like beyond the confines of curriculum subjects as we know them [math, reading, P.E., etc.]?

If we follow seriously the cue in the discussion around multicultural education and diversity in the book, that newcomers bring “a wealth of understanding about the nations and societies from which they emigrated,” various lines of flight may take us to inventing new units of inquiry allowing the engagement with multiplicity of cosmologies uncontainable by democracy, aspirations for a common culture, and desires for social efficiency, and social change. A commitment to validating and celebrating “immigrant” backgrounds is only a starting gesture, an important one.

With that I will transition to the last poster of this *manifestación*.

### **On the Diversity of the Teaching Force**

Expressing deep concern in reclaiming an inclusive vision of schooling through diversifying the teaching force is a critical gesture that must not only be supported, but amplified in the work with teachers. That 65% of the teachers in closed schools were Black, and that “4 out of 10 African American students had only 1-in-4 chance of learning from a teacher who looked like them” (p. 45) are some of the figures circulating to say teachers who represent and relate to the students that they serve matter. The arguments employ ocularcentric style of reasoning (Jay, 1988; Mitchell, 1984; Heidegger, 1977), justified by the governance of numbers (Rose, 1991), and representational politics. In being ocularcentric, the centrality of the eye in “teachers looking like their students” often kidnaps the possibility for militating against normative curricula indiscriminatory of the teacher “kind” of the teacher “type.” This is not a color-blind statement. This is not to say that race does not matter. It very much does. However, I wonder what kind of curriculum could be generated from policy engagement with teachers discussing how the eye and vision and the ways in which the retina has been contoured historically operate in fabricating specific frames that limit the relationships we can forge with each other, the environments available to us, and “our” own ways of becoming. The eye particularly intervenes in the fabrication of identities and the representational regimes that order what can be asked, meditated, and reflected on including ruling out interrogating the very foundations of how teachers, and students have been made-up as particular kinds that then must be matched on to each other in the classroom as an avenue for “educational success”—an utterly dangerous line of action vis-à-vis neo-colonial practices self-similar to natives actively participating in the conversion of natives. I wonder what may come out from the other side of the statement that some of the teachers of minority “students should be non-White” (p. 46). How could white be mobilized as a productive signpost—not within the hierarchical thinking that places it at the top of it all in a apollonian sense—for mapping policy and curriculum cartographies that, suspending the eye, scrutinize how white produces particular effects and limits the expansiveness of ways of doing school responsible to the creative ways in which youth perform their lives. What could a struggle for non-representational, non-ocularcentric multiplicity in the teaching force look like beyond arguments built with numbers, statistics, and figures that as technologies of governmentality extend the cruel grip of the state and the market on educational spaces *Worth Striking for* is aiming to liberate from the control of edu-businesses and neoliberal policies.

If this text is to intervene as a trigger for teacher participation in policy conversations, the enactment of curricula that subversively turns the current education rules inside out in the company of their students, interrogation of the terms that drive the strike as a plight for transformation is another invitation at inventing something that is not education as we know it.

## School Reform, Curriculum, and Pedagogy

### Arlo Kempf

Teachers' work, and its concomitant tools and parts (including pedagogy and curriculum) have been radically transformed in the U.S. Schools, understood as a place of inequitable but shared experiences that produce and reify a contested but collective set of cultural understandings, have become spaces of delivery and implementation rather than dialogue and exploration. Teacher-proof teaching—in the form of standards-based pedagogy and curriculum, rolled out as part of a vague and phantom promise of accountability—rules the day for many students and teachers in the U.S. Educational standardization has ushered in a cultural recession in teaching, with the radical decline of teacher professional control, input, autonomy, and satisfaction. Teachers have struggled to recover these difficult pieces, placing the service of their students ahead of personal and material concerns. In Illinois, where unionized teachers have resisted a host of neoliberal reforms in public schooling, teachers have had to fight to be professionals, something many teachers around the world take for granted but which has become increasingly elusive in the (mis)accountability-driven context of 21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. schooling.

In Chapter Three: Curriculum and Pedagogy, the authors survey the shifting and unstable landscape of teaching and learning in the standardized classroom. They look at related questions of teacher deskilling, and suggest that at the core of teacher resistance to neoliberal education reform is the struggle to do work which best serves students: work very different from that which best serves standardized testing results, work they refer to as “enriching the educational experience” (p. 68). The authors provide a critical analysis of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, and raise a series of related questions with regard to the future of schooling under the Common Core matrix of measures. The remainder of this section follows the structure of Chapter Three and takes up first, the radical changes in teachers' work and the implications for teachers; and second (briefly), the question of what is next for large-scale assessment and evaluation in the U.S., looking at both Common Core and the Every Student Succeeds Act.

### Teachers' Work in an Age of Standardization

Powerfully tracing the arc of alienation that characterizes the professional lives of so many U.S. teachers, the authors share stories of a struggle for professional space and time. Chicago teachers' historic fight for a “better day” in place of merely a “longer day” (p. 55) forcefully illustrates this process, whereby worker demands (i.e., what teachers want) are indeed part of a larger project of enriching the experiences and holistic results of schooling for students. In the Illinois context, teachers successfully won the right to create their own lesson plans. Among a host of issues on the table, including class size and the length of the school day, “teachers were most joyful about winning the right to some degree of creative control over the curricula in their classrooms” (p. 55). The very notion that professional judgement might be considered a concession on the part of the Chicago Board of Education, speaks to the Zombie illogic of neoliberalism in education.

The classroom is the nexus between standards, accountability, and the daily lives of children and teachers, wherein curricula are contracted (both as far as depth and breadth) and students are increasingly understood through narrow measures in comparison to one another. In the Chapter Four *Post Script* stories offered by Nuñez, we hear of the ethos created and maintained in a classroom that was informally governed by community and mutual responsibility. Such a classroom climate is increasingly difficult with standards as the pedagogical true north of a given learning community. With shared ethos a fleeting goal (and indeed an increasingly remote

possibility), what then of pathos, of stories, of the very poignant subjectivity that allows students to find and grow themselves in the context of their learning?

The authors explain that standardized teaching and learning are driving many teachers out of the profession. Teachers are increasingly alienated from what Santoro (2011) terms the moral rewards of teaching when they are unable to do—personally and professionally—what is right in their work lives. Teachers struggle for control in pursuit of these moral rewards. There is a dangerous temptation to see the experiences of teachers through the lens of individual or one-off situations, however, Santoro’s work (2011) is useful for putting these widespread frustrations in perspective. Specifically, she outlines an important distinction between demoralization and burnout. She argues:

Burnout may be an appropriate diagnosis in some cases where individual teachers’ personal resources cannot meet the challenge of the difficulties presented by the work. However, the “burnout” explanation fails to account for situations where the conditions of teaching change so dramatically that the moral rewards, previously available in ever-challenging work, are now inaccessible. In this case, the phenomenon is better termed “demoralization.” (p. 3)

Against this backdrop, teachers’ struggles for professional autonomy are understood as a form of personal and professional advocacy against practices which harm children on one hand, and which can essentially ruin the job, on the other hand.

The discourse of accountability thus demands a certain type of obedience, which can be soul-sucking for the teacher devoted to his students’ holistic development. Disobedience, it follows, comes with profound consequences, as teacher performance evaluations and related punishments and rewards become increasingly central to measuring teacher success. Teachers who refuse to teach to the test risk professional consequences, leaving the practice to those who are either brave or privileged: the former prepared to face professional consequences for low scores and the latter insulated somehow from the consequences thereof, be it through professional connections or school setting. Among the many inequitable results of these processes is the disincentivization of teaching in school settings in which students typically have low test results (often low-income and racially minoritized communities).

As I report in my recent study of roughly 1000 Chicago teachers (Kempf, 2016), the nature and quality of work life is drastically different from one neighborhood to the next in Chicago, based not simply on income, school culture, or resources, but instead on the pressure to bring up scores. The moral rewards of teaching are increasingly elusive for many teachers depending upon where they teach. This equity issue for teachers is concurrently an equity issue for students, as it just so happens that work which teachers find professionally fulfilling is often great for student learning (go figure!). Through this process, progressive approaches (including critical pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, queer pedagogy, and many others) are reserved for low-pressure schooling contexts (more money and fewer racially minoritized students). While rich white kids need critical education as much as anyone, there is a bitter irony to leaving anti-oppression education beyond the professional reach of those teachers serving the most marginalized communities. This complicated matrix of politics, practice, work, and corporatization has taken place on the backs of teachers and their labor (and as well at the expense of student learning and well-being). By centering the agency, professional investments, and indeed the struggle of teachers,

the authors offer an important reframing of the ways in which the meaning of being a teacher is changing.

### **The Future of Large-Scale Assessment and Evaluation**

The complicated behemoth that is standards-based reform emerges from specific policy logic. From No Child Left Behind, to Race to the Top, to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, to the most recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, the U.S. has seen nearly two decades of successive federal reform effecting educational change. Common Core appeared to be a rallying cry for a national vision of standardization, and while states' rights advocates resisted alongside many researchers, teachers, and parents, the standards were adopted in almost every state. Although it was public policy, Common Core is better understood as a private-public partnership. *The Washington Post* argued Common Core would not have happened without the money and influence of private backers including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which “didn’t just bankroll the development of what became known as the Common Core State Standards,” but with “more than \$200 million ... also built political support across the country, persuading state governments to make systemic and costly changes” (Layton, 2014). Software giant Microsoft thereafter partnered with Pearson “to load Pearson’s Common Core classroom materials on Microsoft’s tablet, the Surface. That product allows Microsoft to compete for school district spending with Apple, whose iPad is the dominant tablet in classrooms” (ibid).

The authors suggest the real impact of Common Core remains to be seen as far as the impact on teachers’ work. The passage of ESSA further muddies the water as its bearing on education remains unclear at the time of writing (Spring, 2016). At its most basic, ESSA shifts some authority from the federal government back to states, but just how much, and indeed just how, is yet to be determined. Also unclear is how ESSA will impact parent opt-out movements and other resisters to standardized education, given the sustained obligation of states to test every student. A recent article in *The Atlantic* points out that despite a promise of state autonomy, “[states will] still be required to administer annual testing in certain grades, [and] ensure at least 95 percent of students participate” (Wong, 2015). The accountability matrix appears to be at the heart of the ESSA; a 95-percent test taking/compliance rate certainly appears to target those who dare destabilize the metric. What this means for teachers’ work writ large and writ small may be unclear, but the ESSA appears to be more a continuation (it is indeed a re-authorization of existing legislation) than a new chapter in life in U.S. schools.

This book suggests that many teachers favor accountability for the profession. This leads us to an imagining of teacher-driven accountability, which might reliably assess and improve student learning and indeed teacher quality—a revision of how we understand success guided at least in part by the voices and agency of our teachers. It is dangerous for the profession and the students it serves that such voices have been largely absent or marginalized in the testing conversation to date.

### **Neoliberal Modes of Funding and Governance**

Jennifer Job

Nuñez et al. begin their discussion of financing schools with a What If? scenario: What if Karen Lewis, Chicago Teachers Union President, had won the 2014 mayoral election instead of Rahm Emanuel?

What if recent years' practice of giving public money to private corporations through tax increment financing was ended, and schools were able to utilize the property taxes owed to them?...What if Chicago Public Schools once again were governed by a representative school board that was elected by the city's residents? What if a professional educator was hired to be the chief executive officer (and went back to being called the superintendent, while we're dreaming)? (p. 77)

This section, which goes on to name several other hypotheticals, highlights the neoliberal policies dominating not only CPS, but schools across the country in today's climate—privatization of public schooling, budget cuts that unfairly target poor schools, standardization and deprofessionalizing of teaching, and accountability models that focus solely on test scores rather than the whole child. Nuñez frames these policies through budgetary concerns in order to highlight the disconnect between the neoliberal agenda applied to public schools and the capitalist rhetoric used to describe schools.

The theory underlying this capitalist rhetoric is the idea of “College and Career Readiness,” a term popularized in the Common Core State Standards mission (CCSSI, 2017) and put on steroids by schools trying to align with both the Common Core and the prepackaged curricula states are imposing to meet the standards. Nuñez notes how schools have changed their mission statements to tout visions such as, “Empowering all students to compete globally” and how kindergartners know they come to school to “get a good job” (p. 78). Nuñez traces this trend to Schubert's concept of social behaviorism—the use of education as preparing children for future success that can be quantified. It can also be related to Kliebard's (2004) social efficiency model, which describes a history dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century of those who believe that school serves the community, and particularly the economy, by preparing students to be productive members of the workforce.

While the idea of using school to prepare children for work may not be new, the methods of how this can be done and the resources states are prepared to devote to this goal are vastly different in this new paradigm of funding and governance. As Nuñez points out in this section, in no other capitalist area would people expect *more* from their investment as a result of cutting budgets and assuring that the project is not fully funded. The current argument by neoliberal school reformers is that America's schools are wasting money. We spend more per pupil, they argue, than high-performing countries such as Australia, Norway, and Germany, and yet we are not getting the same “bang for our buck” (i.e., we do not perform as well on international tests such as the PISA that those countries do) (Ross, 2015).

Nuñez's discussion of various aspects of the new paradigm schools face is a thorough analysis of funding, accountability, and top-down control, and the disparities that are being purposely arranged through those mechanisms in order to undermine public schooling. It is also necessary to highlight the false comparisons that school reformers are using in order to bolster their argument for these policy changes, especially the argument that we spend too much on schools. Four of these false comparisons immediately come to mind.

First, many of the countries noted which spend less on education than the U.S. spend money on other social services we do not provide, services that are proven to improve student learning—universal healthcare, paid maternity leave, and nutrition programs, to name a few. Second, current reform practices have caused money to be siphoned out of the classroom. Large-scale accountability programs rely on testing that costs millions of dollars in tests, data analysts, and administrative oversight—money that could be used for better resources in the schools (Kohn,

2012). Third, school reformers are actually using public school funds to attack the public-school system itself. The strongest example, as Nuñez notes in this chapter, is the charter school movement. Charter schools take student populations from the local district, including the per-pupil funding, but often do not hire teachers from the district or the union as they are allowed to operate outside of the school system (Russakoff, 2015). Unions are then blamed for an excess of personnel that they did not cause. Reformers also use testing that they advocate for to highlight the supposed failure of public schools. And finally, the focus on business models of education has opened a wide door to undemocratic influxes of funds from “venture philanthropists,” private donors who not only give huge sums of money to particular districts and schools, but also have strict guidelines for how that money should be used (Saltman, 2012).

The concept of venture philanthropy brings me to a book that serves as an excellent companion to *Worth Striking For, The Prize* (Russakoff, 2015). A *New York Times* bestseller, *The Prize* chronicles how Newark Mayor Cory Booker and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie used a \$100 million grant from Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg to fund an attempt to privatize Newark’s troubled school district. This is another What If? scenario that shows the opposite of Nuñez’s dream situation: What if school reformers were given nearly unlimited resources and the blessing of the most powerful government officials to dismantle the public school system? Booker, who had his eye on more powerful positions than mayor, specifically courted Zuckerberg’s award to create a “Proof Point” from Newark—a plan that could be implemented successfully in cities around the country, no matter the context or culture. Although Newark has a teachers union and school board, years of failing test scores had placed the power over the district in the hands of the state commissioner, who appointed a superintendent who was able to treat the school board as merely advisory (similar to Chicago’s CEO of public schools).

Much of the book outlines the grim realities of a movement to replace neighborhood public schools with privatized charters. Russakoff gives voice to personal narratives of parents and students, recounting stories of siblings separated, young children assigned to schools across town from their homes, and troubled high schoolers pushed out of one school after another in an effort to find a place. But the message of *The Prize* is one of hope. Despite strong efforts by Booker’s team to obfuscate his plans and present a smokescreen of community involvement, the citizens of Newark caught on quickly to the fact that they were being left out of the process of educating their own children, and they fought back. Community forums were filled to capacity; protests against the new superintendent were formed. In the end, the grand experiment with Zuckerberg’s millions failed, and power was returned to the locally elected school board. Zuckerberg, to his credit, learned a lesson that many in his position do not—he refused to donate any more funding to outside districts he knew nothing about, preferring instead to fund a nonprofit local to him that relied on teachers and other education professionals to direct its activities.

*Worth Striking For* gives its readers similar hope. Despite all efforts to the contrary, the Chicago Teachers Union continues to fight for the idea of public education, and it is winning the hearts and minds of the community. Both books serve as both a warning and a balm to those looking for pathways to fight the seemingly indestructible “school reform” machine.

### **The Vocation of Teaching**

M. Francyne Huckaby

**T**he public rhetoric over the past few decades transformed the reputation of teachers and our profession from respectable and professional work accomplished by valuable members of the

community. In its stead, an invasive discourse shaped teachers as the lazy and greedy cause for the displacement of the USA in international rankings. In this context, teachers should be grateful for their jobs of leisure, long summer vacations, and union-supported job security. With this discursive strategy, teachers' unions carry the institutional blame for fostering and enabling national decline and failure.

This rhetoric has had real effects; it opened up public education for privatization, business and profits. Nuñez, Michie, and Konkol stress this point by quoting Rupert Murdoch, who claims that U.S. K-12 education is a “\$500 billion sector ... that is waiting desperately to be transformed” (cited in Nuñez, Michie, & Konkol, 2015, p. 108). The authors continue:

We do, after all, live under a capitalist economic system. In such a system, continuous growth is the only acceptable condition, and markets need to keep expanding. .... More disturbingly, the educational outcomes of the major inroads toward market-based education do not support the theory that the privatizers are working toward either educational equity or school improvement ... If anything, market involvement in public education has worsened outcomes for the most vulnerable populations, increased segregation, and exacerbated the racial achievement gap (p. 108).

For those of us who have followed (anti)education reforms, these are not new revelations. But the authors, in chapter six, make important offerings to reframe the situation. They remember for us that financial security, economic growth, and national ranking are not *the* purposes of education. They recall that the purposes of education were always contested. They remind us that as educators, we are not mere individuals, whose value can be pried from the whole.

Nuñez, Michie, and Konkol turn to George S. Counts, Paulo Freire, Michael Apple, William Schubert, Harold Rugg, and Howard Zinn to highlight the promise of education for social change. They stress the importance of a cadre of educators that foster the “asking of difficult questions.” For the authors, such questioning is “a demonstration of the best of our national character” (p. 97). The authors argue that protections for teachers such as job security and tenure preserve an inquiring, skeptical mindset. In other words, preserving the conditions that foster the free speech of teachers serves to encourage critical inquiry in students. Thus the erosion of tenure does not simply affect teacher job security; it threatens “the inquiry stance of future generations” (p. 97).

Nuñez, Michie, and Konkol show the problems of insecurity created by disrupting teaching-learning communities. They begin the chapter by recounting the death of Derrion Albert, a Fenger High School student. Unlike city policy and law makers, teachers in Chicago and community members acknowledged the culpability of the “turnaround” programs and dispersment of students across neighborhood lines. By firing teachers and school personnel, who know the students and the communities, turnaround programs sever ties between schools and communities.

Furthermore, school districts, like Chicago's, discount and ignore such knowledge as they implement policy changes professed to improve schools and education. These policies destabilized the school communities and created tensions that erupted in violence and death. The authors reframe security of teaching positions to make visible what teacher job security makes possible—and how the stripping of such security makes students and communities more vulnerable.

“If there is one policy that teachers need to speak out against with a single voice, it is this one” (p. 103): value-added measures (VAM) in teacher evaluation. VAM creates a system of ranking that always places some teachers on the bottom and flawed statistical modeling that results in rapid, random teacher turnover. We are members of our society, communities, who happen to also be

individuals; and the collective work we do as educators is valuable. VAM devalues this collective work of education and pits educator against educator. Such modeling assumes a valuing of measured achievement, which is but one answer to the question on the benefits of teachers and education. Facing the ever more present forced choice of a student's self-development or reaching of learning targets, Nuñez points out that she would choose the teacher who fosters her daughter's confidence, love of learning, and expression over the one that helps her reach learning targets. The purposes of education are indeed contested. The authors state:

We want our students to appreciate beauty not just in dance but in mathematics as well, and we want them to be creative not only with their art, but with their writing. Our first priority for every subject, above all other goals, should be enjoyment in learning. ... If we really want to raise achievement, we need to figure out with teachers the many ways to instill student engagement with their subjects. (pp. 100-101)

Ultimately, this chapter, like the rest of the book, is a call to teacher engagement with policy. The authors illustrate how disengagement impacts our profession, school communities, and society, as well as our ways of engaging democracy. Teacher security, then is not just an issue or privilege for the individual teacher. It's a concern for our society and future. Lurking in between the lines of this chapter (and this entire book) is a vision of this future, a continuation of the work of democracy through public education. Thus we need to think and act for change with a focus on social justice, resurrect the best of public education, and prepare ourselves and our educational institutions for the future that makes equitable, just public education possible and sustainable.

### **Bringing It All Together**

Pamela Konkol

**I**n this text, we attempted to explicate and illustrate the greater policy arenas in which the work of teachers and the lives of children, families, and communities are embedded. We used a variety of philosophical and analytic tools generate understanding, and hopefully succeeded in crafting an impetus for action for all who engage with it.

The real question remains, how do we thoughtfully and practically apply all of this theory, all of this knowledge, in real life, to real issues, and in real situations? To what end this new cache of information, this application of philosophy of purpose, and these different ways of seeing and knowing? How might we manifest these ideas and this work in our intellectual and professional practices? And in our current educational and policy milieux, why might doing so even matter in the long run?

When I think about my own hopes for what this text can do for teachers (and for all of us who work in the service of education, who support teachers and students and communities, and everyone in between), I think about how an understanding of policy, of "how things work," can assist all of us in working not just for change, but instead for *transformation* of structures and systems.

Because words are tricky, it's important to take a moment to trouble the difference between "transformation" and "change." We use these words a lot, but what do they really mean? What does it mean to "work for change?" What does it mean to engage in "transformative action?" How are these ideas similar, and how are they significantly different?

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines “change” as “to make or become different.” Importantly however, change, in and of itself, does not imply direction, just difference. This is key. Change can result in something “good,” it can further complicate issues or otherwise create a situation that is “bad,” or it might not lead in any sort of substantive qualitative difference. In education, we toss around the notion of “working for change” quite a bit. Conventionally, it seems to be understood that if we “work for change,” we’re working for something positive, or in the service of social justice, or toward some better place or end than where we’re at right now. But looking around at the world in which we (and our students) are teaching right now, and considering the contested ideas of what it means to be well educated, the purpose of schooling and education, or what good teaching looks like in all classrooms, I must ask, is that inclination toward the positive always the case? When working for change, it is incumbent upon us to make sure that that change is for the good, and not just an alternative to what’s already in place. Change does not always represent progress, and it’s not always in the service of something good; it’s our responsibility to be mindful of that.

“Transformation” is defined in the *New Oxford American Dictionary* as “a thorough or dramatic change; a metamorphosis.” For me, thinking about “working for change” as “transformative” takes this conversation to a different place. Working for change is good – it’s what we are “supposed” to do as advocates for children and families, schools and communities. But a commitment to working for change that is fundamentally “transformative?” Well, that puts upon us a whole new mantle of responsibility. Transformative change is big – and the 2012 Chicago strike was certainly big, in size, scale, and scope. But thinking more broadly, “big” can also happen in small or focused ways, and in contexts that are comparatively tiny. Transformation can be paradigm shifting for the profession, or it can be life changing for a few students in a classroom – or maybe even one.

It is at this point of contemplation where this text becomes a truly hopeful one for me.

One of my very favorite phrases from one of my very favorite philosophers can be found in Maxine Greene’s (1997) eloquent and moving piece, *Teaching as Possibility: A Light in Dark Times*. (It can also be found on p. 77 of our text). Here, Greene implores us to “imagine not what is necessarily probable or predictable, but what may be conceived as possible.” Greene compels us to reach beyond what we know, beyond what we believe “we can” do, or what we “we should” do, and aspire to *dream bigger* and to do *more*. When we begin to imagine what *should* be, what *could* be, we can begin to imagine how to get there.

Not so long ago, Diane Ravitch publicly chastised college of education academics and questioned when we are going to “start taking control back.” My moral compass, (and I hope all of our moral compasses in our own contexts), tells me that it is my and my colleagues duty, our responsibility as teacher and administrator educators to act on behalf of not just our students, but more importantly, the children and families that our students serve as educators themselves. If we want to believe that teaching for social justice, teaching to transform, and working for change are more than pieces of empty rhetoric and fashionable slogans, we have no other choice.

Now, this next bit may seem simplistic, even naïve, but in order to ask folks to consciously work in the service of justice and transformation, I believe that we, as these teachers of teachers and administrators, have to provide them with the tools and knowledge to do so. We need to engage folks in the type of dialoguing, advocating, and educating in ways that empower them to ask critical and difficult questions, that force them to examine social inequities and imperatives, and open the possibility for them contest practices that are harmful and disempowering, and do so with a strong foundation of knowledge and critical analysis.

We believe that this text is a place to start this conversation.

Importantly, in doing this, we must also strive to inspire bravery, courage of conviction, and a disposition toward action in our students *and* our colleagues. Way too often conversations among on-the-ground teachers revolve around feelings of disempowerment, lack of voice, or the possibility (or would that be probability) that taking action would result in negative repercussions of some sort. It is easy to feel overwhelmed at the enormity of the task of conceptualizing action, real action, toward transforming something they, we, care deeply about in terms of education and schooling. But when those on the front lines think this way, and when we think this way, we have already lost the battle, if not the war.

Dewey said (1900/1915), “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon it destroys our democracy.” Beautiful, right? And a tall order. I do realize that asking everyone to be brave in the face of power structures, to not only question that which comes down the pike, but to take conscious and conscientious action against those things which they know are not in the best interest of themselves or the children, families, or communities in their care, is a lot to ask. A lot. But the Chicago teachers did it. And if the 2015 April 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Action here in Chicago is any indication of what is to come, they will do it again.

And as much as I believe in my heart that the work of the educator is a calling and a vocation, I also maintain that teachers cannot be expected to serve as the sacrificial lambs for the cause. But... as Edmund Burke is reputed to have said, all it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing. And Chicago teachers continue to maintain that doing nothing is simply not an acceptable option. To truly transform lives, and not just contribute to yet another rearrangement of policies and procedures, we must be brave. We must hold true to our convictions, and we must not hesitate to act. This is a lot to expect of us, I know. But we are teachers. If not us, then who? I realize now that I am speaking to the book we really wanted to write, but I believe that these ideas, this impetus for conscious, moral action, comes through on these pages as well. I hope you can see it too.

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