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Editorial

Learning Friendship: Critical Education and Community, Political and Personal

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It is an honor to present this special edition and its group of studies to you. As Guest Editor, for this Special Edition of the *International Journal of Education Policies*,** it has been a pleasure to share the work of this group of scholars whose contributions demonstrate deep social, critical engagement. Each piece here carries with it the critical element of scholarly citizenship which is at the heart of democracy through education. Thank you to everyone who worked to share these papers; I apologize for any undue delays. Sadly, I contributed to this while struggling and procrastinating, trying to find the right words for this short editorial. There was a constant argument in my mind about what to say, for this is both and at the same time: professional and personal in a special way.

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** This Special Issue of the journal, comes to our readers in two volumes. Volumes 13 (1), which you see here, and the upcoming volume, 14 (1). Both reflect the thematic guidance of C. Wright Mill's landmark inspiration to generations of critical social scientists, the 1959 publication of his, *The Sociological Imagination*. We hope you enjoy these volumes and the expansive, creative, and critical spirit they represent.

One may work for a notion of justice where an injury to one is an injury to all, and the struggle was always challenging, new pressures make the work seem sometimes hopeless. The authors here demonstrate scholarship conducted in very trying times. They extend that necessary exploration, mindful of civil ideal-the democratic promise of public education. The ideological machinery of late capitalist distortion democracy challenges all with accelerating existential injustice, working class immiseration, including the working-class teacher's increasing exploitation. This journal, its editorial board, editor, and subscribers here are committed, ensuring the work continues. I thank Hasan Aksoy for his invitation to guest edit this special edition. He once generously invited me to be a part of a tough, resilient community in solidarity, and my effort here is the latest effort to make my contribution worthy of this trust.

The power of "story" to inform, and the sociological imagination to elevate, and not merely decorate social research, is here in these works. So, let me share one about a worker, and about how to work, when the inner and outer tensions seem unbearable, when words just fail.

Over the years, I would encourage writer's-blocked students to just write. I would plead-- "Just get it down!" And I would tell this story. As a student for five summers I worked for the City of Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation, paying for College. We traveled the Southside of the city, fixing torn up streets, rutted by traffic and the fierce Chicago winter. One day two men on the crew started shouting at each other, after a day of filling holes in stifling heat. They were arguing how they were moving the material, a heavy, near boiling combination of tar, oil, and stones, from the truck to the street, and then arguing how over how the patch looked. I thought they would throw down their gloves and start fighting right there. Just then Andy Esposito, our foreman said, and he didn't say much often, "Fellas, ... fellas...these streets are going to be here-- a long, long time after we're gone...just get it down. Ok? Just get it down." I also remember the sight of that patch as we drove to away. It looked fine. In fact, it was perfect.

At lunch, Andy asked us to go to a nearby public park. Usually we went our separate ways. But there, under an old Elm tree, he opened his car trunk, took out a grill and a cooler, and started cooking for us. We all relaxed over the treat, grilled Italian sausage, and peppers. Tempers were forgotten. Then somebody said, "Shouldn't we get back, boss?" "I'm worried... Gorman might be in the neighborhood." Gorman was Andy's manager, the District Superintendent, and a bureaucrat who took himself too seriously. Just then, Andy stood up, opened the big, dented cooler he'd been sitting on, and from deep in the ice he pulled out a can, and said so everyone could hear. "Hey fellas, this guy's worried; he wants to know what time it is," and he bent over

to dig out a cold drink. He looked at the can, back to us, and then at his wrist, and said with a big smile, “Well fellas, it looks like my watch says, it’s just about beer o’clock.” Everybody laughed, and we took a long lunch that day. It was a small lesson of community, and leadership: a little resistance, a little defiance, done in style.

The years I worked and attended university, coincided with tremendous social upheavals. That student summer was 1969. Civil rights student protest and the violent reaction, and memory of Chicago’s un-Democratic National Convention and the fires of 1968, are in my mind, as we live life now in this long hot, seemingly endless summer of grief, for our nations and our Earth.

The journal you have before you is international in scope and intent, and my entrée to the work here I focused on its emergence from dedicated comrades, education workers in Turkey, especially at Ankara University where I was graciously invited to teach and study in 2014-2015 academic year. It was the first of what were to be two extended visits for teaching and scholarship, the second time at Middle East Technical University. The work herein demonstrates in each case how critical scholarship at its best often unfolds in the way partnerships develop, across education sites. Social change and education both are forms of action that combine, organically, critique and practice, moving toward organization, organizing for practical, foundational, radical democratic change. My work here began with Professor Hasan Aksoy’s invitation to me, and dedication to the complex process of hosting mine and my wife Jamie’s visit to Ankara University. And continues here with his invitation to guest-edit the journal. In the intervening six years I worked to honor this trust by facilitating wherever I could, the notion of community solidarity as a foundation of social justice education, and I found such great comrades in this effort, as ongoing projects are alive and well.

In the first month to Ankara, I was invited to address a group of students to present an account of the then recent and sudden “disappearance” of 43 Teacher Education students in the Ayotzinapa region of Mexico. I showed a PowerPoint slide, showing the faces of each student. And I can see those faces now, as I think of Dragana Temelkov’s exceptionally powerful Book Review Essay in this collection, *The Mystery Behind the Disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa Students: What’s Left?* She writes a powerful story, woven through her reviews, throwing light on the darkness of that event. Ironically, not long after her review essay came to us, the remains of those young students were discovered after all those years. On the PowerPoint Slide I used, alongside The Forty-Three, I had placed a photo of Michael Brown, who was murdered by police in the U.S. around the same time, It was his high school graduation photo, in cap and gown.

African American writer James Baldwin chose to live in Istanbul during the heart of the 1960s era of Civil Rights protest in America. Writing from therein an unpublished manuscript, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” Fifty some-years on, we are faced with suffocation, new threats to free human life, the cry of George Floyd, “I can’t breathe,” takes on a new urgency. And the politics of plague in my own country, where denial has become a litmus test for patriotism, thousands suffocate alone each month.

I think of those thousands, and I think of Baldwin, the legacy of George Floyd, at the intersection of racism, classism and greed, and the spirit of Nazim Hikmet, who from his confinement would not let the world forget about the hope of freedom, and the freedom of hope itself. Thus, from our own confinement, we are educated. This journal edition was developed in the spirit of C. Wright Mills and his essay “The Promise” in *The Sociological Imagination*. There Mills would argue that academic research must be in harmony with struggles of ordinary people, reflecting their sufferings and burdens. And this research must reflect also deeper community histories, inscribed equally with wisdom drawn from deep wells of music, art, and literature. I recall a poem that speaks across time in that way. We may think of pandemic as theme and reality. So many live with grief fear right now, and are isolated in this, and desperate for the inspiration to lighten that burden. In his poem “Living,” Nazim Hikmet channels the seriousness of our present social and physical universe, with verse that speaks to the way living, in such times, is deeply serious, and echoes also of our medical nightmare.

“Living is no laughing matter:
You must take it seriously.
So much so and to such a degree
that, for example, your hands tied
behind your back,
your back to the wall
or else in a laboratory
in your white coat and safety glasses,
you can die for people –
even for people whose faces you’ve
never seen,
even though you know living
is the most real, most beautiful
thing.
I mean, you must take living so
seriously

that even at seventy, for example, you'll
plant olive trees –
and not for the children, either,
but because, although you fear death you
don't believe it,
because living, I mean, weighs heavier.”ⁱ

... II

Let's say you're seriously ill, need surgery -
which is to say we might not get
from the white table.

Even though it's impossible not to feel sad
about going a little too soon,
we'll still laugh at the jokes being told,
we'll look out the window to see it's raining,
or still wait anxiously
for the latest newscast ...

With life currently at stake, this existential threat of Covid-19, and that of the deep concern for our climate and environment, takes on a new immediacy. Each author here represents the importance of principle, and responsibility, that life is precious and that our work touches that “great humanity” we both serve and live in. In *Equality of Educational Opportunity, Secularism, and The Aladağ Dormitory Fire*, Pelin Taşkın and Nihan Demirkasımoğlu share here the way lives were ended and family lives changed forever when a dormitory fire, caused by negligence, secrecy and poverty diminishing the grounds for proper safety for public school children. These conditions, if left by themselves, can lead only to more such institutional violence, for when constitutional protection for learning environment safety moves from public to private property, the profit motive of housing “entrepreneurs” can and does overshadow civic responsibility.

I recall how Kafka, who expanded our consciousness with his work, would speculate about Education, and asked the question: *What kinds of reforms would children want?* In this time of plague, yet another verse from Nazim Hikmet, is a soft inspiration, and a beautiful reminder that we honor the children who are really at the base of our work, as he wrote:

Let's give the world to the children just for one day
like a balloon in bright and striking colours to play with
let them play singing among the stars
let's give the world to the children
like a huge apple like a warm loaf of bread
at least for one day let them have enough
let's give the world to the children
at least for one day let the world learn friendship
children will get the world from our hands
they'll plant immortal trees.ⁱⁱ

For our work, we have no choice, we will give to them, as generations past gave us theirs, and children in turn, to theirs. How the world will “learn friendship” will be the legacy of our life’s work. Socrates once asked whether the problem of justice is not first tied up in the problem of friendship, and the problem of war; that place where solidarity or violence is the result of or use of reason, And our schools, our Colleges of Arts, Sciences, and Education are guardians of those conditions that either maximize or destroy the possibility of justice and peace, the dream of lands barren or fruitful, where olive trees either grow, or wither and die.

Socially engaged scholarship also includes those where the study is essentially organic, where praxis retains radical roots. Gerald Wood’s article, *Troubling Sanctuary: Excavating the Moral and Educational Wreckage of the Charter School Movement*, documents his year of struggle and study. Disciplined “storytelling” at its best, Gerald shows a collaboration of colleagues, working to run a marginalized school, working to keep that endangered school running, against the rise of xenophobic, neoliberal pressures from without.

During the time when I was working to solicit submission to the journal, I had to go to a funeral, and at the same time visit the *International Conference on Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI)* partly to solicit contributions for this edition. One of my own mentors in the University of Illinois College of Education, Terry Denny, had passed. It was like losing my own father, for he shared so much with me as I grew in my career, family, and life. He had encouraged me and hundreds of other students. And in the spirit of Nazim’s line where 70 is an age for planting olive trees, I’m thinking more, as I approach that birthday not far away, about sharing the gifts my teachers in life, art and science, shared with me. In “research” Terry would insist that we make a visit to our heart and soul on the road to our minds, and never be disconnected from the ancient purposes of storytelling. At an ICQI session devoted to his influence, Jean

Kirschner joined a group of us who were discussing Terry's impact as a researcher, on a generation. She made a reference in the discussion to her work in Belize, with teachers in a collaboration between that community and her school community in Colorado, and I asked if she might share this. In *Deep Engagement: Imagining and Enacting Possible Selves and Possible Worlds for Global Change*, by Jean Kirshner, with George Kamberelis, they provide an example of how transformations happen within distant educational communities, requiring close, sometimes painful, even humbling, cross-cultural collaboration. It is descriptive and evocative, in the best representation of Denny's storytelling method, working the story around the skillful means of close participant observation.

Our Special Edition ends with a special piece. *Insurgent Memories and Some Work Toward a Revolutionary Vision of Public University* is Carolyne White's account of her career of activism in the university, written in this compelling first-person narrative. Many of you who are reading this edition juggle many responsibilities working within the confines of the university. Carolyne White shares a lifetime of experience, using examples social "project" work, and her experience in education institutional politics, and how she worked to create the conditions for democracy in education, within the university. In compelling first-person narrative, she manages to make the urgency of projects from past years, come alive. Beginning with a dream, such projects unfold that model and inspire collaboration for progressive institutional change. Carolyne is also telling how this work was organic to her own transformation as an activist professor, and administrator.

So, I finally listened my own advice, and I got it down. And here I'm happy to celebrate this cross-community, international union of collaborators and social justice educators.

I offer a raised glass, to every one of you in the Turkish community who have guided my work and warmed my life and our family's heart over the past seven years. To all, that One Big Union, thanks for the inspiration and the living example: choosing hope, in "revolution against isolation" who are, "making the road by walking," one story at a time.

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Notes

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About the Guest Editor

Guy Senese is Professor Emeritus in Social Foundations and Educational Leadership in the College of Education at Northern Arizona University. He has published in the fields of Native American Education, Critical Theory and Pedagogy, and Autoethnographic Critical Studies in Education. Professor Senese is the author of *Self Determination and the Social Education of Native American; Simulation, Spectacle and the Ironies of Education Reform; School and Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 8th ed., and *Throwing Voices: Five Autoethnographies on Post-Radical Education*, and the *Fine Art of Misdirection*. He was Faculty Associate at Middle Eastern Technical University, in 2018, and Fulbright Foundation Fellow to Ankara University, College of Education Sciences, in 2015. Doctor Senese is the recent co-editor with Dr. Fatma Mızıkacı, of *The Language of Freedom and Teacher's Authority: Case Comparisons from Turkey and the US*. He received his Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois and taught high school Social Studies at the Rough Rock Demonstration School, on the Navajo Nation reservation in Arizona. He is currently Faculty Adjunct at Pima Community College, and co-organizer and coordinator at the Salt of the Earth Labor College. He lives with his wife Jamie, who is a School Social Worker, retired, in Tucson, Arizona.

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