

## Afterword Reflections on Contemporary Educator Movements

Lauren Ware Stark, Erin Dyke et Rhiannon Maton

Volume 13, numéro 4, 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1093014ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v13i4.186729>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Institute for Critical Education Studies / UBC

ISSN

1920-4175 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Stark, L., Dyke, E. & Maton, R. (2022). Afterword: Reflections on Contemporary Educator Movements. *Critical Education*, 13(4), 50–57.  
<https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v13i4.186729>

Résumé de l'article

In this afterword, the editors of the special series Contemporary Educator Movements: Transforming Unions, Schools, and Society in North America reflect on the purpose and contributions the series. After reviewing relevant research, they discuss the focus of each of the four issues in the special series as well as themes that appear across the series. Finally, they highlight some of the contributions this series makes to research on social justice unionism and educator organizing.

© Lauren Ware Stark, Erin Dyke et Rhiannon Maton, 2022



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

éru  
dit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

# Critical Education

Volume 13 Number 4

October 15, 2022

ISSN 1920-4175

---

## *Afterword*

### *Reflections on Contemporary Educator Movements*

Lauren Ware Stark

*University of Maine at Augusta*

Erin Dyke

*Oklahoma State University*

Rhiannon Maton

*State University of New York College at Cortland*

Citation: Stark, L. W., Dyke, E., & Maton, R., (2022). Afterword: Reflections on contemporary educator movements *Critical Education*, 13(4), 50-57.

<http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled/article/view/186729>

### **Abstract**

*In this afterword, the editors of the special series Contemporary Educator Movements: Transforming Unions, Schools, and Society in North America reflect on the purpose and contributions the series. After reviewing relevant research, they discuss the focus of each of the four issues in the special series as well as themes that appear across the series. Finally, they highlight some of the contributions this series makes to research on social justice unionism and educator organizing.*



Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and *Critical Education*. More details of this Creative Commons license are available from <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. *Critical Education* is published by the Institute for Critical Educational Studies and housed at the University of British Columbia.

Educators have led some of the most significant labor struggles in recent years, including record-breaking work stoppages in the U.S. education sector in 2018 and 2019 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Through their leadership in movements including Red for Ed, educators have organized alongside students, parents, and community members to demand equitable, well-funded public schools, in many cases withholding their labor to secure “the schools our students deserve.” While the COVID-19 pandemic brought a slowdown in worker strikes in all sectors of the U.S. economy in 2020 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021), educator organizing continued throughout this period, with significant actions such as walkouts and sickouts excluded from work stoppage data (Poydock, McNicholas, & Shierholz, 2021). Throughout the pandemic, educators have used both bottom-up organizing and collective bargaining to advocate for public health measures that protect educators, students, and communities, ranging from smaller class sizes to testing to remote learning in the midst of outbreaks (Bradbury, 2020; Jaffe, 2020; Jones, 2021). They have also continued to lead equity-oriented and antiracist struggles including the Black Lives Matter at School movement, which expanded its national organizing to a Year of Purpose in 2020 (Black Lives Matter at School, 2020; Jones & Hagopian, 2020).

## **Background on Contemporary Educator Movements**

### ***Social Justice Unionism and Educator Organizing***

By engaging in these struggles, rank-and-file educators have contributed to a growing tradition that they often discuss as social justice unionism: a form of unionism through which unionists democratically organize alongside parents, students, and other community members for social justice both in schools and in society as a whole (Behrent, 2015; National Coalition of Education Activists, 1994; Peterson, 1999; Rottmann, 2013). Frequently referred to as social movement unionism in the labor studies literature (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; Moody, 1997; Weiner, 2012), this model emphasizes democratic and, at times, horizontalist labor organizing for common good and anti-oppression policies. In following this model, educators advance equitable policies and practices alongside traditional “bread and butter” issues such as pay and benefits, which have historically been prioritized under the model of “business style unionism.”

While social justice unionists frequently lead mobilizing efforts to address immediate challenges, they also engage in ongoing “deep organizing” to address longstanding inequalities at the local, national, and international levels (McAlevy, 2016). Through this organizing alongside parents, students, and community allies, educators take part in what we term contemporary educator movements: social movements that aim to transform teachers unions, schools, and society (Stark, 2019). These movements are characterized by organizers’ use of democratic processes to advance justice from the ground up, frequently centering multiple forms of justice and supporting or organizing alongside other movements. In this way, they connect with what social movement scholars term the “movement of movements” (Sen, 2017) of the past three decades, which use a “contemporary logic of resistance” (Wolfson et al., 2017, p. 397) that emphasizes democratic processes, networks, and new technologies to advance multiple forms of justice (Juris, 2008).

### ***Historical Background***

While they build on the legacies of progressive movements reaching back decades (Stern, Brown, & Hussain, 2016), we can most directly trace contemporary educator movements back to

the mid 1990s (Stark, 2019). In the face of increasing standardization in public schools, educators in the National Coalition of Education Activists (1994) developed and put forward a definition of social justice unionism that prioritizes democracy and social justice. Organizers in this coalition put these principles into practice in reform campaigns in labor organizations across the country, including the first organizations that might be called social justice caucuses: groups of educator unionists committed to rank-and-file organizing alongside parents, students, and community members for justice in schools and society. The most influential of these caucuses, the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), was formed in Chicago in 2008, drawing on lessons from educators in British Columbia and Los Angeles. Educators in this caucus went on to win the top elected positions in their union, leading the pivotal Chicago teachers strike in 2012 (Uetricht, 2014). Inspired in large part by CORE, social justice caucuses developed across the United States throughout the 2010s, with organizers coming together to form the (inter)national United Caucuses of Rank-and-File Educators (UCORE) network in 2014. Through this network, educators in nearly thirty local and statewide caucuses share strategies from each other's work, fostering the development of contemporary educator movements throughout the United States and beyond.

### **Research on Contemporary Educator Movements**

As these movements have blossomed over the course of the past decade, scholar activists have used engaged methodologies to both document and support educator struggles, in some cases publishing research in collaboration with practitioner scholars (Asselin, 2019; Bocking, 2017; Brogan, 2014; Dani & Asselin, 2020; Dyke & Muckian-Bates, 2019; Maton, 2018; Maton & Stark, 2021; Owens, 2020; Riley, 2015; Shiller & BMORE caucus, 2019; Stark, 2019). Likewise, practitioners have offered illuminating public scholarship on these movements, sharing insights from their experiences with fellow organizers, scholars, and the general public (Anderson & Cohen, 2017; Charney, Hagopian, & Peterson, 2021; Friedman & McCormick, 2020; Griego, 2015; Hagopian, 2015/2016; Karvelis, 2018/2019). Few volumes have brought together both practitioner scholars and scholar activists to explore organizing processes within these movements, however. With this goal in mind, this special series includes articles and interviews featuring the analyses of practitioner scholars and scholar activists who are engaged in this work, centering “movement relevant” (Bevington & Dixon, 2005) perspectives on key struggles within the United States and across the Americas.

### **Overview of this Special Series**

The issues in this special series have been organized thematically. In the first issue of the series (Vol. 12, No. 7), we bring together articles exploring learning and knowledge production in contemporary educator movements. In the second issue of this series (Vol. 13, No. 2), we turn our attention to the 2018 statewide walkouts. In the third issue of the series (Vol. 13, No. 3), we explore (anti)racism, democracy, and social justice unionism in contemporary educator movements. In the fourth and final issue of the series (Vol. 13, No. 4), we expand our scope to educator organizing across the Americas, focusing particularly on teachers unions and recent struggles in Canada and Chile.

### *Counternarratives*

The articles in these issues deepen our understanding of contemporary educator movements in a range of ways. Together, they offer counternarratives that complicate popular accounts of educator organizing and are built from authors' engaged research with and for contemporary educator movements. In many cases, these counternarratives draw on direct experiences of organizing within contemporary educator movements. Composing a research team of K12 and teacher educators, Erin Dyke, Heather Anderson, Autumn Brown, Jinan El Sabbagh, Hannah Fernandez, Stacey Goodwin, Mark Hickey, Stephanie Price, Megan Ruby, Kristy Self, Jennifer Williams, and Angel Worth conducted an oral history study of the 2018 Oklahoma statewide strike. Analyzing more than 50 narratives, their piece illuminates ways the struggle grew educators' political understandings, local union participation, and activism in the strike's aftermath. Likewise, in his review of Eric Blanc's *Red State Revolt* (2019), Noah Karvelis draws on his lived experience of organizing in the 2018 Arizona statewide walkouts to shed light on elements of the Red for Ed movement that were not discussed in the text, including the leadership of women of color and the ways that this organizing built on previous movements. Moreover, in her qualitative study featuring educators in the Caucus of Working Educators (WE) in Philadelphia, Dana Morrison explores the influence of previous movements on these educator organizers and their work, revealing the deep roots of recent labor struggles. Furthermore, in their conceptual analysis of the organizational structures of teachers unions, Nina Bascia and Sachin Maharaj draw on case studies of labor organizations in Canada and Chile to showcase the importance of internal organizing structures to advancing external social movement goals.

### *Micro-Level Analyses*

By centering first-hand accounts of educator organizing, many of the articles in this series offer micro-level analyses of organizing processes within contemporary educator movements, sharing insights into both fruitful and counterproductive organizing practices. For example, in his autoethnographic narrative of anti-austerity educator organizing in Ontario, Canada, Paul Bocking offers detailed descriptions and analyses of this struggle, sharing insights relevant for both rank-and-file educators and elected union leaders. Likewise, in her qualitative study of a summer reading series hosted by WE in Philadelphia, Kathleen Riley explores how and why educator unionists use book groups for political education. Similarly, in an interview conducted by Rhiannon Maton, Ontario Education Workers United (OEWU) member and organizer Deborah Buchanan-Walford discusses how educators within her new, cross-union organization have used grassroots organizing strategies to advance justice within Ontario schools. Moreover, in her critical autoethnographic analysis of organizing for democracy and against racism in Newark, New Jersey, Leah Owens shares rich vignettes from her experiences as an educator organizer and leader, highlighting the need for anti-racist practices within caucus organizing.

## **Cultural Processes of Contemporary Educator Movements**

### *Centering Ethical Principles*

The articles and interviews in this series also investigate the cultural processes that characterize contemporary educator movements, including centering ethical principles, using new technologies, and organizing within and across networks. Several pieces emphasize the centrality

of ethical principles to educator organizing, focusing particularly on racial justice, economic justice, and democracy. Chloe Asselin explores how educator organizers in New York and Philadelphia challenge racism through democratic organizing, for example. Likewise, in an interview conducted by Jessica Shiller, Baltimore Teachers Union and Baltimore Movement of Rank-and-File Educators organizer Keysha Godwin highlights the importance of representation as well as grassroots organizing to the caucus and union's work.

### ***Using New Technologies***

Other articles and interviews elucidate how organizers use new technologies to expand traditional organizing practices, such as political education or site-based organizing. In their qualitative study of organizing within the Red for Ed movement(s), for example, Crystal Howell Beck and Caleb Schmitzer analyze how West Virginia educators used online organizing strategies to develop a statewide struggle. Similarly, in an interview conducted by Noah Karveles, Arizona Red for Ed leader Vanessa Arrendono-Aguirre discusses how rural, urban, and statewide organizers used technologies such as Action Network and Excel to develop a strong statewide network and struggle.

### ***Engaging in Networks***

The articles and interviews in this series also explore the centrality of networks to organizing within and across contemporary educator movements. In her exploration of knowledge production among activist educators, Tricia Niesz discusses how educators create and use networks to share knowledge. Likewise, in an interview conducted by Lauren Ware Stark, Black Lives Matter at School leaders Tamara Anderson and Jesse Hagopian discuss how the movement spread from a single local Day of Action to a national Week of Action and Year of Purpose through a range of educator-led networks.

## **Conclusion**

Together, the articles and interviews in this series deepen our knowledge of contemporary educator movements, offering engaged studies and narratives of educator organizing in the United States and across the Americas. By bringing together the analyses of scholar activists and practitioner scholars, this series contributes to both practical and academic knowledge around these movements. In this way, it provides tools for future scholar activists and practitioners to both understand and engage in these movements, using frameworks such as social justice unionism to transform educators' schools, unions, and broader communities.

## **References**

- Anderson, T. & Cohen, S. (2017, May 8). How Black Lives Matter Came to Philadelphia's Schools. *Labor Notes Blog*. Retrieved from <http://labornotes.org/blogs/2017/05/how-black-lives-matter-came-philadelphia-schools>
- Asselin, C. (2019). *Tensions, dilemmas, and radical possibility in democratizing teacher unions: Stories of two social justice caucuses* [Doctoral Dissertation, Graduate Center, City University of New York, Graduate Program in Urban Education].

- Behrent, M. (2015, May 19). The meaning of social justice unionism. *Socialist Worker*.  
<https://socialistworker.org/2015/05/18/the-meaning-of-social-justice-unionism>
- Bevington, D., & Dixon, C. (2005). Movement-relevant theory. *Social Movement Studies*, 4(3), 185-208.
- Black Lives Matter at School (2020, Fall). Pledge to participate in the Black Lives Matter at School “Year of Purpose.” *Rethinking Schools*, 35(1).  
<https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/year-of-purpose/>
- Blanc, E. (2019). *Red State Revolt: The Teachers’ Strike Wave and Working-Class Politics*. London & New York: Verso Books.
- Bocking, P. (2017). *Understanding the neoliberalization of education through spaces of labour autonomy* [Doctoral dissertation, York University, Canada].  
<https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/34487>
- Bradbury, A. (2020, September 18). School and campus workers say: Not until it’s safe. *Labor Notes*. <https://labornotes.org/2020/09/school-and-campus-workers-say-not-until-its-safe>
- Brogan, P. (2014). Getting to the CORE of the Chicago Teachers’ Union transformation. *Studies in Social Justice*, 8(2), 145–164.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019, February 15). Major Work Stoppages (Annual) News Release. [https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/wkstp\\_02082019.htm](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/wkstp_02082019.htm)
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020, February 14). 25 major work stoppages in 2019 involving 425,500 workers. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/25-major-work-stoppages-in-2019-involving-425500-workers.htm>
- Charney, M., Hagopian, J., & Peterson, B. (2021). *Teachers unions and social justice: Organizing for the schools and communities our students deserve*. Rethinking Schools.
- Dani, A. & Asselin, C. (2020, October 29). Beginnings: A social justice caucus in formation in Boston. *Urban Education Justice Project*, 4.  
<http://wp.towson.edu/urbanedemproj/2020/10/29/beginnings-a-social-justice-caucus-in-formation-in-boston>
- Dyke, E., & Bates, B. M. (2019). Striking for a better world : The significance of social movement and solidarity unionisms. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 9(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.5070/B89146423>
- Fletcher, B., & Gapsin, F. (2008). *Solidarity divided: The crisis in organized labor and a new path toward social justice*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Friedman, E. & McCormick, N. (2020, October 19). West Virginia teachers organizing for the common good. *The Forge: Organizing Strategy and Practice*.  
<https://forgeorganizing.org/article/west-virginia-teachers-organizing-common-good>
- Griego, K. (2015, March 30). L.A. teachers escalate. *Labor Notes*.  
<https://labornotes.org/2015/03/la-teachers-escalate>
- Hagopian, J. (2015/2016, Winter). The Seattle educators’ strike. *Rethinking Schools*, 30(2).  
<https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/education-action-the-seattle-educators-strike/>

- Hagopian, J. (2019, Fall). Jesse Hagopian talks with Gillian Russom: How Los Angeles teachers organized and what they won. *Rethinking Schools*, 34(14).  
<https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/jesse-hagopian-talks-with-gillian-russom-how-los-angeles-teachers-organized-and-what-they-won/>
- Jaffe, S. (2020, Fall). Schools reopen – and teachers fight for their lives, their students, and the future of public education. *Rethinking Schools*, 35(1).  
<https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/schools-reopen-and-teachers-fight/>
- Jones, S. (2021, February 26). Teachers unions aren't the obstacle to reopening schools. *Intelligencer*. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/02/teachers-unions-arent-the-obstacle-to-reopening-schools.html>
- Jones, D., & Hagopian, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Black Lives Matter at school: An uprising for educational justice*. Haymarket Books.
- Juris, J. (2008). *Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Globalisation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Karvelis, N. (2018/2019, Winter). You need rank and file to win: How Arizona teachers built a movement. *Rethinking Schools*, 33(2). <https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/you-need-rank-and-file-to-win-how-arizona-teachers-built-a-movement/>
- Maton, R. (2018.) From Neoliberalism to Structural Racism: Problem Framing in a Teacher Activist Organization. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 48(3): 1–23.
- Moody, K. (1997, Sept Oct). Towards an international social movement unionism. *New Left Review*, 1(3), 225-238.
- National Coalition of Education Activists (NCEA) (1994). Social justice unionism: A call to education activists. *Rethinking Schools*, 9(1), 5-7.
- Maton, R. (2018). From neoliberalism to structural racism: Problem framing in a teacher activist organization. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 48(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2018.1474711>
- Maton, R. & Stark, L.W. (2021). Educators learning through struggle: Political education in social justice caucuses. *Journal of Educational Change*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-021-09444-0>
- McAlevy, J. F. (2016). *No shortcuts: Organizing for power in the new gilded age*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Peterson, B. (1999). Survival and justice: Rethinking teacher union strategy. In B. Peterson & M. Charney (Eds.) *Transforming teacher unions: Fighting for better schools and social justice* (pp. 11-19). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Poydock, M., McNicholas, C., & Shierholz, H. (2021, February 19). Downturn in strike activity reflects COVID-19 recession but fails to capture many walkouts for worker safety. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/publication/2020-work-stoppage-report/>
- Riley, K. (2015). Reading for change: Social justice unionism book groups as an organizing tool. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 12(1).
- Rottmann, C. (2013, Fall). Social justice teacher activism. *Our Schools / Our Selves*, 23 (1), 73-81.



- Sen, J. (2017). *The movements of movements: Part 1*. Oakland, CA: PM Press; New Delhi: Open Word.
- Shiller, J., & BMORE Caucus, B. C. (2019). Winning in Baltimore : The story of how BMORE put racial equity at the center of teacher union organizing. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 9(1).
- Stark, L. (2019). *'We're trying to create a different world': Educator organizing in social justice caucuses* [PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, Curry School of Education].
- Stern, M., Brown, A. E. & Hussain, K. (2016). Educate. Agitate. Organize: New and not-so-new teacher movements. *Workplace*, 26, 1-4.
- Uetrict, M. (2014). *Strike for America: Chicago teachers against austerity*. Verso Books.
- Weiner, L. (2012). *The future of our schools: Teachers unions and social justice*. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books.
- Wolfson, T., Treré, E., Gerbaudo, P., & Funke, P. N. (2017). From Global Justice to Occupy and Podemos: Mapping three stages of contemporary activism. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 15(2), 390 - 542.

# Critical Education

[criticaleducation.org](http://criticaleducation.org)

ISSN 1920-4175

## Editors

Stephen Petrina, *University of British Columbia*  
Sandra Mathison, *University of British Columbia*  
E. Wayne Ross, *University of British Columbia*

## Associate Editors

Abraham P. DeLeon, *University of Texas at San Antonio*  
Adam Renner, 1970-2010

## Editorial Collective

Faith Agostinone-Wilson, *Aurora University*  
Wayne Au, *University of Washington Bothell*  
Jeff Bale, *University of Toronto*  
Jessica Bacon, *Montclair State University*  
Grant Banfield, *Flinders University*  
Dennis Beach, *University of Gothenburg*  
Amy Brown, *University of Pennsylvania*  
Kristen Buras, *Georgia State University*  
Paul R Carr, *Université du Québec en Outaouais*  
Lisa Cary, *Murdoch University*  
Antonio J. Castro, *University of Missouri*  
Erin L. Castro, *University of Utah*  
Alexander Cuenca, *Indiana University*  
Noah De Lissovoy, *University of Texas at Austin*  
Gustavo Fischman, *Arizona State University*  
Stephen C. Fleury, *Le Moyne College*  
Derek R. Ford, *DePauw University*  
Four Arrows, *Fielding Graduate University*  
David Gabbard, *Boise State University*  
Rich Gibson, *San Diego State University*  
Rebecca Goldstein, *Montclair State University*  
Julie A. Gorlewski, *University at Buffalo, SUNY*  
Panayota Gounari, *UMass, Boston*  
Sandy Grande, *Connecticut College*  
Todd S. Hawley, *Kent State University*  
Matt Hern, *Vancouver, BC*  
Dave Hill, *Anglia Ruskin University*  
Nathalia E. Jaramillo, *Kennesaw State University*  
Richard Kahn, *Antioch University Los Angeles*  
Ashwani Kumar, *Mount Saint Vincent University*  
Ravi Kumar, *South Asian University*  
Harper Keenan, *University of British Columbia*  
Kathleen Kesson, *Long Island University*

Saville Kushner, *University of Auckland*  
Zeus Leonardo, *University of California, Berkeley*  
Darren E. Lund, *University of Calgary*  
John Lupinacci, *Washington State University*  
Alpesh Maisuria, *University of East London*  
Curry Stephenson Malott, *West Chester University*  
Gregory Martin, *University of Technology Sydney*  
Rebecca Martusewicz, *Eastern Michigan University*  
Cris Mayo, *West Virginia University*  
Peter Mayo, *University of Malta*  
Peter McLaren, *Chapman University*  
Shahrazad Mojab, *University of Toronto*  
João Paraskeva, *UMass Dartmouth*  
Jill A. Pinkney Pastrana, *Univ. of Minnesota, Duluth*  
Brad Porfilio, *San Jose State University*  
Marc Pruyn, *Monash University*  
Lotar Rasinski, *University of Lower Silesia*  
Leena Robertson, *Middlesex University*  
Sam Rocha, *University of British Columbia*  
Edda Sant, *Manchester Metropolitan University*  
Doug Selwyn, *SUNY Plattsburgh*  
Özlem Sensoy, *Simon Fraser University*  
Patrick Shannon, *Penn State University*  
Steven Singer, *The College of New Jersey*  
Kostas Skordoulis, *University of Athens*  
John Smyth, *Federation University Australia*  
Beth Sondel, *University of Pittsburgh*  
Hannah Spector, *Penn State University*  
Marc Spooner, *University of Regina*  
Mark Stern, *Colgate University*  
Peter Trifonas, *University of Toronto*  
Paolo Vittoria, *University of Naples Federico II*  
Linda Ware, *SUNY Geneseo*