

CHAPTER 11

HOW DO I KEEP MY IDEALS AND STILL TEACH?

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We must be together; our masters are joined together and we must do the same thing.

—Mother Jones

In an era marked by regimented curriculum, bureaucratic outcomes-based accountability systems, and corporatized educational aims, how do you keep your ideals and still teach? The answer to this question is multifaceted, but as we argue in this chapter, there are at least two necessary, if insufficient responses. First, working opposition to the mainstream of educational practice requires a question-posing approach. Secondly, we believe that collaborative thought and action are crucial to understanding and transformation of educational practices and social relations. Two counterstories are explored in the chapter below. The first is based on the individual perspectives of two preservice teachers. The second is the counterstory of a collective known as the Rouge Forum.

COMPLY, STRATEGICALLY, OR REDEFINE?!

Pam and Mike had just finished a 16-week student teaching practicum in a primarily White, suburban, middle-class high school. Both had worked with experienced supervising teachers, well known and respected for their abilities to prepare students for the statewide examinations, which every student was required to pass if they were to receive a diploma.

In an end-of-term debriefing with their fellow student teachers, the following exchange took place:

Pam: That was the most agonizing four months of my life. You wouldn't believe what I had to go through to teach anything that was not completely driven by the state exams and the quizzes and tests my teacher has been using for years.

Mike: Well my teacher did the same kind of thing. But, I didn't worry about that stuff. It's his classroom.

Pam: Well that's not my idea of what teaching is. I had to beg my cooperating teacher to let me try something different. He has every class laid out for the entire year and never deviates from his plan. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday are all giving notes. Review for the quiz on Thursday. Give the quiz on Friday and repeat *ad nauseum*. So I made a deal with him that would I would give all his quizzes and tests as scheduled, if he let me teach the material any way I wanted to. He agreed, as long as students kept doing well on the tests, otherwise I'd have to go back to giving his boring lecture notes.

Mike: I don't know why you're complaining, you just made it harder than it needs to be. Those guys have been around a long time and they know what they're doing. I agree it's not the most exciting way to teach, but they have everything organized, it's logical. All I had to do, cover the material each week, give the quizzes on Friday and the unit tests every two weeks. We had the test prep book with the old state exam questions and the answers. It's a perfect way to get kids ready for the tests.

Pam: Is that what you want to be, a drill-and-kill teacher? I don't.

Mike: No, but it's student teaching. We're there to learn and these guys have a ton of experience. Students don't complain much and the school always does great on the tests. Once I get hired and have my own classroom, I'll do things my way. I want to be a good teacher.

Pam: Yeah, but you know, I've heard that before. "When I get my own classroom . . . I'll do this, I'll do that." The problem

is when I talked to younger teachers at the high school they were all saying “when I get tenure . . . I’ll teach the way I really want to.” Then I see the experienced, tenured teachers are teaching to the test and I wonder what’s going on? I don’t think any kid grows up playing school with bubble sheets and a scantron machine, dreaming of teaching to some government test. Don’t most people want to teach so they can connect with students and make a difference in their lives? By the time folks finish their teacher education and teach long enough to get tenure, they must forget what it was that motivated them to be a teacher in the first place.

Teacher socialization was the focus of my (Ross) early career research and these observations by my former students capture some key ideas about how beginning teachers adapt to and struggle with schools as a workplace (e.g., Ross, 1988, 1994). Schools and universities, and indeed all institutions, by their very existence, regulate human actions by establishing predefined patterns of conduct (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966). But institutions are not one-way streets. Even as institutional mores have a profound, controlling effect on the practice of teachers, professors, and other professionals, individuals also affect institutional culture. The socialization of teachers (and other professionals) is a dialectical, interactive process.

People use various social strategies when adapting to and struggling with professional workplace situations (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 2009; Lacey, 1977). For example, Mike’s approach to student teaching could be described as “internalized adjustment”—that is, he chose to comply with institutional demands and adopted the belief that the constraints of the situation were for the best. Setting aside previously held beliefs or goals and assimilating into the extant institutional culture is not an uncommon or unreasonable response for beginning teachers and professors. The desire for institutional (and peer) approval, affirmation, and recognition as a new professional is understandable. There are a host of concerns and risks confronting educators as they begin careers: building professional confidence, acceptance by peers, performance evaluations, contract renewals, attaining tenure, as well as the personal and financial implications of “failure.” But uncritical assimilation into institutional culture carries risks too, including abandonment of personal values and principles and ultimately, perhaps, alienation from oneself and dissatisfaction with one’s work.

Pam, on the other hand, had strong reservations about standard operating procedures and expectations in the classroom and negotiated an opportunity to meet the expectations of her supervising teacher while holding on to core principles that drive her practice as a teacher (or at least her conception of the teacher she wants to be). Strategically complying with

institutional demands—continuing to give the supervising teachers’ quizzes and tests as originally scheduled—allowed her to pursue a different, potentially oppositional agenda in the classroom. Strategic compliance is a social strategy used by many educators who “work within the system” but sustain oppositional viewpoints and pedagogies. Of course, this strategy has its own risks and rewards.

I often talk with my students about the risk and reward structures of internalized adjustment and strategic compliance, advising them that it’s preferable to stay true to yourself and have a short stay in a particular school or university as opposed to assimilating into an institutional culture to keep your job. I tell them it’s better to be like a supergiant star—live fast and die young, detonating as supernova—than a white dwarf star that was once hot, but has run out of fuel, and now lacks the mass to force elements into a fusion reaction. I’ve found there aren’t many folks who like to think of themselves as a detonating supernova, completely disintegrating their professional selves in the process.

There is a third way. Strategic redefinition is change that causes people, including those with authority, to alter their interpretation of what is happening in a situation. I’ve learned from my experience in schools and universities—as a teacher, professor, university department head, and faculty union vice president—it is not very likely that one person can effect dramatic change—strategic redefinition—in the culture of an organization. My experience was affirmed at a conference for academic chairpersons, when a Harvard-based leadership expert told me that if I thought I was going to change the culture of my department I would be better off resigning as department head immediately! Wow.

Strategic redefinition is best thought of as a strategy that requires moving away from the ideal of a triumphant individual working within the system to the creation of self-critical communities of educators in schools and universities working collaborative toward transformative outcomes. Think of the bumper sticker truism: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

“I PARTICIPATE, YOU PARTICIPATE, WE PARTICIPATE, THEY PROFIT”: THE ROUGE FORUM AS A DANGEROUS COUNTERSTORY²

What follows is the counterstory not of an individual, but an organization that is devoted to revolutionary educational activism. Fifteen years ago, the Rouge Forum initiated its work with this statement:

The Rouge Forum is a group of educators, students, and parents seeking a democratic society. We are concerned about questions like these: How can we teach against racism, national chauvinism and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals and still teach—or learn? Whose interests shall school serve in a society that is ever more unequal? We are both research and action oriented. We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring into practice our present understanding of what that is. We seek to build a caring inclusive community that understands that an injury to one is an injury to all. At the same time, our caring community is going to need to deal decisively with an opposition that is sometimes ruthless.

In practice, the Rouge Forum's activists have led mass boycotts against high-stakes standardized exams, helped lead wildcat teacher and student strikes and walk-outs against the tests and military recruitment, and operated effectively inside professional groups as well as unions.

In theory, the Rouge Forum examined, often using a Marxist lens, questions like: What value do school workers or students create? What are the purposes of schools? How can educational workers and students keep their ideals and function inside their institutions? How do pedagogical methods influence substance? In addition, Rouge Forum leaders published extensively in professional and popular journals, conducting serious research into both the social context of school and daily life inside schools.

The Rouge Forum has been challenged by many of the shipwreck questions of the left. Externally, Rouge Forum members faced the checks placed against any critical thinker/actor in an era when the encapsulation of thought is nearly complete, including ostracization, academic mobbing, and threats to job security. Internally, the Rouge Forum sought to address parallel issues like the apparent contradiction between needing a serious organization prepared to fight a ruthless enemy with a centralized command and the need to create an organization that offers people a rare chance to be truly creative and free. The Rouge Forum sought to fashion an integrated powerful movement, working against the stream of identity-based groupings operating without strategy, leaping from issue to issue, moment to moment.

Origins of The Rouge Forum

Although the first official meeting of the Rouge Forum was held at Wayne State University in Detroit, June 1998, the impetus for this meeting stretches back to 1994 and antiracist and free speech activism within the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).

At the 1994 meeting of NCSS in Phoenix, Arizona, two events galvanized a group of activists. First, Sam Diener from the Central Committee of Conscientious Objectors (CCCO) was arrested for leafleting at the conference; and secondly, the governing body of NCSS rejected a resolution condemning California Proposition 187 and calling for a boycott of California as a site for future meetings of the organization. These events fueled political activism the organization had rarely experienced and identified the need for organized action in support of free speech and antiracist pedagogy. Moreover, these events highlighted the hostility of the largest professional organization for social studies educators in the United States to democracy within the organization and beyond.

The Arrest and Trials of Sam Diener³

Sam Diener was arrested for third-degree trespass on Saturday, November 19, 1994 at an NCSS-sponsored concert of the U.S. Marine Corps Band. Diener was a staff person for the CCCO and a registered exhibitor at the NCSS conference. Diener—whose work with the CCCO focused on countering the expansion of Jr. ROTC in schools—distributed small flyers, “Keep Guns Out of Our Schools!” The flyer criticized Jr. ROTC for its expense, discriminatory practices, and militarization of the schools. Diener was arrested. When Diener protested, a security guard responded that he was acting on orders from the leadership of NCSS.

After his release, Diener began distributing a leaflet titled “Free Speech Censored at NCSS,” lobbying NCSS leadership for an opportunity to present his case and have NCSS drop the charges. The President of NCSS, Bob Stahl, an Arizona State University professor, refused to allow Diener to address the organization’s delegates.

A version of the events was given. Diener was portrayed as disrupting the concert. Members of the audience (social studies teachers with leadership positions) ridiculed Diener’s leafleting; many portrayed leafleting as a major crime. Some suggested Diener should be jailed, “the key thrown away.”

Stephen Fleury, a member of the House of Delegates, presented Diener’s version of events based on the free speech leaflet Diener had been distributing. Fleury described the scene:

As I began to read Diener’s story, I felt momentary relief when the delegates began to laugh at what I perceived to be the absurdity and irony of Diener’s arrest. Relief was quickly replaced with horror, however, when I realized the delegates were amused that Diener (and others advocating for him) might believe that social activism was reasonable behavior at a social studies education conference . . . When the final vote was taken, however, the appeal to exonerate Diener was soundly defeated. (Fleury, 1998, pp. 4–5)

David Hursh and Ross later worked with Diener to distribute the free speech leaflet at the convention center. The executive director of NCSS, Martharose Laffey, threatened Diener with a lawsuit if the leafleting continued. On Monday, November 21, Diener was allowed to present his case to the NCSS Board of Directors, but the board refused to assist Diener.

On November 22, Diener was arraigned and charged with trespassing. A series of trials ensued, and in 1998 an appeals court reversed his conviction. After more than three years and four judicial hearings Diener prevailed.

Hursh (1998) says the Diener incident raises questions about whether the leading organization of civic educators in the U.S. tolerates diverse views. As Judge Alice Wright ruled at the pretrial hearing, Diener was ordered to leave the Civic Plaza “solely because of the content of the leaflets.” Additionally, actions of NCSS indicated that as an organization it supports the militarization of schools and society. The events surrounding Diener’s arrest, the discussion in the NCSS House of Delegates, and the multiple appeals on the part of the prosecution, can only be interpreted as an effort to quash free speech.

CUFA, Proposition 187, and the Boycott of California

In November 1994—the same month the Diener imbroglio began—California voters passed the “Save Our State” initiative, Proposition 187. Provisions of the measure denied healthcare, social services, and public education to immigrants without documentation. Under this law all city, county, and state officials in California (teachers, counselors, and social workers) would be required to report any “suspicious” persons to the U.S. Immigration and Nationalization Service, nullifying sanctuary ordinances in many localities.

After Proposition 187 passed, the College and University Faculty Assembly of NCSS, meeting in Phoenix, adopted a resolution condemning Proposition 187 and boycotting California as a future site for CUFA meetings⁴ The NCSS House of Delegates in Phoenix overwhelmingly rejected a similar resolution (Fleury, 1998). Ironically, the 1994 annual meeting of NCSS (and CUFA) was being held in Phoenix as a result of a NCSS boycott of Denver (its planned meeting site for 1994) in response to an amendment to the Colorado State Constitution that denied protection against discrimination-based sexual orientation.

Following the Phoenix meeting, a small group of CUFA and NCSS members worked together as the Emergency Committee of Social Educators for Social Justice to publicize CUFA’s decision to boycott California and encourage other organizations to do the same. Five hundred press releases announcing CUFA’s actions were sent to media outlets. NCSS responded by attempting to suppress the Emergency Committee’s work, while the elected leadership of CUFA took no action to implement the resolution’s provi-

sions (Ross, 1997, 1998). The debate within CUFA regarding action (or nonaction) on the boycott issue remained on low heat.

In the spring of 1997—three and a half years after the initiative was passed by California voters—the NCSS Board of Directors condemned California Proposition 187 (as well as the anti-affirmative action Proposition 209) and planned to provide a forum at the 1998 NCSS Annual Conference in Anaheim “to educate the social studies community and the public about the significant issues involved” in these measures. In addition, the NCSS Board decided to boycott California as a meeting site while Propositions 187 and 209 were in effect. The NCSS Board of Directors barely managed to pass this resolution (the vote was 9 to 8 with 3 abstentions), even though nearly every other leading education organization in the U.S. had taken similar stands.

In November 1997, at annual meetings of NCSS and CUFA in Cincinnati, both groups retreated from previous decisions on the California boycott. The NCSS Board of Directors made a sudden behind-closed-doors about-face rescinding their spring decision, apparently under pressure from leaders of the California Council for the Social Studies.

The Executive Director of NCSS—who had previously threatened the lawsuit against leafleteer Diener—was invited by CUFA leaders to speak at their business meeting in Cincinnati. In her speech, Martharose Laffey advocated rescinding the original CUFA resolution, stating that the organization should not be “sidetracked by seductive but not so important issues” of racism and national chauvinism as represented in California Propositions 187 and 209. Following Laffey’s comments and further debate, CUFA members voted by a 2 to 1 margin to reverse the 1994 boycott resolution and hold its 1998 meeting in Anaheim. (CUFA members, however, did vote to boycott California as a site for future meetings, as long as Proposition 187 was in effect.)

The CUFA reversal had a dramatic and immediate effect. Several leading members of the organization passionately condemned the move and resigned from the organization, including two African American board members—one of whom described the directions of CUFA and NCSS as in conflict with “deeply held convictions about social justice, equity, and democracy” (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In addition, the NCSS African American Educators of Social Studies special interest group decided it would not convene in Anaheim.

A small group of CUFA members (who became the founding members of the Rouge Forum) argued that it turned reality on its head to suggest that taking action against racism and national chauvinism was a diversion. They argued that the battle against irrationalism is exactly what should be taken up by the intellectuals of CUFA. Many CUFA members believed that the primary issue was the unity and solidarity of the two organizations (CUFA

and NCSS). In a speech from the floor of the CUFA membership meeting in Cincinnati, Rich Gibson argued that unity and solidarity were indeed important; however, the questions were: “Solidarity with whom? Around what purposes? Toward what end?”

Despite its reversal on the boycott, prior to the end of the Cincinnati meeting CUFA members voted that the 1998 Anaheim program should focus on analysis of the impact of racism and national chauvinism in educational institutions. Subsequently, a Diversity and Social Justice Committee was formed, with marginal impact.

The origins of the Rouge Forum trace right back to antiracist, antiimperialist, antichauvinist actions like those above. This set the tone.

Seven months later, an informal group was organized by Gibson, Ross, Michael Peterson, and others, and held its first meeting in Detroit. The meeting of around 300 education activists was described by one participant as a “72 hour conversation without end.” People came and went and the agenda flowed with the ideas of attendees. Most found it a refreshing change from the routine of reading papers to each other. One important advantage was having access to a venue that was open 24 hours a day, offering a large room for plenaries and small breakout rooms—at no cost. This is testimony to the working-class roots of Wayne State University.

Toward the close of the meeting, we chose the name, Rouge Forum, after the nearby Ford Rouge factory, and all of its implications, and our dedication to open investigations of the world. We have never been troubled with the relationship to the French, “red,” but that was not on the minds of the locals to whom Rouge means a river, and a huge factory in death throes, and the possibility to overcome. Since this initial meeting, we have been accused of being nothing but reds (hardly true, liberal democrats, libertarians, four U.S. troops in Iraq, socialists, anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, and many others belong to the Rouge Forum.) One vehement critic came up with the stretcher, “You people named yourself deliberately after the Khmer Rouge.” We’ve stuck with the name for a decade and the reds inside the Rouge Forum seem comfortable with the action-oriented liberals, and vice versa. Friendship, sacrifice for the common good (solidarity), all remain ethics of the Rouge Forum.

Continued activism within CUFA and NCSS remained a major topic of discussion at this meeting. Issues included continuing the dialogue on overt political action by both CUFA and NCSS; the social and political responsibilities of educators; the role of researchers and research findings in ameliorating social ills; and the unique position of social studies curriculum and teaching as a force against racism and fascism. The ideas and actions of these social studies educators and their actions at the NCSS conferences during this period illustrate the activist roots of the Rouge Forum.

The Centripetal Position of Schools in North American Society

The key operating principle for the actions of the Rouge Forum is the idea that schools hold a key position in North American society, and educators play a critical role in the creation of a more democratic egalitarian society. At issue for the Rouge Forum, as Gibson and Ross succinctly put it in a 2007 article in *Counterpunch*, is that “school workers do not need to be missionaries for capitalism, and schools its missions” (Gibson & Ross, 2007, n.p.). The metaphor is nearly perfect.

Schools hold centripetal and centrifugal positions in North American society. One in four people in the U.S. are directly connected to schools: school workers, students, or parents (Gibson, 2001). Many others are linked in indirect ways. Schools are the pivotal organizing point for most people’s lives because there is an absence of serious struggle emanating from the industrial working class (and its corrupt unions) despite its historical civilizing influence. School is not merely school, but the point of origin for healthcare, food, and daytime shelter and safety for many people. Schools are also huge markets (consider the bus purchases, architectural and building costs, salaries), as well as bases for technological instruction and skill training. Schools warehouse children, serving as an important tax-supported daycare system for companies whose increasingly poorly paid workers come from dual-income families who see their children an average of 20 hours less a week than they did in 1979.

The beginning point in understanding the role teachers play as major actors in a centripetally positioned organization is to understand the value teachers create within capitalist societies. This is what Marx had to say:

The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes to the self-valorization of capital. If we may take an example from outside the sphere of material production, a schoolmaster is a productive worker when, in addition to belaboring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, makes no difference to the relation. The concept of a productive worker therefore implies, not merely a relation between the activity of work and its useful effect, between the worker and the product of the work, but also a specific social relation of production, a relation with a means of valorization. To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune. (Marx, 1976, p. 644)

How do teachers create surplus value, adding to the self-valorization of capital? Teachers are both commodities and commodifiers. They teach skills, promote ideologies, make possible institutional profiteering (re-

member milk or cola sales, architects, textbooks, bus makers, etc.), and, above all, teachers fashion hope, real or false. When schools fail in their role of fabricating hope, rebellion routinely follows, as France in 1968 demonstrated (Knabb, 2006; Marcus, 1989).

It follows that teachers create terrific value, not only in passing along what is known, but how it comes to be known; not just facts, or even dubious facts, but worldviews. Schools are battlegrounds in the combat for what is true. If the elites conceal the vital battlefronts (like the very existence of exploitation), school workers can reveal them, in work, knowledge, love, and the struggle for freedom—and by holding the schools to their contradictory claims: schools for democratic citizenry or schools for capitalism. In schools the possible questions are: Can we understand the world? Can we change it?

While there is struggle in any job, in schools the struggle represents every aspect of social life, from the struggle over what is true; to the struggle for or against the military and war; to the struggle over wages, hours, and working conditions; the struggle for hope itself—as before, when hope vanishes, uprisings often follow—and the fight for freedom, that being the foundation of learning anything important.

However, schools embedded within a capitalist nation are capitalist schools—their schools, not *ours*, until such time social upheavals or civil strife are at such a stage that schooling is either dramatically upended or freedom schools operating outside capital's schools supersede them.

A paradox of school is that the freedom to struggle for the methods to gain and test truth is often greatest in the richest and poorest schools where, in the former, parents and administrators seem to think that the lures of reading Marx will be overwhelmed by the Lexus waiting in the parking lot, and in the former, few people care what is taught, and administrators focus solely on test scores. However, too many youth learn that the construction of rational knowledge is a waste of time—that is the crowing success of capitalist schooling. Even so, teaching against the destruction of reason is possible in U.S. public schools, though the nooses of standardization and testing tighten each day. The Rouge Forum took the lead in North America in reestablishing the role of Marxism and class struggle in education during a period when the left in education was overrun by postmodernist opportunists of all stripes, and the right sought to silence any form of dissent.

Given that the crisis of the present age is not merely a crisis of material scarcity, but also crisis of consciousness—that is, the abundance that is necessary for a democratic and egalitarian society is at hand, what is missing is the decision to gain it—the role of educators in creating critical class consciousness is even more vital. A base of solidarity combined with an understanding of the collective value school workers create, and the subsequent

struggle to control value in the workplace and community, makes defense possible.

The processes of school can, done well, go beyond demonstrating the wellsprings of social change and justice, but those processes must leap beyond merely involving people in critical construction of daily life. The countercurrent to the democratic abolition of thought (quite possible in the emergence of fascism) is not solely to be found in the contradictory interests of production, but in the inexorable struggle for what is true. Ideas are key now.

Intellectual and practical work, the social praxis of schooling, is the basis for the envisioning of a better world and how to live in it. Clearly, it is not material conditions alone that challenge capital as the mother of inequality and injustice. Even crises do not overturn capital; rather, they feed it. But it is a profound understanding of how things are, how they change, and how we might live in better ways—in solidarity and creativity—that makes social change possible and lasting.

In this context, in deindustrialized North America, where there is little reason to believe the industrial working class will be an initiator for democratic change for some time to come, school workers are positioned to assemble ideas that can take on an international import and assist in practices to challenge injustice. Social change can emanate out from schools, if it cannot be completed by school workers and students.

Regulating Education and the Economy

What has truly set the Rouge Forum apart from other schools-based groups in North America is the limited courage it took to link the system of capital to imperialism, to endless war, to racism, to the necessity of regimented curricula and high-stakes exams, a spiral of events that cannot be disconnected.

In fact, Rouge Forum leaders began to warn middle school teachers, in 1998, “You are looking at the soldiers in the next oil war,” and warned that the Big Tests were a pipeline to the military and meaningless, imperialist-based homeland jobs.

The Rouge Forum stood alone in developing a strategic and tactical analysis of existing conditions well before 2001. Our current context includes:

- An international war of the rich on the poor, within that national wars based on inter-imperialist rivalry, within that appeals to nationalism, uniting people against false claims of united national interests when the very real divide is social class;

- Within that, rising irrationalism, like religious mysticism, and rising racism, often born from religion, segregation to the point of incarcerating 2.1 million;
- Rising inequality as the rich grow much richer, the working classes get laid off and poorer;
- Constant surveillance into every aspect of life;
- The eradication of what were once limited liberties won by the industrial and earlier, even preindustrial working classes, like the end of habeas corpus;
- A government fully exposed as an executive committee, and weapon of violence, of the rich;
- And, as before, we are at a pivotal point in history, with financial and military crises at hand—handmaidens to the emergence of fascism.

Resistance will take place as people are positioned in ways they must fight back; they have no choice, like the wildcat strikers who led Detroit teachers in two illegal job actions, the California Grocery strikers, and the massive immigrant-worker general strike in the U.S. on Mayday, 2006. At issue, however, is whether people can make sense of their circumstances, take charge of their collective lives, organize with ethical foundations, and fight for fundamental change in a manner that can sustain whatever is won—that is, to build a class-conscious movement.

The Big Tests are designed to obliterate such a movement. The primary justification for the imposition of standardized curricula and/or the seizure of local schools by the state/corporate alliances has been poor test scores and high dropout rates, even though both of these measures are less a reflection of student ability or achievement than a measure of parental income. At the same time, the elites have made the specious claim that standardized curricula and high-stakes exams are a method of equalizing education, making the U.S. a greater meritocracy.

Research over two decades indicates that test-based educational reforms do not lead to better educational policies and practices. Indeed, such testing often leads to educationally unjust consequences and unsound practices. These include increased dropout rates, teacher and administrator deprofessionalization, loss of curricular integrity, outright corruption, increased cultural insensitivity, and disproportionate allocation of educational resources into testing programs, and not into hiring qualified teachers and providing enriching sound educational programs (Hursh, 2008; Mathison & Ross, 2008).

It is clear that scores on high-stakes standardized tests as well as dropout rates are directly related to poverty, and none of the powers demanding school standardization is prepared to address inequality. The Rouge Forum has consistently maintained that the origins of the standards-based educa-

tion reform are a direct result of increased inequality and authoritarianism—and war preparations. In fact, high-stakes tests are used to rationalize inequality and authoritarianism to promote the loyalty and obedience that are at the heart of nationalism and slavishness (Ross & Gibson, 2007).

There is growing alliance among conservative and liberal politicians, corporate elites, chief school officers, and teacher union executives to support the standardization and high-stakes testing movement at all educational levels. Inside this alliance is an insidious move on the part of elite stakeholders toward the corporate/state regulation of knowledge, a move that enables what Noam Chomsky calls “systems of unaccountable power” to make self-interested decisions ostensibly on behalf of the public when, in fact, most members of the public have no meaningful say in what or how decisions are made or in what can count as legitimate knowledge. This is purposeful. It involves the coordinated control of such pedagogical processes as goal setting, curriculum development, testing, and teacher education/evaluation, the management of which works to restrict not only what and who can claim the status of “real” knowledge, but also who ultimately has access to it (Mathison & Ross, 2002).

In 2007, Gibson and Ross summarized the Rouge Forum position on liberal reformers like U.S. teacher union leaders who sought to promulgate corporatization through corporate testing and accountability:

We support the rising tide of education worker resistance to the high-stakes exams, as well as student and educator boycotts. We are sharply opposed to those false-flag reformers who seek to do anything but abolish the NCLB, its tests, and its developing national curriculum. Liberal reformers on this bent simply lend credence to a government that stands fully exposed as a weapon of violence for the rich, they disconnect the clear class and race domination in not-so public schooling from the empire’s wars, and they mislead people into believing the dishonest motives of prime NCLB proponents. Above all, through their clear opposition to direct action versus the big tests . . . they simultaneously seek to destroy the leadership of a movement that could actually succeed, build support for laws and a state solely in service to capitalism, and they once again try to teach people that others, usually elites, will solve our problems, a vile diversion from the fact that no one is going to save us but the united action of us. (Gibson & Ross, 2007, para. 30)

Reaching Out: Building Connections and Grassroots Organizing

These are times that test the core of every educator. In the context of an international war of the rich on the poor intensified and thrown into hyper-speed by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, economic col-

lapse, harsh political repression, and in schools the necessarily related rise of standardized high-stakes exams, school takeovers, vouchers, discrete phonics instruction, merit pay, militarization, and the corporatization of schools under the guise of national unity—all combine to call into question what we are and what we stand for.

Collaboration of teachers' union executives (whose high salaries are directly tied to the fruits of imperialism as demonstrated by the ties of the NEA, the American Federation of Teachers, and the CIA-sponsored National Endowment for Democracy) and many professional organizations in these international trends has raised many concerns. How can honest people organize?

The underlying complex processes of intensifying nationalism, racism, sexism, authoritarianism, irrationalism, and forms of oppression, self-imposed or not, often seem overpowering, a series of small bullets coming in fast unison, so fast that it feels as if ducking one creates dozens of wounds from others. How shall we keep our ideals and still teach and learn?

As demonstrated above, the first Rouge Forum in Detroit was guided by the assumption that educators are centripetally positioned in our society. They need, for their own good, to take clear and decisive stands on the side of the vast majority of citizens who are objectively hurt by racism and national chauvinism. From this initial assumption, the Rouge Forum began its work within social studies professional organizations, but also built alliances with educators in the fields of special education and literacy as well as parents and students. They also worked within the two major teacher unions.

Justice Demands Organization

The Rouge Forum has evolved to take a leading role in school-based resistance. As the only group in North America that has connected imperialism, war, and the regulation of schooling, "The Rouge Forum No Blood For Oil" web page became a focus of activity, both for researchers interested in a chronology of material related to the current and future oil wars, and for activists. Using a network developed over ten years of organizing in colleges of education and in K–12 schools, the Rouge Forum, for example, initiated calls for school strikes, teach-ins, and freedom schools, which were adopted and carried out by school workers, students, and parents all over the U.S. at the outset of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The calls for action swept well beyond the Rouge Forum's limited online base, cyberspace serving as a new outlet for organizing action.

Because Rouge Forum leadership shifted focus from opposing standardized tests to opposing a war *and* the tests—and because the organization sharpened its open criticism of capitalism—hundreds of people asked to leave the member-subscriber base in late 2001. They were replaced, though, by nearly 1,000 folks. By 2007, the subscriber base was over 4,000.

Despite the key success of this organization, there have been limitations to the Rouge Forum's cultural work. Internally, the egalitarian and democratic outlook of its leaders has not been matched by a structure reflecting their mindset, or such was the case until the March 2007 Detroit Rouge Forum conference. The participants set up a steering committee with regional coordinators and easily identified chapters, so that anyone walking into the Rouge Forum could see where they might best exhibit their talents, yet remain as public or non-public as they choose, or, in Gibson's words, "We want to be easy to see, but hard to catch."

However, publication of the organization's cultural work remains an issue. For example, leadership in editing the flagship of the Rouge Forum, its newspaper [<http://www.rougeforum.org>], shifted from founding professors to K-12 teachers Greg Queen and Amber Goslee. But the two unpaid volunteers, working full-time jobs, without any external funding, were unable to carry the newspaper beyond a remarkable four-year stint. Although many members at the 2007 Detroit conference chose to continue the on-line publication of the Rouge Forum News, many articles created by the Rouge Forum became part of *Substance News*, which is published in Chicago by test-resister George Schmidt and his wife, Sharon.

Rouge Forum leaders conducted study groups, usually focused on the processes of dialectical materialism, the philosophical/practical foundation of Marxism, and led informal social film discussion groups, sometimes centered on more political films like *Sir No Sir* on GI resistance during the Vietnam wars, on the history of teacher resistance with films like Charles Laughton's *This Land is Mine*, or the quasifictional *Blue Collar*, but both the social and political groups have not been able to consistently sustain themselves over the years, some groups dissolving, others witnessing a passing parade of participants.

Significantly, while the Rouge Forum fought racism and sexism perhaps harder than any other North American education-based group, it remains that the Rouge Forum has not fully bridged the race and sex/gender gaps that form the educator population the Rouge Forum draws from. Goslee, the Rouge Forum webmaster, noted in a recent conference that the organization would need to be transformed in practical ways, more inclusive, more dedicated to fighting internal forms of these Achilles heel, if it would hope to have a lasting impact.

Grassroots Organizing

The Rouge Forum focused much of its work on grassroots organizing rooted in establishing close personal ties, friendships, with people. Working within as well as on the margins of various organizations, we have had a number of successes. What follows is a brief description of many of the organizing strategies and tactics we have found useful.

Interactive and collaborative conferences. The Rouge Forum sponsors interactive, action-oriented conferences propelled by the belief that learning is both personal and social and that classrooms and other educational settings must be learning communities. Since 1998, Rouge Forums have been held across North America, drawing participants from around the world. Over the course of six years, members of the Rouge Forum, Whole Schooling Consortium, and Whole Language Umbrella continued a friendly and productive association based on their clear commonalities. The three groups co-sponsored the International Education Summit for a Democratic Society in 2000 and national conferences in Chicago and Bethesda, MD in the following years. These conferences convened progressive educators, teachers, parents, and community members locally and throughout the country. The summit was an event designed to promote learning and skill development and dialogue, connecting urban, rural, and suburban schools, and organizing to strengthen progressive education for an inclusive and democratic society. It linked art, music, and drama celebrations with ideas, organizing, relationship building.

Working within other professional organizations. Rouge Forum members have also been active participants and leaders in a wide variety of education organizations and unions, including the American Educational Research Association, American Educational Studies Association, National Council for the Social Studies, the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, Michigan Council for the Social Studies, and the Socialist Scholars Conference (now the Left Forum).

Our work in professional conferences sometimes provokes the ire of reactionary scholars and bureaucrats. Rouge Forum members have also been known to target workshops by what are called *standardistos* with good-humored guerilla theatre. In 2004 at an NCSS conference, the audience shouted down a state bureaucrat and a high-stakes test supporter when he tried to aggressively wreck a workshop. Members have brought key resolutions to the governing council of the NCSS call for open access and free tuition in post-secondary education and opposition to high-stakes tests. In 2004 and 2006, the Rouge Forum brought resolutions to NCSS that can be summed up as: “The U.S. should get out of Iraq now.” While CUFA passed these motions overwhelmingly, the members also virtually refused to discuss them and, in 2006, followed the CUFA chairperson’s advice that “we should pass this quickly and get on to the hors d’oeuvres.”

Writing and scholarship. England’s Dave Hill, Susan Ohanian, Patrick Shannon, the late Adam Renner as well as many other Rouge Forum members have published extensively, pointing to the system of capital as the key problem inside and outside of schools. Rouge Forum members work as editors or on the editorial board of the journals such as *Critical Education*, *Cultural Logic*, *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, and *Journal*

of *Critical Education Policy Studies* (UK), creating venues for radical scholars and practitioners. Many members also write op-ed articles or letters to the editor in local papers. We participate in radio and television interviews, usually focusing on the social context of educational reform, standards-based education, and high-stakes testing, which often result from press coverage of our meetings or opinion pieces in newspapers and magazines.

The website, RougeForum.org, not only informs folks of future Rouge Forum events but provides thousands of connections to information that facilitates a theoretical and practical understanding to achieve a more equal and democratic world. Beyond the baseline subscribers, about 32,000 people a month visit the website, from all over the world, enough visitors to shut down the site toward the end of each month. *The Rouge Forum News* is archived on website as are video records of speeches at Rouge Forum conferences.

Community alliances. Rouge Forum members actively involved in and have assumed leadership in numerous community and national coalitions organized against the war, usually coalitions involving labor, leftists, grassroots collectives, and religious groups aimed at ending the war (e.g., PrESS Network), but frequently involved in school organizing as well, such as the San Diego Coalition for Peace and Justice (Gibson, 2007a, 2007b).

Rouge Forum members have also played supportive roles in coalitions focused on driving recruiters and ROTC off K–12 campuses, on the grounds that the lies of imperialist war have nothing to do with gaining and testing knowledge in a relatively free atmosphere: the project of schooling.

CONCLUSION

The Rouge Forum exists because rank and file intellectuals and activists consistently made connections, not only between capitalism, imperialism, war, and the regimentation of schooling, but between one another, persevering over years of practical resistance to authoritarian intrusions into their lives, and intellectual explorations into the struggle to not merely resist exploitation and alienation, but to transform it, now and in the future. The close personal ties, humility, dedication to equality, risk-taking, sacrifice for the common good, internationalism, antiracism, antisexism, commitment to the celebration of aesthetics and creativity (fun), all forge an ethic that assisted Rouge Forum members to keep their ideals and stay afloat in a world that promotes a war of all on all. Those ethics helped bridge the gap between reformers and revolutionaries inside the Rouge Forum.

Today's educational practices are guided by educational policies such as No Child Left Behind Act—now Obama's Race to the Top—that reflect the same obstacles to achieving education for democracy and social justice as

identified by John Dewey (1966) early in 20th century, namely the powerful alliance of class privilege with philosophies of education that sharply divide mind and body, theory and practice, culture and utility: unacceptable disconnections. Our struggle is not new.

How you keep your ideals and still teach? There is no “one best system” for organizing people to act for positive change, The Rouge Forum is one among many groups of committed activists who are contributing to the construction of a K–16 movement for progressive change in education and society, but the only one that takes on the system of capital, publicly, and stresses: Justice demands organization and sacrifice. It is our hope that by sharing our experiences in building a grassroots organization, our comrades in this struggle might learn something that advances the movement as a whole and that we might, in turn, learn from them.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways in which academics are constructing progressive social movements in education and society?
2. In addition to NCLB and RTTP, what educational policies are creating obstacles to achieving education for democracy and social justice?
3. Please provide additional ways in which “understanding the role teachers play as major actors in a centripetally positioned organization is to understand the value teachers create within capitalist societies.”

NOTES

1. This section was written by Ross.
2. This section was written by Ross, Gibson, Queen, and Vinson
3. The basis of this section is David Hursh’s detailed account of Sam Diener’s arrest in “The First Amendment and free speech at the National Council for the Social Studies: The arrest and trials of leafleteer Sam Diener,” and Stephen C. Fleury’s “A Sunday Afternoon in the House of Delegates.” Both papers were presented to the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies as part of the symposium “The journey from Phoenix to Anaheim: Institutional identities and political engagements of CUFA and NCSS, 1994–1998,” Anaheim, California, November 19, 1998.
4. The CUFA Resolution on Proposition 187 was written and sponsored by Perry Marker, Stephen C. Fleury, and E. Wayne Ross. The text of the resolution can be found in Ross (1997).

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Author Queries:

Please give a source for the quote from Mother Jones at the beginning of the chapter.

I can't figure out what this means, describing the CO state constitution amendment (on manuscript p. 11): "the Colorado State Constitution that denied protection against discrimination-based sexual orientation." Please clarify.

Please give a page number for the quote from Ladson-Billings, 1998 on ms p. 12.

Please list Noam Chomsky (references on ms p. 21) in your references.

On ms p. 21, you cite Mathison & Ross, 2002, but in your references, the date listed with those authors is 2008. Is that the work you meant to cite? If so, please make the citation and reference match; if not, please add the 2002 work to your references.

Please list the films referred to on ms p. 25 in your references.

The following works are listed in your references but not cited in the text. Please either add a citation or remove from your references: Leahey, C. S. (2010); Marciano, J. (1997); Vinson, K. D., & Ross, E. W. (2001).

