



**Academia and Activism:  
An Essay Review of Jean Anyon's *Radical Possibilities***

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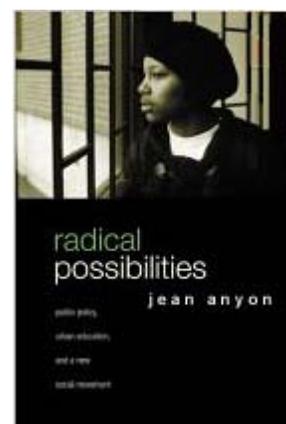
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**Abstract**

This essay review provides an analysis and critique of Jean Anyon's new book, *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and a New Social Movement*. The analysis summarizes her argument, places her book in the context of her previous work and the current debates about school reform and policy analysis. Anyon attempts to link school reform to social reform and makes the case that unless school reformers connect to a new social movement with education at its center, educational researchers will end up colluding in a discourse that shields education reform from addressing growing economic and racial inequities.



Like many social activists, I gave up activism when I became an academic. Growing up in a working class family in rural Iowa, the military draft and the Vietnam war thrust me, along with many of my generation, into the cauldron of campus activism. I became active in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in college, and during the 1970s, when I was a teacher and administrator in New York City, I volunteered for a number of organizations including Amnesty International, Michael Harrington's Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, and several solidarity groups fighting dictatorships in Chile and Argentina. Even as a doctoral student, I worked with the Sanctuary Movement, helping and teaching English

to political refugees from El Salvador. Then I entered academia, where I told myself that doing research and writing on more equitable policies and practices in schools was a form of social activism.

Like many fellow “tenured radicals,” I have watched the country drift to the political Right, intensifying a crisis of socio-economic and racial apartheid that schools can only reflect, but cannot impact in any truly significant way. We scholars of education may keep returning to George Counts’s classic book, *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?* for inspiration, but we know that Tyack and Cuban (1995) are correct when they argue that education reformers have colluded throughout recent history in “blaming schools for not solving problems beyond their reach. More important, the utopian tradition of social reform through schooling has often diverted attention from more costly, politically controversial, and difficult societal reforms” (p. 3).

Reading Jean Anyon’s book, *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement*, brought these personal dilemmas to the fore as she describes her own origins as a daughter of radical parents and a veteran herself of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. The book is a call to education scholars to broaden the scope of their work beyond school reform, lest they collude in becoming part of a social system that is increasingly reproducing greater and greater levels of socio-economic and racial inequality.

In Part I, Anyon provides extensive data to document that economic policies rather than any education related factors have produced vast increases in poverty and social inequality. In Chapter Three, she documents how U.S. taxation policies have shifted the tax burden from the wealthy to a shrinking middle class. In addition, corporations, which shouldered 40% of the federal tax burden in the 1940s, today pay a mere 9.2%. In Chapter Four she argues that if we really want to improve the lot of poor children, we need to give them the same access to economic resources that the middle class currently enjoys. This means redistributing wealth, not merely education opportunity. What Anyon calls for in Part I is greater balance between school reform and broader economic policy reform. While she insists school reform alone will not change the plight of low-income children and children of color, she also states clearly that “more equitable macroeconomic policies will not by themselves create high-quality urban schools.” (p. 3)

In Part II, Anyon focuses her analysis on metropolitan areas, since recent demographic studies show that “over 80% of Americans live in one of 300 metropolitan areas.” (p. 76) By studying the spacial stratification of people into municipalities of different income levels and racial concentrations, she can propose regional solutions that can open up greater economic and educational opportunities. By pointing out disparities in the location of jobs and the location of those who need them, she highlights the importance of access to affordable mass transit as a partial solution. She also elaborates in detail on an area largely missing in education discourse: housing policies that have determined current concentrations of low-income communities and communities of color. Anyon not only provides critique but also examples of successful cases of metropolitan policies that mitigate disparities, such as revenue sharing, community development corporations, living wage campaigns, and other forms of grassroots organizing,

In Part III, Anyon makes the case that throughout history the only way that wealth concentration in the U.S. has been stopped or reversed has been in periods of mass social movements. Because she is aware that such a movement does not currently exist, she dedicates one chapter to a historical discussion of how ordinary people become involved in

social movements. In another, she provides the African American Civil rights Movement of the 1960s as a case study; but, more importantly, she shows that the civil rights movement did not appear *ex nihilo*. Its origins are to be found in smaller struggles by African Americans throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a point well documented by historians such as Vanessa Siddle Walker and James Anderson. Anyon argues that since the 1980s community organizing in the U.S. has been slowly advancing through groups like the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), and other small community groups. She argues that education could be the focal point for bringing various small social movements together into a larger movement that can begin to have an impact on current economic and social policies that benefit privileged groups. Education, Anyon argues, “is an institution whose basic problems are caused by, and whose basic problems reveal, the other crises in cities: poverty, joblessness, and low-wages, and racial and class segregation.” (p. 177)

While this proposal may sound utopian, Anyon is worth taking seriously since she has been at the forefront of radical educational scholarship for over twenty years. For those unfamiliar with her earlier work, some background on the neo-Marxist debates of the late 1970s may help to explain her current stance in *Radical Possibilities*.

American research on schooling was profoundly changed in 1976 with the appearance of Bowles and Gintis’s book *Schooling in Capitalist America*. For the new Left, it was the first thorough neo-Marxist critique of the role of schooling in American society. Social reproduction and correspondence theories turned on its head the popular notion that public schools’ primary function was to provide greater opportunity. According to Bowles and Gintis, public schools in capitalist society necessarily became enmeshed in sorting out deserving students from undeserving students, thus colluding in the preservation and reproduction of the current social order.

However, as economists, Bowles and Gintis presented macro-level economic and historical data that did little to illuminate the day-to-day mechanisms through which this process of social reproduction took place. They were sometimes unfairly criticized for failing to look inside the “black box” of schooling for micro-level explanations of these macro-level processes. This task was left to qualitative sociologists and anthropologists of education. Drawing on correspondence theory, Jean Anyon was one of the first to use qualitative methods to peer into the black box of schooling to describe how the beliefs, skills, and attitudes that students learned in school “corresponded” to those that were required by a stratified work force. These articles, published in 1980 and 1981, were, and continue to be, widely cited as empirical evidence of how social stratification is reproduced in schools at the classroom level. British researchers at the Contemporary Center for Cultural Studies in Birmingham were also using qualitative methods to document what came to be known as ‘cultural production.’ Paul Willis (1977) demonstrated how youth in schools were not merely “reproduced,” but rather participated in processes of social production through acts of human agency. The goal of these early studies was to work within the tensions of the macro-micro divide, and both Willis and Anyon were often critiqued by more mainstream ethnographers for giving the structural constraints too much agency over social actors.

Subsequent studies—some by Anyon herself—more explicitly incorporated issues of gender and race, demonstrating how race and gender were implicated in reproducing not only class stratification, but also patriarchy and institutionalized racism. As qualitative studies continued to explore the “black box” of schooling, many scholars moved away from a

concern with social reproduction, and focused instead on individual social mobility. These studies brought individual (as opposed to collective) human agency to the fore; structural constraints on groups (working class, women, and persons of color) were increasingly pushed into the background. In some studies, “successful minorities” from “at risk” backgrounds were celebrated even though their success depended on isolating them from their peers and alienating them from their culture (Cordeiro and Carspecken, 1993)

More thoughtful studies identified many in-school processes that caused low-income, students of color to do poorly. These studies called for making the middle class rules of classroom life more explicit (Delpit, 1994), detracking schools by offering an enriched curriculum to more students (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, Lintz, and Okamoto, 1996), examining institutional mechanisms and their impact on Latino school engagement, (Conchas, 2000), and attending to many more forces and phenomena than can be mentioned here. Some studies took a more ecological approach that linked student failure to such concepts as social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2001), funds of knowledge (Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti, 2005), or parents’ cultural capital (Lareau, 1989). While these studies attempted to leverage greater access to social networks or bring knowledge of community learning styles into classrooms, they seldom explicitly addressed what kinds of economic opportunity existed for students even if one could succeed in providing more relevant and effective instruction.

I do not mean to be dismissive of such studies, nor to suggest that, for instance, unpacking institutional forms of racism in schools is less important than issues of political economy. In fact, a return to political economy, absent what we have learned from fine-grained ethnographic studies, would threaten to erase the gains made in understanding how race, gender, and homophobia are key elements in the maintenance of economic inequalities. Political philosophers have also argued that issues of distributive justice should not be given priority over injustices based on issues of difference, marginalization, symbolic violence, and powerlessness (Duggan, 2003; Frasier, 1997; and Young, 1990). Furthermore, the notion that it is possible to change schools in ways that benefit all children and diminish the disparities that are created and reinforced from within is a valid and sensible way to proceed. While Neo-Marxist studies often left educators feeling blamed and impotent, studies that focused on upward mobility often stressed things that educators could influence daily. However, while such studies provided educators with a greater sense of efficacy, they often contained unstated assumptions about upward social mobility and tended to give less weight to social policies that were as powerful, if not more powerful, sources of social reproduction than schools themselves. Although schools internally may be more powerful producers and reproducers of class, race and gender, shrinking social services and increasing numbers of jobs that fail to pay a living wage leave fewer options for low-income youth other than underemployment, the military and incarceration. (Children’s Defense Fund, 2004)

Studies like Anyon’s of social reproduction and correspondence tended to remind educators of the pessimism of the Coleman report (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, and McPartland, 1966), which was interpreted to mean that schools did not make a difference in students’ life opportunities. In fact, studies of social reproduction and correspondence seemed far worse. They seemed to be saying that in fact schools do make a difference: they reinforce rather than challenge current social inequalities. Studies that looked at in-school solutions, such as the effective schools research, were not only more practical, but were also less depressing. Education scholars have a low tolerance for studies that breed hopelessness.

Anyon's *Radical Possibilities* takes up these contextual issues again, as did her previous book *Ghetto Schooling*, but without the hopelessness that studies of social reproduction tend to induce. Anyon does argue that in-school influences, though crucial, cannot make up for regressive social policies that impact schools and classrooms negatively. But she also argues that progressive internal school reforms and social movements leading to new social policies are *both* necessary, since neither can be successful without the other. *Ghetto Schooling* was an attempt to demonstrate how municipal and social policies affect urban school districts. While deploring the conditions of schools in Newark and refusing to blame a mostly African American leadership and teaching force, she demonstrated how the downward spiral of Newark's schools began long before it became a largely African American community.

Anyon's insistence in *Ghetto Schooling* on placing the social and political context of schooling front and center was important because the tendency to decontextualize classrooms and teaching had become official policy in school reform and accountability systems of the day. Without an understanding of the policies that sustain inequalities, teachers and their "low-expectations" become handy scapegoats for growing levels of social inequality in the U.S. While blaming teachers may be a step up from blaming poor students and their parents, it still misses the big picture. Anyon argues that any attempt to provide a broader social analysis that might include excessive corporate profits, regressive tax codes, or public policies that redistribute wealth upward, is met with accusations of not believing that poor children can learn or with anti-intellectual exhortations like "No excuses!" Right wing think tanks, like the Heritage Foundation and, in my view, some progressive education scholars, have bought into this ploy to make educators the scapegoats for growing social inequalities. (Carter, 2002; Skrla and Scheurich, 2001)

### **Reframing School Reform and Education Policy**

Although *Ghetto Schooling* was an attempt to recontextualize school reform by providing historical and case study data, *Radical Possibilities* is an attempt to reframe school reform as primarily—though not solely—a broader political and economic problem. Anyon argues that school reform is doomed to failure unless it is driven or accompanied by a social movement that can address the lack of economic opportunities that exist for youth even if their achievement levels improve. She also suggests a new education policy paradigm that is far more interdisciplinary and closer to the needs of communities than that which currently prevails.

In a sense, Anyon's latest book returns to the debate that swirled around Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America*, but this time she picks up a different thread in their work. What Bowles and Gintis documented were the social conflicts that led to policies that created a system of education that favored the already advantaged. By documenting this social conflict among groups, they highlighted the push and pull among social movements that resulted in victories and defeats. Instead of learning this history lesson, educators saw the problem as solely a problem of social structure vs. human agency.

Anyon spent twenty years studying New Jersey classrooms, schools, and school districts, but always with an eye to how class, gender and racial inequities are reproduced there. In this book, she returns human agency and dynamism to dominant elites and the social movements that oppose them. Whereas macroeconomic policies appear, if at all, in educational research as mysteriously produced constraints to educational change, Anyon

insists on holding such policies and those who support them accountable for school failure, refusing to blame what the political Right derisively labels the “education establishment” or “the public education monopoly.”

In a chapter entitled “Federal policies maintain urban poverty” she writes, “I believe it is important for educators, public policy analysts and practitioners to take hold of the fact that economic policies yield widespread low-wage work even among an increasingly educated workforce.” (p. 29) Then as if responding to those who use a discourse of “no excuses” to divert attention from economic policies, she adds, “This phenomenon seriously strains the credibility of urban school reform as a solution to the problems of the urban poor.” (p. 29) In this and subsequent chapters, she documents how social and economic policies at local and national levels—not low student achievement—are responsible for urban poverty and growing disparities between haves and have-nots.

Throughout the book, Anyon attempts to demonstrate how most research on school reform puts the cart before the horse. A theme of Chapter Four, *New Hope for Urban Students*, is the simple notion that people are not poor because they have low academic achievement—a commonly taken-for-granted notion—but rather, they have low achievement because they are poor. School achievement improves as family resources increase. Anyon cites various studies that show the many ways that poverty is the result of macroeconomic policies, not low academic achievement; and many of these policies deprive communities and schools of much needed resources.

Anyon writes, “I believe that in the long run we would do better to increase the access of the urban poor to economic resources so they, too, can afford the time, money, and inclination to prepare their children for school success.”(p. 71) But unlike those who propose vouchers or access to private tutorial services, Anyon lays out in detail how a new social movement can provide the pressure required to bring about real social reform. She is relentless in insisting that one look to the history of social movements as the way to learn the lessons of how to bring about enduring social change. After documenting that levels of wealth concentration have approached those of the age of the Robber Barons of the 1920s, she declares, “The historical record also reveals that the only periods during which the concentration of wealth has been halted or reversed are years following sustained political contestation – i.e. mass social movements.” (p. 49) But unlike such exhortations in the 1970s, and thanks to feminist and critical race theory, we now understand that unless social movements address inequities of race and gender, not everyone benefits equally from such movements. (Barlow, 2003) Such insights are built into her analysis throughout.

Much of the data Anyon provides on regressive taxation policies, getting central city residents to jobs in the suburbs (or binging jobs back to central cities), housing reform, and the like are not exactly new to scholars who work in the areas of public policy and urban studies. What is new is how little educational researchers know or seem to care about such issues, and the extent to which they seem to think that “closing the achievement gap,” while important as a goal in itself, will somehow miraculously solve these problems. The narrow disciplinarity of educational research keeps scholars from connecting the dots in order to bring about genuine social change.

This book will help initiate a much needed conversation about the narrowness of current school reform thinking and policy analysis. Nevertheless, I do have several criticisms of Anyon’s book. Actually, they are less criticisms than areas that I wish she had developed further. Though it may be unfair to expect the book to accomplish more than

document the need for a new policy paradigm in education, I will highlight some issues that the book raises, but does not address in detail.

First, while Anyon describes successful progressive social movements, particularly the U.S. civil rights movement, she ignores the most important social movement of the present historical period, which is a grassroots conservative movement that has risen from the ashes of Goldwater's disastrous electoral defeat in 1964. The successful mobilizing techniques of this movement require close analysis by progressives.

Second, as a plea to broaden our notions of policy and school reform, a primary audience of the book seems to be university faculty (as well as educators generally and community organizers). But the book fails to discuss in any depth the institutional constraints that universities represent for participation in social movements. Anyon suggests that university faculty can provide resources for social movements, and this may be the case; but, at least in the U.S., universities have tended to be more of a domesticating influence.

Finally, and this is closely related to the previous issue, it is not at all clear what the new roles of university based education professors and researchers would be in this new social movement with education at its center. Does research still have a role, and if so what would that research look like? In university systems built on traditions of tenure, promotion, and "objective" research, how do we ally with social movements, while retaining legitimacy in conservative academic institutions, and is that even feasible (or desirable)? I will discuss each of these points in more detail below.

### **Social Movements and the New Political Spectacle**

While I was impressed with Anyon's reframing of school reform and education policy from a technical problem to a political one, her use of the civil rights movement as a model for social organizing and her call for building on current grassroots movements fail to take into account new realities of an information society. Television helped to legitimate the civil rights movement by showing snarling dogs attacking young black protesters in Birmingham, Alabama; and it was Nixon's televised five o'clock shadow that some say lost him the 1960 Presidential election. However, ruling elites have learned to manipulate the media in far more effective ways today than in the 1950s and 1960s. While in Chapter Nine, Anyon provides a primer for educators on how to build a new social movement, largely absent from her analysis are the role of the media and the successful strategies the political Right has used to advance its interests. Here I am not referring so much to the hardball tactics of a Karl Rove, as to the network of ideological apparatuses the right has set up, such as think tanks, talk radio, websites, and the like.

One might reasonably ask whether we should emulate the tactics of the political Right? The late Audre Lorde cautioned, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." To attempt to do so carries the risk of becoming part of the system one wants to change. There are growing signs that it may be too late anyway, since the media airwaves—a principal master's tool that should belong to a sovereign people—are largely under corporate control (McChesney, 2004). As I write this, Congress is threatening massive cuts in funding for public broadcasting, one of the few remaining non-commercial spaces that reach a national audience.

On the other hand, unless education activists learn from the Right's impressive use of talk radio, think tanks, and appropriation of traditional values, they will have a hard time

competing successfully in today's political environment. Mainstream education reform is led by both political parties—both promoting neoliberal economic policies and both closely allied with corporate interests. As Berliner and Biddle (1995) and Smith, Miller-Kahn, Heinecke, and Jarvis (2003) documented, both parties have constructed textbook cases of political spectacle to promote their interests. Political spectacle manufactures a crisis, displaces targets, evokes enemies, renames problems, feigns neutrality, reduces citizens to passive spectators, and ultimately manufactures the consent of the governed. (Edelman, 1988).

Furthermore, as Lakoff and Dean (2004) have discussed, progressives fail to understand basic cognitive and linguistic principles that underlie the Right's success. Most of us respond not to rational argumentation, but rather to how a problem is framed. Those who win elections are not those who amass the most data or the better arguments, but rather those who most successfully frame problems in ways—often metaphorical—that average citizens can relate to. (e.g. drawing on family metaphors, such as, the need to protect the family, preference for the strict father over the permissive mother, etc.).

*Radical Possibilities* has two key strengths. Anyon documents her assertions in copious detail, and she also seems to understand Lakoff's notion of reframing issues as she successfully reframes the problem of school reform for educators from merely a technical issue to be solved at the school level (e.g., class size reduction, smaller schools, detracking, accountability systems, and the like) to also a larger political issue requiring a social movement. The book is full of textual strategies that displace the victims of social policies from blame and reposition the policies themselves and those who support them as the problem. However, these strategies of reframing must be made explicit and consciously employed by progressives on a large scale if the ability of the Right to frame social problems through metaphors of patriarchal family values and free market populism is to be countered. Currently, the brilliant framing and reframing abilities of Neoliberals and Neoconservatives go largely unopposed.

Neoliberals and Neoconservatives have successfully framed social justice advocates as the enemy and, except for African Americans, most poor and working class Americans are voting against their own material interests. Ironically, as Frank (2000) points out, these disenfranchised groups do not see corporate CEOs or millionaire politicians as the problem, but rather the enemy is us—the education establishment and intellectuals—particularly those of the Left. According to Frank, sometime around 1968, the terms of social conflict shifted:

It was now a conflict in which the patriotic, blue collar “silent majority” (along with their employers) faced off against a new elite, the “liberal establishment” and its spoiled, flag-burning children. This new ruling class—a motley assembly of liberal journalists, liberal academics, liberal foundation employees, liberal politicians, and the shadowy powers of Hollywood—earned the people's wrath not by exploiting workers or ripping off family farmers, but by showing contemptuous disregard for the wisdom and values of average Americans. (p. 26)

Thus, according to Frank (2000), in this new hierarchy, “normal Americans” were at the bottom as before, but now instead of the wealthy and the owners at the top, the “establishment” consisted of liberals from all walks of life along with minorities, criminals, and homosexuals. While Anyon sees the seeds of social movements in urban settings, largely in communities of color, the existence of a large, Neoconservative white working class

cannot be ignored. Some progressive academics—themselves in relatively privileged university positions—exacerbate this situation by focusing on “white privilege” without making distinctions between truly privileged whites and the majority of poor and working class whites who are potential allies.

Anyon is likely not unaware of these tendencies and she may have intentionally chosen to place more emphasis on local, community-based forms of organizing. She would perhaps not object to using the media, think tanks and other strategies; but she makes it clear that the only chance of long-term success is for reforms to be rooted in organized communities prepared to defend them. She documents several contemporary movements, including ACORN and IAF that have successfully organized at local and national levels. I will leave Anyon the last word on this point:

Even though masses of people across the U.S. demonstrated against invading Iraq in 2003, and many activists fought the “battle of Seattle” in 2000, these campaigns were not part of sustained community movements with organized constituencies; and they will not be, unless time and effort are spent to build bases in towns and cities around the country. Community organizing is a strategy that must remain central to any attempt to build a social movement (p. 171)

## Universities and Social Movements

While universities are today characterized by the Right as a hotbed of radical thought, they have more often had a domesticating effect on social movements. A textbook case is that of bilingual education. In the Latino community, bilingual education was a product of class, race, and gender-based social struggle, principally through the farm worker struggles led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta and Chicano and Puerto Rican movements for economic and racial justice. Bilingual education, however, sought legitimacy in universities by ceasing to be a social movement and instead becoming essentially a subfield of applied linguistics. While the field opened up many jobs for Latinos in schools and universities, it lost much of its potential as a social movement and in many cases became estranged from the very poor and working class communities that had been its core. (See Grinberg and Saavedra, 2000, for a more in depth discussion).

Not only do universities tend to turn social movements into academic disciplines, most university faculty have full time jobs doing research, teaching, and professional service. Does Anyon suggest reengineering the faculty role to include the kinds of activity she recommends, or is building social movements a “night job”? Some colleges of education have loosened their definition of what counts as research, teaching, and service, as expectations that faculty will become more involved in schools increase. However, most models of school involvement of education faculty are limited to professional development schools or liaisons aimed at school improvement, not community organizing.

Furthermore, faculty norms of balance and objectivity, while not evoked in terms of massive corporate or military involvement in universities, are often evoked against progressive faculty. Right wing activist groups like the National Association of Scholars monitor universities for political bias, recently reporting that far more social science professors vote Democrat than Republican, while conveniently leaving out business schools and other departments. In such a climate, it is difficult, especially for non-tenured faculty, to come out of the closet as social activists. Perhaps a new reframing is required that casts

corporate and military involvement in universities as a form of bias or activism aimed at privatizing and militarizing universities. Anyon tends to gloss over the institutional barriers to linking university faculty to local social movements.

### **Research and Activism**

Many critical education scholars are beginning to question whether their research is “making a difference.” It is difficult to read Anyon’s book without asking how educational researchers can help build social movements. Is this a skill we need to be teaching administrators and teachers? Should we abandon our research agendas and turn to organizing instead, or is our scholarship our contribution? Anyon draws heavily on both quantitative and qualitative research studies to defend her assertions, which suggests that she finds traditional research a useful tool. She also asserts in her introduction that, “This book is another attempt to intervene against injustice,” (p. 2) suggesting that scholarship is a form of activism. Yet there is little explicit discussion of what kinds of research are useful under what circumstances. She dedicates one paragraph to this issue:

In this new paradigm of educational policy, the political potential of pedagogy and curriculum would be realized. Critical pedagogy would take to the streets, offices, and courtrooms where social justice struggles play out. Curriculum could be built toward and from these experiences. Vocational offerings in high school would link to living wage campaigns and employers who support them. And educational research would not be judged by its ostensible scientific objectivity, but at least in part by its ability to spark political consciousness and change—its ‘catalytic validity’ (Lather, 1991).

Sign me up, but I need to know more about what these new pedagogies and catalytic scholarship would look like and how our jobs as faculty would need to be retooled to bring it off. These are all important questions, and I hope Anyon takes them up in her next book.

On the other hand, the relationship between research and political activism has by now been rather widely debated in educational research in the context of critical ethnography, feminist research, participatory action research, critical race theory, and queer theory. (Anderson, 1989; Gitlin, 1994; Herr and Anderson, 2005; Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas, 1999; Tolman and Bryden-Miller, 2001) Participatory Action Research is the most compatible methodology for an activist research stance, but it lacks credibility in universities. A first step toward moving academics into alliances with communities would be to legitimize the very type of research that would provide both a collaborative approach and the kind of action-oriented, catalytic validity that Anyon seeks. (See Herr and Anderson, 2005)

Institutional ethnography, inspired by feminist standpoint theory and Dorothy Smith’s method of studying what she calls “ruling relations” is another promising development. (See Andre-Bechley, 2004; DeVault and McCoy, 2002;) Such an approach allows researchers to understand how social problems are never merely local, a major tenet of activist research at the community level.

There is a growing body of research that has documented social movements linked to educational reform in the U.S. Shirley (1997) has documented the struggles of the IAF in Texas and the Alliance Schools that resulted from their struggle. Research for Action, a Philadelphia-based group has documented the Cross City Campaign. (Gold, Simon, and

Brown, 2002) New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy has documented links between community organizing and public schools in New York. (Mediratta, Lewis, and Fruchter, 2002) And Scott (2004) has documented the role of ACORN in opposing school privatization in New York City. While Anyon makes reference to this research on social movements, a more in-depth discussion of the various ways research and activism might inform each other would have been useful.

## **Conclusion**

At the 2005 Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association in Montreal, Jeannie Oakes reflected on her own evolution as an activist and researcher. Early in her academic career, she co-authored a book on education from a critical theory perspective that was read by only a handful of scholars. (Oakes and Sirotnik, 1986) Frustrated by her lack of impact, she started on a more empirical program to document inequalities in schools on the assumption that if policymakers and the general public knew about such unjust practices as academic tracking, they would surely organize to change them. She was disappointed to discover that, in spite of their progressive rhetoric, middle-class parents and the policymakers who represent them wanted no such thing. It is my sense that activist scholars are increasingly finding themselves at this crossroads, and are wondering in which direction to turn their attention and their skills.

It is perhaps instructive to note that some former social activists have turned to working on more in-school solutions. Robert Moses, for example, engaged in direct action and organizing during the civil rights movement. I doubt that he would consider his work with the Algebra Project, which aims at helping students get over a major curricular hurdle, less important than his previous activism in the streets.

In reviewing Anyon's book, I have, perhaps, unwittingly pitted school reform against social reform. In reality, what Anyon is proposing is social reform with school reform at its core, rather than school reform detached from a broader policy analysis and growing grassroots movements. Clearly, abandoning school reform and taking to the streets would divert much needed resources from building a greater understanding of how class, race, and gender inequities are reinforced rather than interrupted by schooling. Nevertheless, university and school professionals represent a formidable political block if allied to low-income, grassroots movements, made up largely of people of color. This is the conversation that has been simmering in the background among academics who are current or former activists, and Anyon has placed it squarely on the table. Anyon's work has always been viewed as controversial by many, and this book will be no exception. Undoubtedly, academics will have a lively debate about the issues she raises. One hopes that debate will lead to an expansion of the current policy paradigm and a closer link between school reform and social reform.

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