

For Jean Anyon, my colleague and friend

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I first met Jean Anyon at a University of Wisconsin-Madison AERA reception in the early 1980's. I walked into the room, and there, sitting at a table off to the back, was Jean. I had, of course, read everything that she had written to date, and cited her extensively, but we had never met. I was looking forward to meeting her, and here she was.

This began a close to thirty-year friendship that spanned decades of our own work and critical changes in the national and global context. A warm and generous person and scholar, she impacted many, and I was one of them. Jean and I participated on numerous panels together, and spoke at one another's institutions. I often introduced her, and found myself both enamored and star struck by the breath and depth of her scholarship, and simultaneous deep commitment to social justice—to righting the world just a bit, as we capitulated into intensifying inequalities that increasingly define our society and our educational institutions. To Jean's credit, she never gave up. Through deep scholarly investigation, she worked to articulate exactly what was happening with respect to the growing disenfranchisement of the poor and working class, while ultimately offering concrete possibilities towards meaningful radical movement to contest the encroachment of power and ever deepening inequalities. As she makes clear, such moves are conscious and deliberate—moves to enhance opportunities for the privileged

while cutting off such opportunities for those with less. Jean reminds us that there is nothing accidental about this—this deliberate set of moves consciously works to enhance outcomes for the rich, while ensuring that the poor and working class are availed fewer opportunities in one of the richest nations in the world. She continued to speak power to power until her untimely death in 2013.

Relatively few graduate students over the past thirty-five years in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK in the areas of Urban Education, Sociology of Education, Curriculum Studies, and Anthropology of Education have not encountered her work. Since the late 1970's Jean Anyon sits at the very center of a scholarly movement to unpack the nature of what later is called the "official curriculum": what is it; how it comes to attain this status; and who it serves. Spurred by calls in England in the early 1970's for a "new sociology of education," scholars began to address questions related to what constitutes "official" knowledge and the ways in which such knowledge is differentially distributed through schools. The theoretical starting point for most of these analyses is articulated by Michael F.D. Young, who argues that there is a "dialectical relationship between access to power and the opportunity to legitimate dominant categories, and the processes by which the availability of such categories to some groups enable them to assert power and control over others" (1971, p. 31). Extending

this general framework, numerous writers argue that the organization of knowledge, the forms of its transmission, and the assessment of its acquisition are factors in the reproduction of class relationships in advanced capitalist societies.

While excellent theoretical and conceptual work has been done in relation to this general area, serving to break open an entirely new way of understanding schools and schooling, Jean Anyon is among the first to empirically probe these issues. Her three articles, published in *Harvard Educational Review* (1979), *Curriculum Inquiry* (1981) and *Interchange* (1981) on official knowledge and its distribution are undeniably classics in the field. Two of these articles have been reprinted over thirty-five times. Anyon's early work on ideology and US History textbooks (the 1979 piece) makes concrete Young's contention that there is a dialectical relationship between access to power and the opportunity to legitimate dominant social categories, in this case, knowledge related to appropriate mechanisms for bringing about economic change. Her slightly later work (the two 1981 articles) focuses on the ways in which knowledge is distributed differentially across schools that serve students of varying social class. Working-class students, she notes, are offered knowledge as rote memorization and a series of structured tasks, while knowledge distributed to students in what she calls "executive elite" public schools is far more challenging. Students in these latter schools are socialized into an academic culture of excellence, while working-class students are socialized into a culture of rote memorization, a finding later confirmed by McNeil (1986) and numerous others, as well as in important studies of the

US track structure (Oakes, 1985). This work empirically affirms and extends Bowles and Gintis's (1977) earlier argument that the everyday actions/activities of schools serve to socialize students into highly differentiated future places in the labor force.

What makes this series of essays compelling while simultaneously having long-term scholarly consequences, is that they set the stage for a large corpus of future work on social class and schooling. Jean Anyon's early work in this regard is widely seen as path breaking, and few have equaled her accomplishments in this area. The questions she opened up in the 1980's sit at the center of a corpus of important ongoing work and Anyon's scholarly products are widely considered foundational to this area.

Jean Anyon went on to break important ground in related scholarly areas, particularly as linked to urban education, wherein both *Radical Possibilities: Public policy, urban education and a new social movement* (2005) and *Ghetto Schooling: A political economy of urban educational reform* (1997) are widely considered seminal. In a 1995 issue of *Urban Education*, Anyon authored a path-breaking article in which she argues that much theory assumed that "education can be fundamentally altered without making structural changes elsewhere in the social system, such as politics and economic institutions" (p. 65). As she notes, "we must change both inside and outside of an inner-city school in order to make an effective long-term difference" (p. 67). *Ghetto Schooling*—a volume that sold over 23,000 copies and was reviewed in the *New York Times* Sunday Book Review—quickly followed on the heels

of her important journal article. As Gerald Grace (Institute of Education, London, UK) writes in his review of *Radical Possibilities*, while extolling Anyon's accomplishments more generally, "In *Ghetto Schooling*, Jean Anyon produced a brilliant example of policy scholarship in urban education in America. With contemporary fieldwork data derived from close study of the inner-city schools of Newark, New Jersey, Anyon was able to show, using historical and political economy analysis how the policies of federal, state and local governments, combined with business and market forces had created the 'inner city community and school problem', making the chances of 'successful' inner city school outcomes virtually impossible" (p. 104). Grace further notes that *Ghetto Schooling* with "its meticulous historical, socio-political and socio-economic data showing how the inner-city school problem had been created in the first place, constituted a major research critique of structural policies and of conventional urban education literature" (p. 104).

But Anyon was not content to be simply a theorist who works off impeccable empirical material, no matter how noteworthy the scholarly product. She, like many in education, wished to go beyond such important critical scholarship to offer a vision as to how we can mobilize the political will for structural intervention in inner-city life and schooling. In this regard, her 2005 book *Radical Possibilities* and the thoroughly revised edition to be published in 2014 stand as exemplary. There are few texts that integrate research, policy and practice, and *Radical Possibilities* will definitely stand the test of time.

There is no dearth of extraordinary reviews of Jean Anyon's work, and she is widely considered a scholar of exceptional note. Like any exceptional scholar, she takes seriously the mentoring of the next generation of scholars and has routinely written and presented with her students in a range of important venues. I have been in attendance at many such sessions, and am deeply impressed. The outpouring of grief among our community of scholars—emerging and veteran—that continues to follow her untimely death, stands as testimony both to our deep love for Jean personally, and her extraordinary impact on the field.

In Jean's over forty-year career, she has been a catalyst to new and long-lasting conversations on race, social class, schooling, political economy, and urban education. She has also been my good friend, and I, like so many others, will miss her greatly. Rest in peace, my friend, and we will work hard in your memory.

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