

Editors' Introduction to the Special Issue: Learning from Jean Anyon

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Who was Jean Anyon?

*J*ean Anyon authored numerous important works on the limits of educational reform, including *Ghetto Schooling* (Teachers College Press, 1997), *Radical Possibilities* (Routledge, 2005; 2014) and *Marx and Education* (Routledge, 2011). Jean spent the first 25 years of her academic career at Rutgers University-Newark and the last 12 years at the CUNY Graduate Center's Urban Education Program. At Rutgers- Newark, she chaired the Education Department for over a dozen years and connected it to the Newark Public Schools and other urban districts. At the CUNY Graduate Center she taught doctoral courses in urban educational policy and was a beloved mentor and dissertation advisor to many doctoral students. (Alan Sadovnik)

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. (Lois Weis)

The range of her contributions, the ground-breaking studies, the ability to make crystal clear what was happening and what was at stake if we did not act back, or even who the "we" was. (Michael Apple)

Her immigrant father arrived at Ellis Island and was asked his name. He responded that he was anyone, by which he was referring to the universality of the working man. The clerk turned "anyone" to "Anyon." (Roslyn Mickelson)

Her great legacy lives on in all of us who have been inspired by her life's work and her life so well lived. (Kathleen Nolan)

Jean had warmth and a sense of humor which are all too rare in academic life. (Annette Lareau)

*J*ean Anyon was not just anyone. That much is clear from the reflections her friends and colleagues contributed to this special journal issue. In these pieces Jean Anyon is remembered—and loved—as a ground-breaking scholar, a committed teacher educator, a nurturing mentor, a sharp critic, and a loving mother. Whether holding a "TAX THE RICH" sign at an Occupy Wall Street rally, writing incisively about the relationship between urban schools and the political economy, or pushing a

doctoral student "to think more deeply, to offer something of significance" (as Kathleen Nolan remembers), Jean Anyon was not just anyone.

Yet as we learn from the reflections written by Roslyn Mickelson and Michelle Fine, Jean's Anyon's last name, whether the result of her father's response to the question asked at Ellis Island or posed during a McCarthy-era arrest, was a shortened version of "anyone." In the words of Mickelson, the origin of the

name “captures the groundedness, humanity, and the left politics” apparent in Jean’s life and writings. We couldn’t agree more. Looking across the reflections collected here, which capture the dimensions of Jean’s practice as a scholar, educator, and activist, we begin to piece together her legacy for education researchers. In a field where scholarship and practice are often detached from one another and even vie for academic importance, Jean Anyon modeled a scholarly life in which the two had a mutual, even interdependent existence. In her life and work, theory and practice, scholarly inquiry and educational work, insight and activism were interwoven. Like the flannel shirt and pearl earrings that were “Classic Anyon-wear,” according to Fine, they belong together. To learn education scholarship from the work of Jean Anyon is to learn to embrace and practice these (oft-uncoupled) couplings.

Theory-Practice

Many of the reflections on Jean’s work point to her use of empirical data, real educational practice, to flesh out previously theorized outcomes and her use of an evolving toolkit of social theories to explain educational patterns and phenomena. Those who recall Jean’s early work attest to the ground-breaking and eye-opening quality of her studies of social class and school knowledge. Unlike many of the educational researchers of her day, she took a rare look inside classrooms to investigate how curriculum and pedagogical practices reflect and reinforce persistent patterns of social stratification. As Kathleen Nolan, one of Jean’s first doctoral students, asserts, “Jean

was among the first in the United States to offer empirical evidence of the ways schools reproduced social hierarchies by offering different kinds of preparation to students based on their social class status.” The evidence she offered explained how schools performed the stratifying functions others (like Bowles & Gintis, 1976) had noted, and resulted in what Lois Weis refers to as “an entirely new way of understanding schools and schooling.”

In her next major work, *Ghetto Schooling*, Jean broadened her gaze to include an urban school system located within one of the most economically deprived cities in the country, Newark, New Jersey. As she has done previously, Jean peered inside the inner working of her subject, this time a city and its struggling school system, to reveal the underlying economic and sociopolitical structures. Her analysis shed light on macro-level patterns as they played out in Newark and other urban school districts across the country. Jean’s theoretically driven account of Newark’s schools, as Annette Lareau suggests, “helped many Americans to look at schools with fresh eyes” and “renewed their desire to help make them better.” By using data to “people” theories about the relationship between schools and the larger political and economic systems in which they are embedded, Jean forged a path of what she later named “theoretical labor” in the introduction to her more recent book, written collaboratively with students, *Theory and Education Research*. This labor involves employing theory to explain social phenomena and leveraging the intricacies and complexities of these phenomena to illustrate

and extend theories. In the introduction, Jean explains, “neither data nor theory alone are adequate to the task of social explanation,” but they “imbricate and instantiate one another, forming and informing each other as the inquiry process unfolds” (Anyon, 2009, p. 2).

Scholar-Educator

Jean Anyon was not just an educational scholar. She was an educator through and through. Her devotion to on-the-ground educational work, and urban education in particular, was evident in the 25 years she spent on the faculty of Rutgers-Newark, teaching and supervising prospective teachers. As Geoff Whitty’s reflection indicates, Jean was not only interested in sociology of education and social theory, but in “social studies teaching and teacher education.” The dozen years she spent chairing the Department of Education in Newark is recalled by both Whitty and Alan Sadovnik as work she undertook with devotion and commitment, work Whitty recalls her labeling as “important work.” In addition to fostering a formal relationship with Newark Public Schools, she successfully fought an internal attempt to close the department.

Jean’s work as a scholar-educator is unmistakable to those who remember the 12 years she spent working closely with graduate students at CUNY Graduate Center’s Urban Education Program. As her former student, Kathleen Nolan, and her close colleague, Michelle Fine, recall, her combined commitments to critical educational scholarship and inciting social and

educational change drew students to her. Jean offered her guidance and insight generously, treating her students as thought partners and friends, honoring their intellectual insights and scholarly contributions. Nolan speculates that Jean’s vision was to “support the next generation of on-the-ground” scholars, “to help cultivate our critical scholarship, and provide a model for linking the two.”

Insight-Activism

The scholarly insights that Jean produced through her scholarship were not intended as knowledge for library shelves; they provided channels for instigating change. We learn from those who knew Jean that she was a social activist, in the words of Lois Weis, “not content to be simply a theorist who works off impeccable empirical material, no matter how noteworthy the scholarly product.” As Michael Apple explains, “Jean was not satisfied with ‘bearing witness to negativity.’” She used both conventional and radical means to imagine how we might mobilize political forces to transform opportunities, educational and economic, for those living, working and learning in cities. Mentoring the next generation of scholar-activists was, perhaps, one of the more conventional approaches she took to initiating social movements. To some, joining the Occupy Wall Street demonstration, displaying a placard reading “TAX The RICH,” might be seen as one of her more radical approaches. It is possible, however, that her book, *Radical Possibilities*, was among her most radical efforts toward social mobilization.

Radical Possibilities is a call to action, a call

to radical action grounded in razor-sharp analysis of social movements in U.S. history and their effects on policy, economic reform, and access to educational opportunity. As Michael Apple explains, in this book Jean “demonstrates the transformative power of progressive mobilizations and focused as well on what we could learn from these movements in ways that again gave hope.” But she does not stop there. The final chapter, in her own words, is tasked with providing “concrete activities that educators in various positions can utilize to make classrooms and schools progressive movement-building spaces” (p. 12). To be clear, Jean does not recommend that educators alone should incite political transformation; she calls on low-income parents, community organizers, and youth, in partnership with local and national networks, to collectively advocate for a “new paradigm of educational policy.” This new paradigm would “transform the political and economic environment that currently stymies most student and educator efforts in low-income neighborhoods” (p. 13). As always, Jean places urban schools and urban educators at the center of these movements.

Following her Legacy for Education Scholarship

Perspectives on Urban Education is a student-run journal housed in a school of education within a city facing many of the same educational and economic struggles Jean spent her life exploring, writing about, and trying to change. We see Jean’s work as instrumental to carving out a path for the task that lies ahead of us. As Aaron Pallas

acknowledged, “Jean’s work opened up new vistas for me.” For the emerging generation of education scholars, we see Jean’s life and work as opening up new vistas, as offering radical possibilities indeed—radical ways of challenging the divisions between theory and practice, educational scholarship and educators, and research and activism. We invite readers to enjoy the reflections written by Jean’s colleagues, friends, and students; and then we challenge readers to keep reading, to revisit Jean’s work or to read it for the first time, to think with her about how our own practice—whether as university-based scholars and teachers, emerging researchers, or school-based educators—can “offer something of significance.”

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