

Reclaiming Expertise: Research & Inquiry Conference 2018
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Title of the session: A School by the People, for the People: Reimagining Public Education in the Era of Privatization

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Abstract

In countries and states everywhere, public education is under attack. From school voucher programs to the surging charter school movement, the promises of market competition and choice-based policies are shaking the foundation of public schools as proving grounds for a vital and vibrant democracy. Increasingly, parents and students are encouraged to act as consumers on the educational market, intimating a challenge not only to the democratizing potential of the public school project, but also to the credibility of pedagogical research and knowledge.

In this session, we invited participants to rethink the notion of public education and public knowledge in light of the recent decades' growing distrust of public schools, government institutions, and academic research. Our hope was to address, in a collective manner, how the influx of corporate, commercial, proprietary, and profit-driven interests are reframing questions of responsibility, (in)equality, knowledge, democracy, transparency, and value in the education sector. We asked:

- How is the rise of school choice and school voucher policies challenging the notion and potential of education as a uniquely public responsibility?
- How are the promises of private companies, organizations, and media transforming public debate and knowledge regarding education?
- How can we meaningfully reconnect public schools to the communities and cultural funds of knowledge in which they are embedded?

Through a participatory 'campfire' session, this session purpose was to lay the groundwork for producing a manifesto for the reinvigoration of the public school, emphasizing its capacity for generating transformative experiences, promoting democratic moments, and nurturing radical love across race and gender.

Notes from the session

Following a participatory approach, the session participants engaged in a fruitful debate around public schools and public knowledge. The debate revolved around the production of a manifesto for public education aiming to recapture the radical potential of schools as proving grounds for a democratic and vibrant society. A draft of the initial outline of the manifesto is found below.

A MANIFESTO FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLING

This manifesto [draft] is written to recapitulate the purpose of public schooling in a context of cultural plurality and unprecedented connections between ideas, peoples, and shared global commons.

In a time of rampant xenophobia, bigotry, social injustice, and socioeconomic inequality, we insist on the necessity of public schooling to uphold and protect the values of solidarity, respect, and radical love between peoples of different origin, race, genders, cultures, and epistemologies.

Against incessant tidal waves of technocratic school reforms by evidence-hungry politicians and market-oriented corporate reformers, we refuse – as practitioners, as researchers, and as parents – to let the interests of aliens tame the radical potential of our schools as spaces to read, eat, write, learn, discuss, disagree, agree, and discover the world together.

We believe that schools must be more of society than society can ever be. They must be guardians of our present tense, the here and now, a rupture in time between the shadows of the past and the expectations for the future. They must politicize the ordinary and remold the mundane. They must teach us how to begin, not how to end.

The following principles must guide the future of public schools:

- Guardian of Society
- Inclusive Universal Access
- Community Based Curriculum
- Organic Institutions (integrated social services)
- Intersectoral and interdisciplinary
- Participatory Policy
- Non-Proprietary

Looking ahead, the session organizers will orchestrate a collaborative delineation of these principles in an online Google Docs document shared with all participants. If you would like to be included, please email Andrew Swindell at aswindell@ucla.edu