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"A View from the Field:" A Practitioner's Perspective on Teacher Education as a Site of Nonviolent Resistance – An Interview With Barbara Madeloni

Abstract

In this audio piece, Dani O'Brien interviews the President of the Massachusetts Teacher's Association (MTA), Barbara Madeloni. The MTA is the 110,000-member union representing educators in public PK-12 and higher education in Massachusetts. Barbara Madeloni is an education activist, a former high school English teacher, and a teacher-educator at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She was elected President of the MTA in 2014, supported by a grassroots organization of teachers working to move the union in a more progressive, and activist, direction. In the interview, Barbara explains how the corporate assault on education produces structural violence, and talks about the nonviolent resistance she and other educators are engaged in. She discusses her campaign to become union president and the work she hopes to accomplish in that office.

Keywords

teacher education, education activism, education policy

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Author Biography

Kysa Nygreen is Assistant Professor of Education at University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research and teaching focus on diversity and equity in education, community-based education, critical ethnography, and critical pedagogy. She is the author of *These Kids: Identity, Agency, and Social Justice at a Last Chance High School* (University of Chicago Press). Dani O'Brien is an educator, activist and doctoral candidate living in Western Massachusetts. She is a former English teacher who is currently working on her Ph.D. in Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her activism and research attempt to understand and push back against neoliberal policies that undermine the promise of public education and stand in the way of social justice

Teacher Education as a Site of Nonviolent Resistance □ An Interview With Barbara Madeloni □

Produced by Dani O'Brien, with an Introduction by Kysa Nygreen

The privatization of public education, the top-down imposition of high-stakes tests, the deskilling or of teachers' work, and the weakening of teacher unions' collective bargaining rights: These are just some of the forces reshaping the landscape of public education in the US today. These shifts in educational policy and practice reflect the influence of a movement, commonly referred to as "education reform," which seeks to apply market-based principles to education (Ravitch 2014; Hursh 2009; Burch 2009). This neoliberal turn in education is occurring against the backdrop of growing economic inequality, the increased racial segregation of schools, and a tighter school-to-prison pipeline (e.g. Lipman 2004, 2011; Watkins 2011; Giroux 2005; Apple 2006).

A vast body of critical education scholarship reframes this "education reform" movement as a corporate assault on education, and illuminates how this assault produces and exacerbates structural violence (e.g. Lipman 2004, 2011; Watkins 2011; Ahlquist et al. 2011; Lea 2011). At the same time, an organized resistance movement, led largely by parent and teacher groups, has emerged and gained national attention in recent years. One branch of this resistance involves teachers mobilizing within their unions, as exemplified by the Chicago Teacher Strike of 2012 (Leibelson, 2012) and the Seattle-based boycott of the MAP standardized test in 2013 (Queally, 2013). Through these and other similar efforts, teachers are working to transform their unions into sites of movement building and nonviolent resistance.

In this audio piece, Dani O'Brien interviews the President of the Massachusetts Teacher's Association (MTA), Barbara Madeloni. The MTA is the 110,000-member union representing educators in public PK-12 and higher education in Massachusetts. Barbara Madeloni is an education activist, a former high school English teacher, and a teacher-educator at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She was elected President of the MTA in 2014, supported by a grassroots organization of teachers working to move the union in a more progressive, and activist, direction. In the interview, Barbara explains how the corporate assault on education produces structural violence, and talks about the nonviolent resistance she and other educators are engaged in. She discusses her campaign to become union president and the work she hopes to accomplish in that office.

In 2012, Barbara made national news when *The New York Times* featured an article about her students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, who refused

to participate in a field test of a standardized teacher licensing assessment called the EdTPA (Winerip 2012). At the time, this assessment was being piloted at the University of Massachusetts and several other universities, in eleven states. The EdTPA is administered by Pearson Inc., the largest for-profit testing company in North America. Just weeks after *The New York Times* published a story about Barbara's students' refusal to participate in the EdTPA field test, Barbara was terminated from her faculty position at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her non-renewal prompted a student organizing effort that became known as *Can't Be Neutral*, invoking Howard Zinn's famous statement that "you can't be neutral on a moving train."

Barbara's interview begins with her telling of this story—her experience as a teacher-educator at the University of Massachusetts, her analysis of the EdTPA, her students' choice to opt out of the assessment, and why it matters. Barbara's voice contributes an important perspective to our understanding of the neoliberal turn in education. Although the effects of neoliberal reform on PK-12 schools have gained increasing national attention, we do not often hear about university-based teacher education as a significant site of analysis or struggle. In this piece, Barbara helps us understand how teacher education is also under corporate assault, and why it is an important site of nonviolence resistance.

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