



# Educators learning through struggle: Political education in social justice caucuses

Rhiannon M. Maton<sup>1</sup> · Lauren Ware Stark<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

At a time when educators are increasingly rising up within and beyond their unions to protect public education, it is vital to understand how activist educators become politicized and how their activist organizations contribute to such political education efforts. In this article, Maton and Stark examine the grassroots organizing work of three educator-led social justice caucuses and a national network in order to explicate how five forms of political education—relational, structured, situational, mobilized, and networked—support educators’ political learning within and beyond their unions. We tease apart the characteristics and central knowledge sources inherent to these five forms of political education, showcasing examples of how caucuses capitalize upon and embed political education within their change-making efforts.

**Keywords** Political education · Teacher knowledge · Teacher learning · Unions · Teachers unions · Social justice unions · Social justice caucuses

Social movements are sites of profound learning—sites where knowledge itself is contested and constructed, where identities and subjectivities (both individual and collective) are defined and redefined, where citizens are formed and where oppression is named. These activities, so integral to social movements, are clearly political learning processes. (Chovanec, 2009, p. 64)

In the wake of Trump’s 2017 Executive Order 13,769 in the United States of America, which barred entry by immigrants and refugees from Muslim-majority countries, educators across the U.S. organized in defense of their students and communities. Much of this organizing was led by *social justice caucuses*: groups of

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✉ Rhiannon M. Maton  
rhiannon.maton@cortland.edu

Lauren Ware Stark  
lstark@bowdoin.edu

<sup>1</sup> College at Cortland, State University of New York, Cornish Hall, Room 1223, P.O. Box 2000, Cortland, NY 13045, USA

<sup>2</sup> Bowdoin College, Riley House, Brunswick, ME 04011, United States

educators committed to advancing democracy and justice within, through, and outside of their unions. Building on the tradition of social justice unionism (National Coalition of Educator Activists, 1994), educators in Social Equity Educators (SEE) in Seattle, Washington led campaigns supporting immigrant rights in the months following this order. They supported community mobilizations at SeaTac Airport, practicing civil disobedience to demand the release of detainees. They organized for immigrant rights within their union: writing articles and putting forward motions to defend student protesters, support sanctuary schools, organize educator protests, and fundraise for immigrant rights groups. Caucus members also aligned with city-wide and national immigrant rights groups by calling for a May Day strike for worker and immigrant rights.

While their May Day strike motion did not pass, SEE educators successfully organized a day of action composed of teach-ins on immigrant rights during the school day and an immigrant rights march which took place after school hours. As such, they built on their ongoing work to promote ethnic studies in Seattle schools. Moreover, SEE educators saw the struggle to pass this motion as an important opportunity to mobilize conversations around immigrant rights and labor organizing within their union and broader networks. For these educators, this campaign allowed them to deepen the political education of their fellow educators, welcome like-minded educators into their struggle, and win concrete policy changes to benefit immigrant and refugee students.

This campaign suggests some of the ways that educators have used social justice caucuses to pursue progressive political agendas, focusing particularly on their unions as the most strategic and viable platform from which to trigger policy change. Social justice caucuses like SEE have increasingly emerged over the past ten years, with the agenda of partnering with other stakeholders to advance justice within their schools and local communities. They seek to build the power necessary to achieve the schools and cities that they assert their students deserve, challenging decades of structural and fiscal inequities that have particularly harmed students within racialized and economically insecure communities (Bocking, 2020; Brogan, 2014; Maton, 2018; Stark, 2019; Uetricht, 2014; Weiner, 2012). Organized social justice caucuses have won union control in cities and states like Baltimore, Chicago and Los Angeles, and have gained significant media coverage through their campaigns and organizing work (Jaffe, 2014, 2019a, 2019b; Stark, 2019). We assert that political education efforts are crucial to such political mobilizing processes. Despite the significance of their work, there is a dearth of knowledge about how caucus members both engage in and advance political education within and through their caucuses.

In this article, we define *political education* as the teaching and learning processes that compel individuals to reflect on the nature of power and its connections to the range of forces shaping both individuals and institutions. Following in the traditions of critical (Freire, 2004) and insurgent (Ross & Vinson, 2014) pedagogy, there is a rich educational studies tradition of illuminating the ways that educators can support the political education of their students within and through formal schooling. We focus on the political education of educators themselves, however, turning our attention toward the political education of educators within and through social movements. In so doing, we highlight the ways that educators become ‘politicized’

through both formal and informal political education processes, gaining enhanced political knowledge and analysis. We likewise consider the ways that educators in turn lead political education activities in order to foster the civic engagement of their peers and community members and advance justice within their schools and communities (Au, 2021). In this way, we discuss political education as a process of both learning (Choudry, 2015; Foley, 1999; Hall & Clover, 2005) and knowledge production (Cox, 2014; Niesz, 2019) within educator-led social movements.

Political education activities are integrated throughout the work of many unions and grassroots organizations (e.g., Bocking, 2020; Foley, 1999; Riley, 2021; Taylor, 2001). Such activities have been found to serve a range of purposes, including: attracting and retaining members (e.g., Foley, 1999), fostering new and deepened connections among people and ideas (e.g., Chovanec, 2009; Maton, 2016a; Riley, 2021), strengthening the reflexive organizing capabilities of learners (e.g., Freire, 2004), and contributing to the design of more resilient and responsive activist organizations (e.g., Chovanec, 2009; Maton, 2018; Stark, 2019; Tarlau, 2014). As such, political education is fundamental to the daily operations and longevity of grassroots movements pushing for social and economic change, including educator-led social justice caucuses. These educational movements are in turn fundamental to advancing educational change (Oakes & Lipton, 2002; Oakes & Rogers, 2007; Rincón-Galardo, 2020). We contend that understanding the nature of political education efforts is one necessary component in the quest to deepen our understanding of educator learning and knowledge production within social movements, illuminating how and why educators engage in political education outside of their classrooms, while contributing to social movement change-making efforts within and beyond their labor unions.

While there is an emerging body of research on the role of learning and knowledge production in educator-led social movements (e.g., Niesz, 2019, 2021; Riley, 2021; Stark, 2019; Stark & Maton, 2019; Tarlau, 2014) with initial examination of specific types of political education such as book groups (e.g., Riley, 2021) and inquiry groups (e.g., Maton, 2016a, 2018), there is a dearth of research clearly articulating the varied forms and purposes that political education takes and serves within educator-led social justice caucuses. In order to address this gap, we draw upon data from three U.S. social justice caucuses and a national network of social justice caucuses to theorize that teachers' political education takes place in five forms—relational, structured, situational, mobilized and networked. Through differentiating five varied forms in and through which political education takes place, we strive to examine the “how” of political education practices among activist educators. We project that this research will be of use and interest to educational scholars and activists alike, through exploration of the research question: How does political education take place among members of educators' social justice caucuses?

## Social justice caucuses

Public education currently faces a range of competing neoliberalist threats driven by profit motives and a longstanding history of racialized disinvestment in public schools. These include: privatization of public schools and their services (e.g., Ball & Youdell, 2009); efforts to reduce educators' professional discretion through the standardization of assessment and curriculum (e.g., Hursh, 2008); ongoing legal and political challenges targeting teachers unions (e.g., Jaffe, 2018; Weiner, 2012); and chronic underfunding, especially for schools primarily serving economically and/or racially marginalized populations (e.g., Lipman, 2011). U.S. teachers and their unions viscerally feel the effects of such forces and, alongside local communities, parents and students, are increasingly engaged in acts of resistance (e.g., Quinn & Carl, 2013; Rosen, 2019) with the goal of impacting broader educational systems and policies (see Bascia, 2009).

Since the 2008 formation of Chicago's influential Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), social justice caucuses have emerged in over thirty U.S. cities and states, including in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, Massachusetts, New York City, North Carolina, Philadelphia, Seattle, and West Virginia (Stark, 2019). They share in common the goal of pushing their broader unions to embrace social justice unionism principles and tactics in order to trigger wide-scale institutional and systemic change. As a philosophical and practical approach, social justice unionism seeks to ally with historically marginalized populations in order to achieve beneficial concrete results for union members and the public broadly (Dyke & Bates, 2019; Stark, 2019; Weiner, 2012), deliberately striving to avoid the historical tendency of some teachers' unions to prioritize the interests of members over those of the community (see Shelton, 2017).<sup>1</sup> Educators' social justice caucuses tend to see the union as the most viable political platform for effecting radical educational policy change and strive to push their union to embrace a member-driven approach (Asselin, 2019; Stark, 2019; Weiner, 2012) while employing assertive tactics like walk-outs, strikes, and allied resistance with local communities (Dyke & Bates, 2019; Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; Weiner, 2012).

Prior to this recent push toward social justice unionism, the standard model of union organizing has most frequently focused on "business model" unionism, which prioritizes providing services to members like collective bargaining, member representation in disputes with management, and contract enforcement. Alongside providing such traditional union services, social justice unions and their caucuses value democracy and transparency in the effort to engage grassroots members in organizing for members' workplace and livelihood concerns and the advancement of the

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<sup>1</sup> It may be argued that there are localized examples of social justice caucuses and unions embracing values and priorities that at times diverge from community interest. However, the literature shows that social justice unionism as a philosophy and movement strives to avoid such divisions and foster solidarity amongst unions, union members, community groups, and community members (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; McAleve, 2016; Weiner, 2012).

common good and social justice goals (National Coalition of Education Activists, 1994).

Caucuses are meso-level organizational forms that exist both within and apart from their broader unions. At times they are formally recognized by their broader union as a “caucus” or group of unionists sharing a specific set of values and agenda, and at other times they operate without formal union recognition while still using this title. Their membership tends to consist of a range of constituents, including progressives seeking radical systemic and structural change, unionists disgruntled with traditional conciliatory union politics, and classroom educators seeking support in the development and advancement of social justice curriculum, pedagogy and politics within and beyond the classroom (Stark, 2019).<sup>2</sup> Caucuses tend to have greater flexibility to work beyond traditional union venues such as district negotiations, and frequently strive to develop deep partnerships with local community groups and constituents.

On their own and in collaboration with grassroots education networks, social justice caucuses have led major campaigns for equity in education, including: fighting school closures, organizing against standardized tests, advocating for democracy within their unions, and collaborating with community groups to win ethnic studies in schools (e.g., Brogan, 2014; Owens, 2020; Shiller & BMORE, 2019; Stark, 2019; Uetrict, 2014).<sup>3</sup> They have played a vital role in movements challenging racist and neoliberal policies in schools (e.g., Morrison & Porter-Webb, 2019; Owens, 2020; Stern & Brown, 2016; Stark, 2019), as well as the recent shift toward prioritizing social justice initiatives within union organizing (e.g., Brown & Stern, 2018; Stark, 2019). Social justice caucuses advance new social imaginaries in response to neoliberal, undemocratic and racist policies, and scholarly and journalistic accounts show that they are beginning to achieve tangible results (e.g., Bradbury et al., 2014; Jaffe, 2019a, 2019b; Uetrict, 2014).

This article is based on the premise that social justice caucuses cannot do such outward-extending political work without a forward-thinking membership that subscribes to the notion that social justice and common good goals should be advanced through the teachers union. We believe that political education processes can support members in identifying and developing a common politics. As such, political education is a fundamental component of social justice caucus recruitment, retention, mobilizing and organizing practices.

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<sup>2</sup> Ideological diversity among caucus members can, at times, foster tensions within caucuses. For example, some caucus members may prioritize internal union politics while others prioritize advocating for curricular reforms. These tensions can be productive when navigated through democratic processes, but unresolved tensions risk alienating new members. For more on intracaucus tensions, see Asselin (2019) and Stark (2019).

<sup>3</sup> For more on how such campaigns and mobilizations are identified and selected, please see Stark (2019), Bradbury et al., (2014), and McAlevey (2016).

## Political education in social justice caucuses

Political education is a central component of the member recruitment/retention practices and daily operations of educator-led social justice caucuses and activist organizations (Niesz, 2019, 2021; Riley, 2021; Stark & Maton, 2019), and yet it has been undertheorized in the educational justice movement literature. Niesz (2019) calls for further development of the literature in this area: “What is needed now is a more deliberate effort to better understand the production, circulation, and educational dimensions and implications of social movement knowledges” (p. 229). Responding to this call, we take a specific look at social justice causes, analyzing how their members construct new and refined political analyses through engagement in political education activities. We are particularly interested in the various modes through which political education takes place because it is our view, alongside Freire (2004), Niesz (2019) and others, that political learning and knowledge production fundamentally shape the terrain of focus, organizing power and success of educator-led social movements in protesting and resisting neoliberal and systemically racist policies.

Scholars have already shown that political education is embedded within, and fundamental to, the work of activist organizations and involves implicit and explicit processes of learning and analysis of broader political trends and their links with public institutions and policy processes (Choudry, 2015; Cox, 2014; Foley, 1999; Hall & Clover, 2005; Maton, 2016a). Social movement learning scholars have shown that such processes are inherent to the daily organizing efforts of grassroots social movement organizations (e.g., Choudry, 2015; Chovanec, 2009; Foley, 1999; Hall & Clover, 2005), and labor scholars have similarly shown that such learning is woven throughout the organizational structure and organizing work of many unions (e.g., McAleve, 2016; Rottmann, 2012; Taylor, 2001). Political education requires that participants make sense of their identities and relationship with broader systems of power while honing new methods for triggering change (e.g., Choudry, 2015; Chovanec, 2009; Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Freire, 2004). Such political education processes range in the degree to which they are explicit and intentionally designed by movement leaders, or implicitly and perhaps subconsciously embedded within the daily work of the organization (Foley, 1999). Effective organizations, however, have been found to align their political education initiatives with their overall strategy and tactics so that member learning aligns with the organization’s political goals and methods in mutually reinforcing ways (e.g., Snow & Soule, 2010; Taylor, 2001).

Based upon our observations of three educator-led social justice caucuses and a caucus network, we propose that political education takes five main forms—relational, structured, situational, mobilized and networked forms. The forms vary in the degree to which political education efforts are explicitly and intentionally woven into the daily work of the social justice caucus, but share in common that they support the development and refinement of political frames of analysis and understanding amongst organizational members and their allies. We provide more detailed explanation of the goals, characteristics and common sources of knowledge utilized in each of the five forms of political education within the findings section.

## Research context

This study focuses on political education efforts led by three caucuses and one caucus network. The three caucuses in our study are: CORE in Chicago, SEE in Seattle, and the Caucus of Working Educators (WE) in Philadelphia. The study also examines the work of an established network composed of social justice caucuses, United Caucuses of Rank-and-file Educators (UCORE), which brings together social justice caucuses from across North America, including the three caucuses examined in this study. While we highlight examples from the work of these three caucuses and network in our typology of political education, the research of Stark (2019) suggests that this typology applies to the efforts of social justice caucuses in UCORE broadly, as well as other groups engaged in political education for social justice or equity.

CORE was founded in 2008 in order to organize against austerity budgets and cutbacks in Chicago. This caucus has been internationally visible and successful in orchestrating organized resistance in alignment with Chicago neighborhoods against school system budget cuts over the years. Through their organizing within the caucus and elected union leadership, CORE educators have taken on a wide range of campaigns, including developing political education around the city's misuse of Tax Increment Financing, the disproportionate effects of school closings on Black educators and students, and supporting the election of progressive candidates through the United Working Families coalition. Much of CORE's work has focused on countering the onslaught of market-based reforms in Chicago Public Schools and the city as a whole.

SEE was formed in 2009 in order to organize against austerity budgets and cutbacks in Seattle. SEE has advocated for social justice issues in the union contract, including the successful bid for mandated recess time, as well as leading campaigns for Black Lives Matter (BLM) at School and ethnic studies. SEE educators have mobilized against broader policies and issues, including the legislative underfunding of Washington schools, targeting of immigrant communities by ICE, and police shootings. SEE has also continued to push back on market-based education reforms, including standardized tests, school closures, and charterization.

WE was founded in 2014 with the intention of pushing the local teacher union to take a stronger stand against privatization and the charterization of the local public school system. Similar to the other three caucuses, it has led a range of campaigns around standardized testing, racial justice and environmental issues such as asbestos in schools, while advocating for enhanced teacher-led professional development and union democracy. WE's organizing focuses largely on organizing against systemic racism and market-based reforms in the Philadelphia School District (PSD) and the city as a whole.

UCORE is a national network of social justice caucuses that was founded in 2014. It strives to link existing and nascent caucuses from across the U.S.A. and provide a physical and virtual space for educator activists to meet, share strategies and tactics, and support one another. The national network tends to meet physically on a biannual basis, with occasional in-person regional meetings, and members can join monthly phone calls to share successes and challenges in their organizing work.

There are significant differences between the three caucuses and their contexts. All three caucuses have challenged teacher union leadership embracing business unionism approaches, and yet of the three, only CORE has gained core leadership positions within the union. Both SEE and WE members have run for these positions in the past, with several members of SEE gaining union executive board positions and WE members leading several sophisticated, if unsuccessful, campaigns. The contexts they are fighting against have differences, as well. While each of these three cities has faced school closures, charterization has so far been a more significant concern in Chicago and Philadelphia. Chicago and Philadelphia have also faced challenges in democratically shaping school policies due to mayoral—rather than elected school board—control over the school district.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these differences, the three caucuses and their contexts share much in common. All are located in large urban cities where public schools tend to serve high numbers of students who face racism and/or economic insecurity. The three caucuses share a common central concern with advocating for safe and healthy schools that provide a high quality and equitable education to all students, and especially for those facing racism and/or economic insecurity. Leaders from across the three caucuses have tended to advance a racial justice critique and framing as explanation for why austerity projects have been rapidly advanced in the three cities, and advocate for more equitable distribution of school funding at the state and city levels.

In our work with the caucuses, we have observed that caucuses generally engage a diverse range of political education initiatives that include inquiry groups, meetings, mobilizations, social gatherings, and publications. They organize around shared values such as care, democracy, justice, and solidarity, and against shared concerns such as privatization and racism in schools (Stark, 2019). Likewise, they all collaborate as members of UCORE. Our analysis will focus on these commonalities, and in particular the five forms of political education that we have identified in caucus organizing. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that these forms of political education are at times employed differently across the three caucuses, dependent upon the specific local needs of the caucuses and the constraints presented by their contexts.

## Methods

### Methodology and researcher positionality

This project is premised on the recognition that the political education processes of activist teachers are deeply embedded in their personal experiences of activism and their grassroots organizations. As such, we engage ethnographic methods (Erickson, 2006; Spradley, 1979, 1980) to theorize the various means through which teacher political education takes place in a time of austerity and enhanced oversight of teachers' professional work.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the similarities and differences between these caucuses, see Stark (2019).



As researchers, we were initially drawn to conduct this research through our own experiences as public school teachers in underfunded and under-resourced schools and/or districts. Through this, we came to see the union as vital for ensuring the quality and longevity of public education. We ally ourselves with the organizations under study, and, like Juris (2007), are committed to creating opportunity for the members of the organizations and networks with whom we work to reflect upon their activist practice so that our research might support their continued development. Throughout our research, we have consistently taken on tasks that would benefit the organizations and educational justice movement broadly, including through participating in organizational decision-making processes, and organizing and facilitating political education opportunities like book clubs, talks, workshops and protests for caucuses and their associated communities.

We are white women who, like Fine (2018), believe our research should ultimately serve the public school students, neighborhoods and educators who are at the center of our work. With this in mind, the focus of our data analysis was on understanding why and how educators develop the critical mindsets necessary for supporting their involvement in activist movements to protect and enhance equity in, and access to, public schooling, rather than attempting to uncover inconsistencies or problems within their organizations or networks.

## Data collection

The authors learned of each other through our common involvement in caucus research and organizing, and have met up on a regular basis during the past half-decade to talk about our research findings and activist experiences. Our respective projects share a common focus on organizational dynamics in grassroots social justice caucuses in the U.S. They likewise explore common considerations of the political dynamics of social justice caucuses, cultural practices in activism, knowledge production, and the political education of public school educators. This study was designed as an opportunity to think together about how political education transpires across multiple caucus organizations and a network. In so doing, we draw upon the data collected in our respective studies while collaboratively inquiring into questions of educators' political education processes in social justice caucuses.

This study brings together data from two previous research projects. Maton's research examined the relationship between organizational dynamics and caucus members' learning processes in WE in Philadelphia, from 2014 to 2018. She primarily employed practitioner inquiry methods stemming from ethnographic traditions while engaged in activist participation and observation. Data collection in 2014 and 2015 involved over 150 h of participant observation at organizational meetings and related events, 35 interviews with fourteen caucus members, and seven inquiry group meetings with nine participants centered on examining how traditions of racism shape the organizing practices of the caucus and its members (see Maton, 2016a). In years 2016 through 2018, she continued to attend WE events and track online conversations.

Stark employed ethnographic methods throughout her research on social justice caucuses in UCORE from 2015 through 2019, drawing on the traditions of multi-sited, network, and militant (Juris, 2007) ethnography. She spent a year conducting research in spaces that bring together caucus organizers from across the country, using this data to identify four caucuses for further ethnographic study, including all three caucuses examined in this study. After another year of multi-sited research, she spent three years as an activist participant observer within SEE in Seattle. Throughout, she employed ethnographic methods such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and served as a policy broker between SEE and UCORE. In total, Stark conducted over 345 h of ethnographic field work at over 150 meetings and social actions as well as interviews with 45 caucus organizers (see Stark, 2019). Maton and Stark recorded and transcribed all interviews and focus groups, and recorded field notes throughout their respective studies.

## Data analysis

Institutional review board requirements state that we cannot share our raw data, and thus in phase one of analysis we chose to independently analyze our full transcripts and then verbally talk through our observations.<sup>5</sup> We agreed that we had seen multiple instances and examples of political education across the three caucuses and network, and developed a table in an online shared document to generate a list of theory-generated codes and codes that emerged from real-life data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), which included multiple instances and examples of political education.

Phase two of analysis involved category generation and the development of a typology (see Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Because both of us were active in local caucus organizing and had attended one or more UCORE conferences, we shared a common knowledge base and language when discussing the caucuses. This allowed us to verbally discuss patterns of similarity and difference across the codes noted on the online shared document, and we worked together to identify five overarching forms of political education based upon our organizing and research experiences. At this time, we published an initial manuscript (Stark & Maton, 2019) where we began to develop this typology and applied it to the issue of school closures in Chicago. In phase three, which focused on coding data for the purpose of writing this article, we sought to develop the typology in further detail through broadening our analysis to include a more expansive range of data and used this deep immersion into data as a reiterative opportunity to further test and refine our developed typology. We chose salient examples of the five forms of political education from across the three caucuses and network, choosing the examples that succinctly exemplify broader trends in the data. In order to ensure validity of our findings, we have conducted member checks with the organizations in the study and shared the analysis with leadership in

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<sup>5</sup> While our IRBs would have technically allowed us to share de-identified transcripts or longer quotations with one another, such information might have unintentionally revealed participant identity. Thus, we chose to talk through rather than de-identify our data.

**Table 1** Teachers' political education: a conceptual framework

Goals	What purposes and goals are assigned to this form of political education? What are the desired learning outcomes?
Characteristics	What are the distinguishing characteristics of this form of political education? How are such learning opportunities structured and implemented?
Sources of Knowledge	Which knowledge sources (ex: peers, experts, books, scholars, etc.) are assumed to be most important and relevant? How are these sources of knowledge positioned or fore-fronted? Which tools and resources do they draw upon? How do educators access these knowledge sources?
Current Initiatives	In social justice caucuses, what are common practices in current initiatives that exemplify this political education form in practice?

the three caucuses and network. Please note that our IRB and informal agreements with the caucuses under study allow us to share their names and locations. Where full names are mentioned in the findings section, these are real names that are provided with the full consent of participants, whereas single first names indicate the use of pseudonyms to protect participant identity.

## Findings

We find that political education takes five main forms in teachers' grassroots social justice caucuses—structured, situational, mobilized, relational and networked forms. *Structured political education* involves participation in intentionally-designed and -created activities with an explicit agenda of political education. *Situational political education* is comprised of contextually-situated personal, organizational or institutional experiences of policies that tend to reap negative emotional responses among educators. Such experiences are not intended by policymakers to be educational, and yet facilitate political education. *Mobilized political education* refers to the ways in which political learning occurs through involvement in explicit political action, such as a strike or rally. *Relational political education* positions relationships as the central component in supporting the growth of a particular political viewpoint. Finally, *networked political education* involves personal or organizational participation in formal networks, alliances and/or partnerships that support political education. We find that these five forms coexist within teachers' grassroots union organizing efforts and together construct the range of approaches teacher social justice union caucuses employ to support their members' political learning needs and efforts.

The relationship between these five forms of teachers' political education is interconnected and nonlinear. Although the five forms vary considerably, we find that the lines across are not perfectly drawn and they tend to work in tandem to support and enhance members' political education. We explore each form separately in the findings in order to reveal the inner workings of the individual forms, yet believe it is important to emphasize that each of the caucus' initiatives and campaigns generally span across several forms of political education. Thus, the forms are mutually-reliant and -influential. The purpose of differentiating such forms is to show the range of

ways that teacher activist organizations intentionally employ and mobilize political education as a means of growing and enhancing organizational efficacy and power.

We have found there to be key areas of conceptual distinction across the five forms of political education (see Table 1). These areas of conceptual distinction concern their goals, characteristics, sources of knowledge, and range of current initiatives. First, there is variation in the *goals* of each form of political education. Such goals range in their desired learning and political outcomes and hold variation in the means through which they support the goals of the broader organization. Second, there is variation in how forms tend to adopt specific *characteristics* in the effort to achieve their goals. Third, *sources of knowledge* tend to be conceptualized, identified and positioned differently across the five forms of political education. There is variation in which sources of knowledge and organizing tools are valued and fore-fronted, and how teachers tend to access such resources. And finally, we find that there is significant variation in the types of *current initiatives* that exemplify each of the five forms. We will describe examples of current initiatives in the subsequent findings sub-sections and show how such initiatives engage and reveal aspects of this conceptual framework.

In the subsequent findings, we discuss each of these five forms separately, using the conceptual framework as a means through which to explore the intricacies of each form. We open each section by describing the broad features of the form based upon our research with the three caucuses and network, and then subsequently seek to paint a more detailed and narrativized portrait through reporting upon one example chosen from one of the four organizations under study. Due to space restrictions in this article, we are unable to provide a range of examples from across the various sites for each form, but have instead chosen to highlight in-depth examples that we believe are representative across the four organizations.

### Structured political education

The three caucuses and UCORE tend to organize events and distribute texts on a regular basis, with the explicit intention of supporting the political education of members and allies. Such events and texts take varied shapes, but structured political education opportunities tend to share in common the intentional design of opportunities for specific targeted audiences to gain exposure to focused topics, ideational viewpoints, and skill-based development opportunities.

Generally, the three organizations and network each employ a diverse range of types of structured learning opportunities. Examples of in-person structured learning opportunities include: curriculum fairs where teachers gain exposure to new curricular and pedagogical ideas; conferences examining a range of pre-identified issues and skills; workshops on philosophical ideas or skill-development; events featuring guest speakers; book clubs oriented around specific books pre-selected by caucus committees; and inquiry groups examining specific issues in depth. We also found that organizations produced texts that were designed to support the political education of members of the organization and their allies. Such texts include: blog posts; newsletters; and videos that are distributed via social media, email, in print

or during in-person meetings and events. In-person and textual structured political education share in common the intentional effort by movement leaders to promote learning about predetermined issues and frameworks among particular audiences of educators and others.

The themes and issues advanced within structured political education opportunities are intentionally selected and chosen for members, based on both the perceived learning needs of educators as well as the ideological perspective or frame that the organization chooses to advance. In 2015, Maton worked with WE to run a series of structured inquiry group meetings for a small group of nine WE members dedicated to the topic of structural racism (see Maton, 2016a, 2018, 2021). Such inquiry groups provided opportunity for these members to gather regularly in order to think about racism as a theoretical concept as well as its implications for caucus organizing. The inquiry group acted as an intellectual space for considering the focus and direction of the Caucus. In the final meeting, participants expressed that the structured meetings had been helpful both for their learning about the topic as well as their visions for where the caucus needed to continue to grow. Kathy, a WE leader, proposed “I am really interested in finding out a way to continue this over the summer” to which Miriam, also a WE member, proposed: “Can the theme of the book groups be—can all the books deal explicitly with racism? So that everybody’s talking about it and then I think that would be a powerful message to the entire caucus.” Camille, WE member, supported this idea, stating: “It’s so very important, a conscious effort and thinking about racism in the caucus.”

As background, each summer WE runs a popular and well-attended summer book club series (also see Riley, 2021) in which caucus members or allies voluntarily take part in order to read and collectively discuss ideas in the books. This book club series is a good example of structured political education, and it is interesting to note that the books in 2015 were oriented to engage the topic of racism at the behest of the inquiry group members. In this sense, the work of one structured political education opportunity (i.e. the inquiry group) led to a broader structured caucus-wide initiative to intentionally advance a particular critical framing that reached most members of the caucus and thus shaped how caucus members understood the link between racism and the work of their caucus (see also Maton, 2018).

Across the varied locations in which structured political education takes place (i.e. conferences, talks, book clubs, inquiry groups, etc.), we find that both experts (i.e. experienced activist organizers, scholars and published authors) and peers tend to be positioned as sources of knowledge. Often, caucuses ask experts to provide political analysis that is then shared with members through in-person or online events and texts sponsored by the organization. Within in-person structured events there is typically time devoted to both experts sharing perspectives as well as peer-based sensemaking, wherein caucus members might speak with and learn from one another. For example, during caucus workshops, talks and conferences, time is usually allotted first for experts to explicate their perspectives to an audience, and then caucus members talk and collaboratively construct new knowledge through informal conversations. During WE’s annual summer book club series, local book authors are often asked to attend and at times facilitate all or some of the meetings, and the book along with the author are positioned as experts while attendees engage in critical

dialogic sense-making processes through verbal discussion and analysis of the book and its ideas.

It is interesting to note that structured political education opportunities considered most productive and successful are frequently shared through caucus networks, such that a “successful” model of political education is later taken up and adapted by other organizations. For example, the summer book club series developed by WE has been shared at UCORE, in an article published in *Rethinking Schools* (Riley & Cohen, 2018), and through other means, leading CORE and SEE to implement adapted forms of this book club structure in their own structured political education efforts (Stark, 2019).

There is some variation in structured political education regarding the degree of organizational horizontality or verticality employed in the design and facilitation of events, and the degree of passivity or active engagement typically required of participants. Overall, structured political education allows caucus members to grow deeper political analysis shaping how they understand issues like neoliberalism and systemic racism, and holds potential for shifting how they think about the world and their union organizing work.

### **Situational political education**

It is common across our data for caucus members to discuss how experiencing the negative and inequitable outcomes of policy pushed them to build a stronger political analysis. Experiences of inequity in policy outcomes are usually tied to specific contextual factors and the political learning that results from such experiences is typically unplanned and informally structured in nature. We find that common experiences of inequity that lead to situational learning might include educators’ observation or experience of the impact of school closures, layoffs, mandated testing, funding cuts, and/or a dearth of access to resources on students, student families, local communities, or colleagues.

While educators individually respond to their observations or experiences of oppression in a range of ways, situational political education encourages caucus members to reflect more deeply upon the nature of power in their context, developing a justification and method for active resistance to inequity. Over time, the educational response to the situational event may become increasingly structured as teachers and allies work to create organized mechanisms for triggering change. In this way, situational political education is more likely to deepen educators’ political analysis and inspire action when it develops alongside other forms of political education (e.g., structured or relational).

Many social justice caucuses form in order to directly respond to inequitable policies. Both CORE and SEE were formed by educators who were deeply engaged in fighting back against racist school closures and frustrated by their unions’ complacency around market-based reforms (e.g., Stark & Maton, 2019). As CORE, SEE and WE have developed and grown as caucuses, they tend to draw in new members who have directly experienced the harm of market-based reforms and systemic racism in their schools, whether it be through turnarounds, high-stakes tests, Eurocentric

curricula, or discriminatory discipline policies. As such, we observe that situational political education is a fundamental component of the origins of the caucuses themselves as well as their ongoing recruitment of new members, who are drawn to the caucus as a result of their personal experiences or witnessing of inequity.

In an interview with Stark, CORE leader Tammie Vinson noted that as the caucus grew in the late 2000s and early 2010s, educators were “losing their jobs and they were experiencing internal school policies that were making it almost unbearable to be an educator in Chicago.” While these direct experiences of educational inequality inspired a number of educators to become more politically engaged, many indicated that they were even more galvanized by the ways that they saw these policies affecting their students. Vinson noted that students at the school were the “third, fourth generation of families going there.” She shared that when the students learned that the school was slated to be closed, one of her eighth graders commented that “he was not going to bring his children back to the school where he graduated.” Ultimately, this student was pushed out by the neoliberal policies reshaping Chicago schools. Vinson commented, “That child, that baby, you know this eighth grader, he dropped out of school after that. He didn’t even go to his first day in high school, but he was just so upset about a place that he had gone from kindergarten to eighth grade, would not be there.”

Through this direct experience of the effects of neoliberal policies and related gentrification on her students, Vinson was politicized, channeling her frustrations into work with the union’s Black Caucus and the growing CORE. Other educators in the caucus shared similar stories of both experiencing the impacts of austerity policies and, more significantly, witnessing these policies’ effects on their students and colleagues. CORE leader Debby Pope discussed these policies as “nine years of political education” for educators in the city, noting that their “level of consciousness is much higher now than it was before the nine years of political education, and watching Rahm [Emanuel] and his minions destroy the schools and shut down 50 schools.” Peers and community or organizational members typically become primary sources of knowledge within situational political education, as members seek to make sense of the various inequities they witness in the schools and communities surrounding them.

We find that situational processes generally overlap with other forms of political education. As members strive to make sense of what happens around them, they typically simultaneously draw upon other forms of political education in order to provide both a theoretical context and an informed approach in order to respond to such inequities. Through their organizing, educators in CORE built upon and responded to this situational political education through each of the other forms of political education. For example, in one-on-one conversations, organizers elicit other educators’ perspectives on these policies and what they would like to see instead for their schools. Moreover, in campaigns and publications, organizers offer a political analysis of these policies in connection to broader economic and racial inequalities. In this way, caucus organizers’ direct and proximal experience of educational inequalities fosters each of the other forms of political education, including structured education in the effort to understand the policies shaping schools, and mobilized

political education in the quest to build the power necessary to challenge and change policy.

### **Mobilized political education**

Each of the social justice caucuses we study in this project have led major campaigns that engaged existing and future caucus members, educators in the wider union, and community allies. We find that caucus members often refer to their participation in mobilization efforts as a major component of their political education. Likewise, we find that caucus members recognize both the change-making and educational dimensions of mobilizations and other social actions.

Across the three caucuses, we observe that mobilized political education typically takes place during organizing or participating in the following types of activities: protests or demonstrations; strikes; walkouts; rallies; school-based solidarity actions; petitions; curricular campaigns. Our observations show that learning happens in a range of ways over the course of a given campaign or mobilization: during the process of planning this action, over the course of the action itself, and in participants' and community members' reflections on this action. In some cases, this learning can be planned in advance, while in others it may be somewhat incidental, unplanned and interspersed throughout the processes of event organizing and participation. Similar to situational experiences of political education, peers and community/organizational leaders are typically positioned as the primary sources of knowledge. In addition, we find that there is frequently a symbiotic relationship between situational and mobilized political education, wherein exposure to inequity leads to a sense of incumbency to act—and learning is embedded throughout this interconnected process.

All of the caucuses in our study have driven major campaigns and grassroots actions. Amongst the three caucuses, two have led district-wide teachers' strikes, and another has led an ambitious district-wide sickout day to protest the lack of a contract for city educators. Likewise, all three caucuses have collaborated with community organizations to lead major protest campaigns against market-based reform and systemic racism. These include ongoing protests against school closures in Chicago (Bigos, 2018; Peralta, 2013), the MAP boycott in Seattle<sup>6</sup> (Hagopian, 2013), and the "Feltonville Six" opt-out campaign in Philadelphia<sup>7</sup> (Shamlin III, 2015). Each of these campaigns fueled learning and policy changes at the local and national levels, and educators from each of these caucuses have spoken at national

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<sup>6</sup> In 2013, Seattle educators at Garfield High School led a successful boycott against the implementation of the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) standardized test.

<sup>7</sup> In 2016, six educators at Feltonville School of Arts & Sciences in Philadelphia organized a campaign to inform families about their right to opt out of standardized tests.



educator and parent conferences to share lessons and successes from their struggles (see Stark, 2019).

Within Seattle, mobilizations in the first annual BLM at School<sup>8</sup> campaign provided opportunities for political education within SEE and across the district as a whole. This campaign began as a solidarity effort with Seattle's John Muir Elementary School in 2016. The school faced bomb threats after educators and members of the grassroots organization Black Men United to Change the Narrative organized to greet students while wearing BLM t-shirts. At this meeting, SEE members discussed strategies for supporting the organizers at John Muir, voting to write a solidarity letter and build a campaign involving educators across the district. SEE organizer Sarah Arvey successfully presented the proposal for a BLM at School Day of Action to their union's Representative Assembly, inspiring dialogue among union representatives as well as amongst students, educators, and community members across the district. SEE members likewise collaborated with educators on their schools' Racial Equity teams to develop curricula and designed two t-shirts for educators to wear on the first citywide BLM at School Day of Action in 2017. At the end of this Day of Action, SEE hosted a rally where students, educators, and allies discussed and advanced three demands that were documented in Stark's field notes: restorative justice in every school, ethnic studies for every student, and an end to tracking.

For educators in SEE, this campaign was "a first step in a larger conversation" around racial equity in education. In the union resolution, Arvey argued that the purpose of the campaign was "showing solidarity, promoting anti-racist practices in our schools, and *creating dialogue in our schools and communities*" (Arvey, 2016, emphasis ours). In this way, the campaign was developed both to directly transform schools and to further the political education of stakeholders throughout the district. For SEE organizers such as Darrin Hoop, this work was crucial in furthering political education within their union and district, as well as reshaping the membership of the caucus by fostering collaborations with like-minded educators, particularly educators of color. In an interview with Stark, Hoop noted that the caucus' "Black Lives Matter at School work" was especially significant in furthering political education within the union and transforming the caucus itself. In the years following the action, caucus organizers deepened their focus on racial justice efforts, displayed through leading a successful campaign for ethnic studies in Seattle schools and revising the caucus's mission statement and points of unity to align with racial justice principles.

As this first year of SEE organizing in the BLM at School campaign illustrates, educators become increasingly engaged and politicized through the mobilizations supported by caucus campaigns. Through this campaign, organizers recruited new members while supporting the ongoing political development of existing members and the organization as a whole. Relationships were fostered between educators as they participated in this campaign and made sense of their politics during mobilization. This mobilized political education continued in the years that followed as

<sup>8</sup> Following its 2016 emergence in Seattle, the BLM at School movement has expanded to include hundreds of U.S. K-12 schools and colleges. The movement centers Black voices, curriculum and pedagogy, and seeks tangible antiracist institutional educational change (see Jones & Hagopian, 2020).

educators in Seattle, Philadelphia, and other caucuses planned similar campaigns (Jones & Hagopian, 2020). This development suggests the power of the final two forms of political education we have identified in our research: relational and networked political education.

### **Relational political education**

Caucus organizers tend to develop deep relationships with colleagues across their local context and wider network, frequently offering support, sharing strategies, and learning from each other's experiences (Stark, 2019). Relational political education builds an individual's political analysis and organizing skills through one-on-one conversations between varied constituents including teachers, organizational leaders, and/or community members. These conversations may be spontaneous, as in the case of two educators discussing their direct experiences or observations of oppression in schools. Alternatively, they may be deliberate, as in the case of what organizers refer to as "listening conversations" and "organizing conversations," in which the conversational leader strives to achieve a specific political education or mobilizing outcome through the conversation.

We find that there is some variation in how such relationships develop and take place, spanning: informal conversations between acquaintances and friends, in which content is frequently spontaneous rather than pre-meditated; one-on-one conversations, including both impromptu conversations and pre-planned organizing or listening conversations; and assigned or informal mentorship pairings between novice and more established organizational members. We find that colleagues who are peers, parents of local children, and community members are typically positioned as sources of knowledge within relational political education. In addition to facilitating learning, these relationships serve an instrumental purpose: drawing new members and supporters into this work and engaging rank-and-file educators in the broader struggle for justice in education.

Relational political education is especially striking in the work of WE in Philadelphia. As part of their 2016 campaign for union leadership, WE organizers led trainings on organizing conversations. These trainings included supporting members as they conducted mock organizing conversations. In this way, caucus organizers used structured political education to build their members' capacity to drive relational political education in their own contexts or regions. While this strategy did not lead to an electoral victory as hoped, it did help to build the caucus as well as, arguably, the union as a whole. In a written piece reflecting on the campaign, WE educator Kathleen Melville noted that their organizing for this campaign led to "a more engaged membership" and "a more connected union": "Getting involved in the campaign helped me to forge relationships with members I might never have otherwise met."

As the caucus prepared for another election four years later, organizers deepened their understanding of how to lead organizing conversations to build power within their union. This was especially clear in Stark's interview with WE organizer Carolyn. In this campaign, WE used a regional model, breaking the district into seven

regions and training organizers to work with contacts in schools in their assigned district. Rather than stopping at a single contact per school, they worked with these contacts to identify “the ideal leader” at that school—someone trusted by the majority of faculty members—to meet with a caucus organizer, discuss their hopes for their school, and develop a contract action team that will support a campaign linked to those hopes. Carolyn noted that the “organizing conversation [structure] stays the same” no matter what the campaign, but that the “ask” changes depending on their current campaign. In the case of the 2019 election, the ask was to sign a petition calling on the school district of City 3 to ensure safe learning conditions for students. In this way, we can see relational political education supporting mobilized political education within a single campaign.

Reflecting on this strategy, she noted that her role in the caucus has shifted from planning campaign events and messaging to the more challenging task of “building relationships with new people”: “I call my work now ‘talking to strangers’ because I’m getting those strangers to find a leader in the schools to talk to me.” Carolyn identified this responsibility as a significant shift from her work in the caucus’s previous campaign, when she and other organizers had focused on working with the most like-minded contact in a given school. By instead striving to build authentic relationships with the educator who has the deepest connection to other educators in their school, she notes that the caucus is “moving them to see that they can access power and change conditions for their kids and themselves.” In their recent campaign against “toxic schools,” each petition signature represented an organizing conversation led by a caucus organizer or one of their school contacts. This petition could therefore be seen as a “structure test” (McAlevey, 2016) of their organizing (i.e. a means of gaining information about the degree and strength of support for the caucus and its campaigns), with the caucus using the number of signatures to assess their own success in building power across their union and district.

Through this campaign, caucus organizers applied lessons they had learned through their relationships with educators across the wider UCORE, in particular educators in caucuses in Baltimore, Chicago and Los Angeles. They likewise applied lessons from such resources as Labor Notes organizing guides and Jane McAlevey’s *No Shortcuts* (2016), a popular text among caucus organizers. Moreover, through their engagement in national networks such as UCORE, WE organizers shared lessons from their own work, inspiring educators in SEE and other caucuses to try similar strategies to support relational political education in their own contexts (see Stark, 2019).

## Networked political education

All three caucuses tend to be active in a range of networks, spanning geographic locations and specific areas of political foci. Organizations and individuals benefit greatly from these networks, as the networks tend to provide opportunities for people and groups to connect and learn from one another. In other words, engagement in networks, alliances and/or partnerships supports caucus organizers’ political

education as well as developing their skills in leading other forms of political education (e.g., relational, structured, mobilized).

Networked political education most commonly takes place in the following ways: virtual meetings to bring together educators with shared interests, goals, or challenges; distribution of contact lists and databases; and workshops, speakers and conferences targeting diverse audiences. Networks frequently sponsor events that are organized with the intention of bringing together members from diverse perspectives and organizations, or informal information- and strategy-sharing conversations between members of diverse organizations. Peers across diverse organizations are typically considered the primary sources of knowledge within this form of education.

Within these networks, participants often engage in learning and knowledge production that aligns with the four other forms of political education. Despite the overlaps inherent to this and other forms, we recognize networked political education as its own form of political education for several reasons. Networked political education operates at both the organizational and individual levels, facilitating the transfer of skills related to all other forms of political education across contexts and organizations. In this way, networked political education drives educational and social change beyond the local level.

CORE, SEE, and WE are active in a wide range of networks: local, national, and, in some cases, international. These include grassroots networks, labor networks, leftist networks, and caucus networks. In most cases, these networks have developed through the process of in-person relational political education outlined in the previous section. There are some exceptions to this, however. Some major national networks, such as the Badass Teachers (BATs), developed electronically through social media, forming before the development of strong ties between members. Likewise, several of the recent strike waves in the United States grew out of networks created electronically between educators in a single state, including West Virginia in 2018 (see Howell & Schmitzer, 2021). For the majority of the caucuses we study, however, formal networks develop only after considerable interpersonal connection and deliberation. In most cases, these networks are formed by educators who lead situational, mobilized, structured, and relational political education before developing broader networks, enabling them to extend this political education into wider contexts by serving as policy brokers, sharing strategies, and fostering collaborations.

Most notably, each of the three caucuses are active participants in UCORE. This network was created in a deliberative process that is comparable to the development of the caucuses themselves. In the wake of their historic teachers' strike in 2012, educators in Chicago's CORE found themselves offering informal support to educators facing similar struggles in their own communities. Realizing that it would be helpful to connect these educators, CORE organizers initiated the first meeting of the precursor to UCORE in 2013, which has continued to meet formally under the name of UCORE since 2014.

Through this network, education organizers in caucuses across the country share and learn from each other's experiences and campaigns. In so doing, they develop deep ties to organizers in other contexts, furthering their mutual political education as well as galvanizing and sustaining their local work. CORE organizer Debby

Pope reflected on the affective and pedagogical dimensions of the network's work: "Sometimes it feels like we're just doing group therapy, political group therapy in the sense that we are there and we're cheering, and we are supporting, and we are learning about things." As Pope further argues, this "political group therapy" can be transformative for both new and longstanding caucus organizers. At national and regional UCORE meetings, caucus organizers both discuss and model practices integral to caucus organizing, ranging from employing specific techniques to center marginalized voices in meetings to strategies for using chart paper to support horizontalist discussions and decision-making (see Stark, 2019). Thus, participants emerge from network meetings equipped with not only knowledge but also direct experience of practices that have successfully fostered educational transformation.

In Stark's fieldwork at the 2017 UCORE summer conference, this transformative potential was especially clear in interactions between organizers in caucuses with a range of levels of experience, including more established caucuses like CORE and newer caucuses such as Baltimore's BMORE caucus. While BMORE organizers clearly benefited from the lessons CORE organizers had learned in their experiences forming the caucus and leading the Chicago Teachers Union, CORE organizers frequently commented on the insights they had gained from organizers in the newly-formed BMORE, including their commitment to leadership by women educators of color. At the end of the conference, participants reflected in small groups on the ideas they were taking away from the conference before sharing out key themes with the whole group. During the share-out, an organizer from the Stronger Together caucus in New York State noted key themes of the conference, highlighting "the depths and the richness that I get to hear about things like racial justice and rank-and-file organizing." An organizer from the WE caucus added that the conference facilitates "taking lessons from here and being able to say 'this is a lesson from teachers' unions in Chicago or a lesson from teachers' unions in LA,'" arguing that "teacher organizing in other places drives people." Across these reflections, participants highlighted the ways in which their involvement in the UCORE network furthers their understanding of how power operates at individual and organizational levels.

As suggested in this example, networks such as UCORE foster political education among organizers engaged in these networks. Meanwhile, the educators participating in these networks serve as policy brokers, sharing insights from their experiences in these broader networks with organizers in their local contexts (see Stark, 2019). Thus, political education can in turn deepen and expand other forms of political education within social justice caucuses, fueling their efforts to address inequalities and transform institutions in their local contexts.

## **A typology of political education**

The typology that emerged from our findings reveals how teacher activism and organizing around social justice issues is tightly bound with processes of teachers' political education. Teachers gain deeper critical analysis on sociopolitical issues through engaging in varied forms of political education, including those that are relational, structured, situational, mobilized and networked.

The five forms of political education outlined in this article tend to be integrated and interspersed throughout the broad work of caucuses and their networks. Each form of political education tends to have different terrain and levels of appeal to varied audiences, such that some members tend to be more inclined toward particular versions of political education than others. For example, some members primarily enjoy reading and discussing books while others would rather spend their time planning protests. However, we have observed that while some members might tend to benefit more than others from particular forms of political education, collective organizational spaces tend to provide space for members to draw upon their political learning and share their perspectives in ways that continue to shape the ongoing political education of members and the direction of the caucus broadly (also see Maton, 2018). Thus, while political education may be understood to take place within particular locations and at particular times, it becomes the “air that members breathe” and as such tends to inform organizational priorities and decision-making broadly and in ongoing ways.

Our research holds significance for understanding political education processes at both the individual (micro) and organizational (meso) levels. We have shown that individual educators develop and refine their political frameworks and analysis, in part, as a result of their unique personal experiences within the workplace and the world, as well as in ways that are connected to the broader goals and actions of their social justice caucuses. We discussed in a previous chapter how educators’ individual experiences sometimes lead them to become involved in teacher-led organizations (Stark & Maton, 2019). In this sense, individual experiences frequently guide educators to find allies and like-minded others through teacher-led organizations, and their learning is supported by the political education efforts spearheaded by such organizations. Further, individuals bring their personal experiences and stories to bear in their organizational learning processes (see Maton, 2018), and thus such micro-level processes shape the ways the organization conceptualizes political education goals and structures to support learning among members and allies.

In a broad look across the five forms of political education, we find that teachers’ political education varies in the degree to which it is intentional and planned. At times, political education is a highly intentional and planned process, as seen perhaps most consistently in structured forms of political education. Workshops, conferences, inquiry groups, trainings and other events are planned ahead of time with specific goals for what and how participants will learn. And other times, political education is more implicit and embedded within teachers’ daily activities in the workplace or their organizations. Here, teachers learn about broad political trends through daily life, such as while chatting with a colleague during lunch break, experiencing the pain of losing a colleague due to layoffs, or showing up to a protest. As such, political education should be understood as both a result of the intentional efforts of activists as well as resulting from unintended effects of external factors like teacher activism and organizing efforts or market-driven reform. We wish to point out the irony embedded in instances where market-driven reform triggers the political education of educators, as our data indicates that the resulting teacher radicalization and generation of educator-led counter-movements are frequently in stark contrast to the intentions of powerful policymakers and corporate interests.

We find that political education is triggered by a combination of reactive and proactive forces across all five forms of teacher political education. Sometimes teachers gain political knowledge through reacting to specific events, circumstances or conversations. Here, political learning tends to result from teachers' efforts to respond to a particular scenario, such as the effects of neoliberal reforms on students in Chicago. Yet, at other times teachers arrive at enhanced political knowledge through the organized proactive measures of social movements. For example, educators in Seattle galvanized a movement with the purpose of advancing racial justice in schools, which was in turn extended into a national movement by educators in Philadelphia and other contexts.

At a time when educators are increasingly rising up within and beyond their unions to engage in grassroots activism and change-making efforts, it is vital to understand both how activist educators engage in political learning processes as well as how caucuses themselves contribute to such efforts. This essay has presented a typology that articulates processes of political education among social justice caucus members and organizers and demonstrates that political education is not only integrated into the shape and daily work of social justice caucuses, but also serves to significantly shape the political analyses and organizing work of their members. We believe that this political education typology holds potential for shifting how scholars think about knowledge production, grassroots educator organizing and political learning, and may assist education activists and unions in designing political education opportunities that are more consciously embedded throughout their organizing work in order to improve political potency. In so doing, this typology may support educators' enhanced articulation of the impact of broader political forces, including neoliberalism and systemic racism, on student, family and community experiences of public schooling. And, in turn, support unions in shifting the terrain of schooling and society in more equitable directions.

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