Community Engagement Statement

The empowerment gained from education has long been perceived as connected to an obligation to give back to the public good in order to sustain a democratic society. Despite this admirable aim, the educational system itself was founded as a means to ensure the continuity and protection of the status quo. We must not forget that the American schools first created by colonists were explicitly and exclusively reserved for white, Christian men as a means for proper civic and religious socialization and apprenticeship (Cremin 1970). The schooling system has since endeavored to maintain a class of educated citizens who will produce knowledge that will advance our society, uphold the laws of the land and increase the economy. Students are trained to become not just socially responsible citizens, but obedient ones. Thus, while schools have been revered as sites of knowledge production that contribute to the public good, there has been little contestation regarding *whose* good they are aiming to serve (Butin 2010; Westheimer & Kahne 2004).

Because of this, "systematic or formal education, in spite of its importance, cannot really be the lever for the transformation of society" (Freire and Shor 1987, p. 129). Because "the problems of school are deeply rooted in the global conditions of society," even when teachers use the critical pedagogy approach to inspire "democratic participation," their classes *alone* cannot create widespread change (ibid). Classroom learning must be connected and accountable to community-based movements for change. As Freire explains: "To change the concrete conditions of reality means a tremendous political practice, which demands mobilization, organization of the people, programs, all these things which cannot be organized just inside a classroom or a school" (Freire & Shor 1987, p. 134).

Fortunately, connecting education to social change by partnering with organizing efforts outside the classroom has a long and rich history. For generations, young people have been central to forwarding most social movements around the globe, movements which have been intricately connected to their own learning about peace and justice. "Community Engagement" is one of the most popular terms used currently for the work of students and engaged scholars who see the academy as inextricably tied to the challenges and movements of social systems and communities outside the walls of the university. Community engagement can include "service-learning," which is usually defined as "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (Jacoby 2003, p. 3). I and many other scholars, teachers and activists consider the "service-learning" concept to be limiting, however. It often assumes a hierarchical relationship about who is being served and who is doing the learning and it excludes the scholarship of engagement (i.e., community-based, participatory research). I prefer to use community engagement to broadly represent practices that create respectful, ethical and reciprocal partnerships among engaged faculty, students, and staff of colleges and universities with community members, organizations and institutions utilizing methods of civic engagement, community building, service-providing, political organizing, participatory action research, advocacy or accompaniment. These collective efforts aim to shift paradigms of injustice and increase peace and wellbeing.