



TEACHER UNIONS **AND** SOCIAL JUSTICE

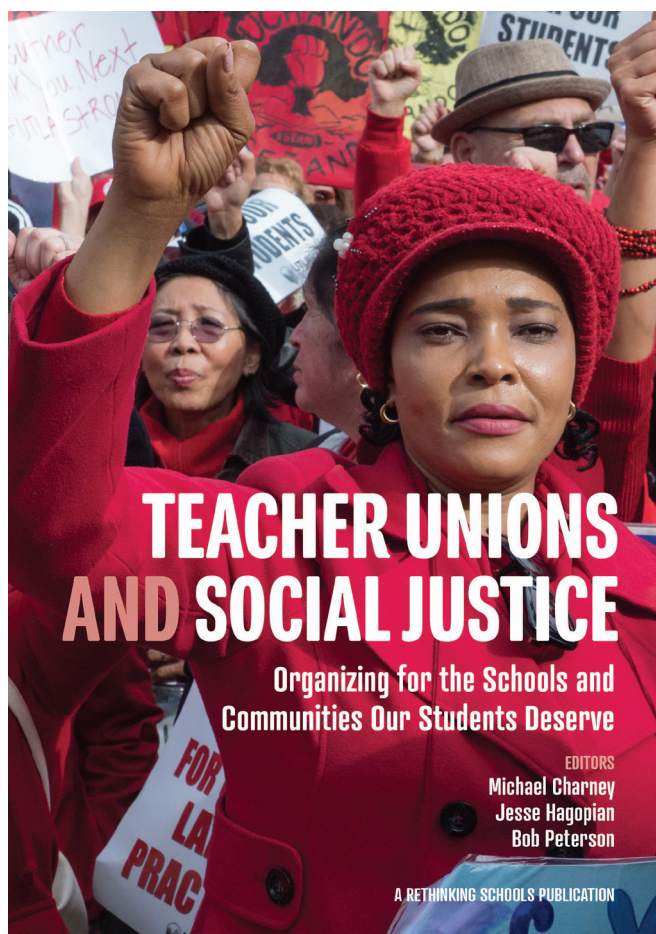
Organizing for the
Schools and Communities
Our Students Deserve

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DISCUSSION GUIDE





Teacher Unions and Social Justice is an anthology of more than 60 articles documenting the history and the how-tos of social justice unionism. Together, these contributions describe the growing movement to forge multiracial alliances with communities to defend and transform public education.

This discussion guide includes questions and activities designed to help union leaders, staff, and rank-and-file activists plan for varied learning formats: one or two-hour workshops, day-long retreats, or study/book groups that meet over an extended period of time.

Although there are a multitude of creative ways for workshops to unfold, we suggest three guiding principles that can enhance the level of engagement of participants:

REQUEST A CO-EDITOR OR CONTRIBUTOR VISIT

Study groups interested in a possible virtual visit from a *Teacher Unions and Social Justice* co-editor or contributor can email marketing@rethinkingschools.org. Let us know the number of individuals in your group, union affiliation, and possible topics or articles of interest. We can't guarantee availability, but we will do our best to get you connected with an editor or contributor. Bulk discount rates are available for study groups.

1

The impact and meaning of workshops will be deepened when they include close reading and discussion of the articles coupled with in-depth exploration of how the articles illuminate the experience and ongoing challenges of workshop participants. Ideally, the articles will provide inspiration and practical guidance that will enable participants to organize for social justice unionism within their own schools and districts. At the same time, some of these articles may generate really hard conversations around issues of power, racism, sexism, how our unions are internally organized, and what we should fight for. Encourage those conversations and be open to them.

2

Both workshop sessions and ongoing study groups benefit when participants agree to and are guided by explicit norms. For example, to generously share the airtime, to speak one's truth, to listen with respect and empathy, and to be fully prepared for and fully present during workshop sessions.

3

Engagement is deepened through shared leadership. This can take many forms: co-chairing sessions, rotating the planning and facilitation of meetings among workshop participants, asking individual participants to critically summarize particular readings. Study groups that meet over an extended period of time can provide opportunities for members to develop important leadership skills.

The book's table of contents, introduction, and additional union-related articles are available at rethinkingschools.org/TUSJ

The book's introduction and seven sections lend themselves to multiple discussion/study sessions.



INTRODUCTION

Read the introduction to get a sense of the breadth and depth of the book. As an easy discussion starter, read “Imagine if your union...” and have participants share a couple key “imaginings” that they would like to see in their unions. Discuss the additional “imaginings” they would add. What would it take to begin the work of making these “imaginings” happen in their school or district?

SECTION ONE OUR ROOTS

These articles revisit the power of unions, especially when they take up issues of racial and social justice. Choose three of the articles or interviews and answer these questions: What aspects of these historic struggles are comparable to or different from your situation today? Are there insights that might strengthen or change your current work?

SECTION TWO WHAT SOCIAL JUSTICE UNIONS LOOK LIKE

The detailed chart (pp. 103–106) describes several aspects of teacher unionism through the three models of industrial, professional, and social justice unionism. This can lead to valuable discussions on the state of one’s union. A quick read of “Social Justice Unionism” (p. 99) and the introduction to the three models (p. 102) provides the context for a discussion of the chart.

Engage a small group of union members to unpack each section of the chart, discussing where their union falls on the chart, and then considering some action steps to move the union forward.

How can our understanding of these models help us move toward class conscious and anti-racist teacher unions that can organize for the schools and communities our students deserve?

This section also includes articles about how the goal of creating transformative community schools can be worked toward through home visits, peer assistance, implementing teacher leadership, and bargaining for the common good. Which of these approaches might make sense in your union? Or, if you’ve already incorporated some of this work, what are the similarities and differences in how the experiences addressed in the book compare with your experiences?

SECTION THREE PUSHING FROM THE BOTTOM UP

In this section, we present nine examples of different kinds of rank-and-file organizing — which describe successes and failures. Have members or pairs in the study group read particular chapters and then summarize their chapter for the entire group, sharing what they see as the strengths and weaknesses of the organizing that took place in each instance. What would be the challenges/push-back that you’d expect from similar caucus work in your union? How might you prepare for or respond to that push-back?”



SECTION FOUR

REIMAGINING OUR UNIONS TO BUILD POWER

Compare and contrast how union activists in Milwaukee and Los Angeles transformed their unions. Reflect on campaigns of your union (local, state, or national) using the article, “Three Theories of Change.” Divide up the articles by Inouye, Quinn, and Donaghy (pp. 252-282) and have each person or group highlight organizing tactics and strategies that might be useful. What are the take-aways from the last three articles on the use of social and mainstream media and Art Builds?

Why do you think some educators or unions that want to do social justice work and want to organize for the schools and communities our students deserve really don’t succeed in the end? What makes this work so hard? How could the challenges be overcome?

SECTION FIVE

FIGHTING THE SYSTEM

Depending on the issues confronting your schools and community, choose articles that relate: education debt, achievement gap, privatization, or standardized testing. To push thinking on international solidarity, read and discuss the article on the teacher struggles in Colombia and the interview with Angelo Gavrielatos on global issues.

SECTION SIX

TAKING SOCIAL JUSTICE INTO THE CLASSROOM

Why should education unions promote anti-racist, social justice, and climate justice teaching in our schools? What are the potential challenges and benefits of bringing social justice teaching into the classroom? What examples included in these articles might be useful for your union to pursue? What push-back might you expect/get from administrators, parents, or students themselves? How do you respond to that?

SECTION SEVEN

RESOURCES

Here is a big picture question: As a union member what would it mean to implement the AROS principles into your local, state, and national unions? If your union has collective bargaining rights — or meets and confers — do any of the contract excerpts spark ideas of what your union could organize for in the future?



Note: If you have suggestions for revising this discussion guide or would like to share your experience of holding discussion sessions around *Teacher Unions and Social Justice* — or if you have questions for the editors or writers, please contact Bob Peterson, bob.e.peterson@gmail.com.

For more information about special bulk order discount rates, email marketing@rethinkingschools.org