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Rod Bush and Radical Pedagogy

I. Introduction

The U.S. higher education system is fraught with contradictions. Within the last forty years, colleges and universities have become increasingly privatized and corporatized. Discourse around education has been marked by the same rightward shifts that characterize much of U.S. politics. These changes come as access to postsecondary education has expanded to a larger share of high school graduates. But expanded access has not been an unqualified good. The financial burden of college education has been shifted from society at large onto individual students and their families (Goldrick-Rab 2016); teaching has been sourced to increasing numbers of contingent faculty working at low wages, and is increasingly threatened by online courses. Further, regimes of placement and competency testing—undertaken in the name of academic standards—have become effective barriers to participation in higher education at many public colleges and universities (Gordon 2016).

Nonetheless the fact remains that college education still has

transformative potential. While the system is increasingly constrained, the fundamental act of education—the vital interaction of students and teachers—can still exert profound influence on thought and action; however, this potential is not always realized. Higher education must compete with other powerful cultural influences in a landscape that encourages apathy and cynicism. And as students focus more and more on the bottom line of securing remunerative employment, fostering political engagement becomes a loftier aim for educators. We thus face a difficult but necessary task, especially in an era when anti-intellectual sentiment and disinformation pervade the political landscape. Rod Bush stood out as an educator both for his ability to break through the obstacles embedded in and surrounding higher education, and to harness its great potential.

Though other interactions with him were significant, Rod Bush incited me to consciousness and engagement first and foremost *as a professor in the university*. As a scholar who spends much time looking at institutionalized higher education, and noting its many limitations with respect to vital engagement, I see this as a noteworthy achievement. Thus, I focus here on critical education in the university using Rod as an exemplar. In so doing, I hope to foster a better understanding of the method and meaning of a political mentorship in the space of higher education as it exists today. The ideas presented here proceed temporally and proximally; each step takes us closer to the present day, and closer to the point where I think Rod's practice as an educator, scholar, and mentor fits in the tradition and theory of radical pedagogy.

In order to highlight its features which Rod epitomized, we must first define radical pedagogy. Apart from particular methods and techniques—which unfortunately are often extracted from their context and thereby degraded—radical pedagogy is a continuous and dynamic interplay between education and political work which aims to cultivate deep understanding of students' social and political situations, and to prepare them to become active participants in effecting change to those circumstances. This preparation for action concerns not only practical skills, but also willingness—and the latter is of particular concern. Ours is an historical moment in which such a program is

perhaps more imperative than it has been in decades. We need to engage young people on the part of progressive social transformation. Rod Bush was a potent force for facilitating engagement, and did so across lines of race and class through his work in the university. By way of analogy to a historical moment with important similarities to the present in 2017 (when this essay is being written), I begin by further specifying the problem: What is the nexus of political work and education, which Rod understood so well?

II. The Challenge and Necessity of Youth Engagement

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Wilhelm Reich was a member of the Communist parties of Austria and Germany. During this time, he witnessed fascism sweep across Germany and proceed to engulf Europe. Reich's attempts to increase the appeal of the party and challenge the swelling ranks of fascist groups led him to question communist orthodoxy. The party consensus was that economic issues ought to be the driving engine of the movement, casting aside other issues as ideological distractions. Reich argued that the contradictions of everyday life were more effective mass organizing principles than the economic contradictions of capitalism. Specifically, he advocated for a program to bring young people into the movement by engaging the question of sexual morality. This was based on his belief in the connection between social and psychic repression, which led him to integrate the ideas of Freud and Marx. But, practically, he was concerned about the vitality of the Communist movement in the face of a fascist party which had a clear, albeit repressive, sexual program (Reich 2012). As Reich did in his time, we face a moment in which authoritarian tendencies are on the rise, and we face similar challenges engaging young people in the resistance of those tendencies. One can argue with Reich's particular choice of organizing principle, but his earnest belief in bringing youth into the fold of social movements, and the resistance he faced from within the left all have contemporary relevance.

Reich's position on sexuality led to his expulsion from the German

Communist Party (KPD) in 1933. The party had grown increasingly sectarian and expelled many dissident voices, including those advocating a united front against fascism (Wilde 2013). But Reich demonstrates specifically that the KPD had a problem engaging young people in political struggle. He was critical of attempts to appeal to them using the slogans and concepts of political economy. Communist youth organizers, relying solely on this orthodoxy, failed to address problems important to young people and were unable to bring traditional party issues to a level at which youth could engage. Reich's assessment of party newspapers summarizes his point:

In today's revolutionary press almost nothing but party jargon is to be found. There is hardly ever any sign of comprehension of the contradictions facing the various strata of the population. ... Without their sympathy and active support for the cause of the revolution we shall always remain miserable word-slingers. (Reich 2012:339)

I offer this example, not only because it comes from an era in which authoritarianism was on the rise, but also because Reich's concern with incorporating youth into progressive social struggles points to a contemporary problem of radical pedagogy. Indeed, Antonio Gramsci recognized education as the key component in the strategic "war of position," which comes along with revolutionary struggle (Gramsci 1971:2010). Similarly, Paulo Freire, whose foundational work on radical pedagogy is discussed below, made no distinction between the radical educator and the revolutionary leader. The significant point of convergence is that in each of their views, education, like all political activity, is about reaching people, especially young people, and fostering their action.

We don't live in the 1930s (as Reich) or the 1970s (as Freire). Radical pedagogy in its pure form seems an endangered species. This is particularly true in the academy, but it is a significant and remediable gap. With the withering of durable social formations like trade unions, and a more general decline in permanent voluntary associations, there are precious few sites of explicitly political education in the 21st Century US, and in many ways the Left today seems as incapable of

engaging young people as it has ever been. As a young person who has attended many gatherings of the ostensible Left, I am sad to say little has changed with respect to how the concerns and opinions of young people are treated.¹

Thus the task of political socialization falls largely to those of us working in schools, and particularly in institutions of higher education. But the university, as it exists, emphasizes non-political discourse, and either discourages or sanctions direct political engagement. This emphasis, along with other secular trends—increased workloads, pressure for continuous publication, and relatively low regard for teaching—leads many to disengage from political work and from education altogether. Likewise, youth-led uprisings like Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter possess the requisite (and inspiring) righteous anger and determination, and indeed have begun to emphasize the need for study, but could benefit greatly from historical insight and theoretical clarity as they strive to achieve lasting victories. Many in the academy are sympathetic to social movements, but this sympathy rarely translates into vital engagement with students. And for those of us who do wish to engage our students, it is important to harness the lessons of those who have been successful in doing so.

Ironically, spending years studying schooling as a social institution can ruin one's ability to clearly illustrate concepts of educational practice. But I still remember being politically engaged and truly educated for the first time by Rod Bush both in the classroom and in activities within the campus community. It was clear to me then that my experience was no isolated incident, as my fellow former student-contributors to this volume attest and every time I meet another of Rod's former students, the point is made clearer still. Years later, and with some of the canon of progressive/radical pedagogy in my repertoire, I can weave together what I know *in theory* with what I experienced *in practice*. So I proceed below by pivoting between these

1. As an organizer and board member of the Left Forum, one such Left gathering, Rod Bush worked against the conference's insular tendencies by both encouraging diverse viewpoints at the executive level and convening numerous panels comprised of diverse and young speakers.

concepts and practical illustrations from my own recollections, in order to distill key elements of Rod's radical pedagogy and in the hope of offering valuable practical lessons for future generations of educators.

III. Moral Education as Precondition for Radical Education

I was introduced to “Dr. Bush”—as I knew him then—as an undergraduate sociology student, so it's perhaps fitting to begin with Emile Durkheim. While not a radical in the usual sense, Durkheim was deeply committed to both sociology and pedagogy, and made great effort to unify the two. He offers a sociological definition of education—the process by which older members of a society prepare younger members physically, intellectually, and morally to participate in the life of society (Durkheim 1956:71). He emphasized moral education—by which he means fostering practices that are disciplined (motivated by a sense of duty), societally oriented (rather than self-interested), and autonomous (accepted based on knowledge rather than coercion). For Durkheim, without the reliable transmission of morality, society itself is impossible. He entrusted this task to the public schools, regarding religion and the family as unfit to the task of fostering a distinctly modern society.² Thus, for him successful modern pedagogy depends on the educator being a *moral authority* for his/her students, someone who can model not only the necessary skills for individual success, but also the way of living a good life in community with others (Durkheim 1961).³ Moral education cannot be imposed upon students by the educator in the form of sermons on appropriate conduct. If it appears to students as something inauthentic, morality won't be effectively communicated. Thus beyond reciting morality, the educator must exemplify it in practice.

2. Indeed, the crisis of French education—to which Durkheim applies himself—is rooted in the incompatibility of religion with scientific knowledge and of the family with modern social organization.

3. This point is sadly lost in mainstream American discourse on the purpose of higher education. This debate presents a false dichotomy between vocational training and fostering creativity, usually centered on which of these is more valuable to employers (Zakaria 2015, Leonhardt 2014, Goldin and Katz 2010).

What tools can we use to enact moral authority and moral education in the classroom?

Rod Bush's pedagogical repertoire embodied moral authority. From the first day I walked into his classroom, Rod impressed me as an eminent presider, someone who commanded our respect, but without having to do so actively. His presence in the room was distinct from any of my other instructors before or since; everything about how he engaged classroom time accumulated a sense of seriousness. He came to class dressed formally, something uncommon in the social sciences. He addressed all of us by name despite his often large classes. When he asked questions, he would carefully take in each answer. When he showed films, Rod would take copious notes, even more so than most students. This note-taking was also apparent when he attended campus lectures and conferences—even those with student presenters. Reflecting on it, this makes sense. We discussed important topics and Rod's presence in the classroom was serious, even as the mood remained collegial. In Durkheim's terms, he carried authority not through any sense of his own superiority, but out of a profound respect for the role he played as an educator. His attention at all times also conveyed the extent to which Rod was continuously engaged in study. As a result, Rod's classroom manner affected his students in the same direction, and the classroom became a serious place.

Beyond just providing an image to aspire toward, educators must model the conduct they wish to foster in their students. The college classroom can be a tough space to manage under ordinary circumstances. Discussions of critical history and social theory can invite particularly tense reactions, precisely because they challenge how we see ourselves in the world. Many times, students came to Rod's classes specifically to challenge what was being said. As a teacher, I know antagonism can lead to visceral reactions and/or total disengagement for instructors and students. As an undergraduate, I watched other professors crack under that sort of pressure. But Rod was a veteran of social movements. He knew the importance of maintaining the high ground, and was able to do so with grace. He would invite discussion

and controversy, as the issues we discussed were significant and had to be treated with importance. To him, it was central that students have their own perspectives, even if they conflicted with his own. More importantly, Rod could defuse hostility without harming his students; he was capable of overwhelming you with knowledge, but he knew that such displays would have been counterproductive. So rather than reactively pushing back against poorly considered or misinformed statements, Rod flipped the script and took them as opportunities. This allowed all students to remain part of the classroom community; their perspectives were treated as (and perhaps often were) expressions of anxiety or unreflective repetitions of statements uttered in prejudiced homes and neighborhoods.

One topic that frequently came up in Rod's classes was the "color-blind society." A student would advance the notion that U.S. society had become color-blind and that merit or effort now superseded race in determining life chances.⁴ The concept was intellectually significant for Rod, and one which he challenged in his work. This is the sort of situation that one can shrink from or woefully mishandle in a college classroom. However, for Rod it was precisely the moment to further engage discussion. He would cite the history of the concept and the debate surrounding it; other students would be invited to express their perspectives. Nobody was judged for holding the opinion, but the problematic contents of the argument were brought to light. Despite controversy, community was maintained and even reinforced, and students were given an opportunity to think about the implications of history and of sociological concepts. This practice of open discussion also helped to build empathy in the classroom; even if you disagreed with your fellow students, Rod's class gave you the opportunity to see them as individuals rather than as media caricatures of so-called liberals or conservatives. In our age of deep political polarization, such opportunities ought to be taken every time they appear.

The moral education Rod embodied was a precursor for the kind

4. I was not in Rod's classes after the election of Barack Obama, and I would expect these pronouncements of a 'post-racial' America would have only increased in frequency.

of radical political education he ultimately gave many of us. Again, it makes sense in retrospect; if morality is the willfully enacted desire for and obligation to society and humanity, then we need to first of all be moral in order to effect change toward a more just society. But to arrive at such change, we first need to understand what and how education—and Rod’s pedagogy specifically—transcends the classroom.

IV. Cultivating Shared Interest in Social Justice

How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the living present?

—Dewey 1938:23

The American philosopher John Dewey was particularly concerned with educating citizens in a democratic society and focused on the school as one *potential* site of education. Unlike Durkheim, he wasn’t sure schooling was the sole hope for modern society. Lest we forget that not all education happens in school and that not all schooling is educative, Dewey makes a distinction between education and training. For him, training provides capacities and skills, but cannot guarantee that they will be retained or valued. Education is qualitatively distinct from training because it provides not only skills and mental associations, but also *shared interest* in the success of the practices which require these skills. Training can be accomplished by trainers’ appeals to trainees’ base motivations like pleasure and pain—and all animals including humans can be and are habituated through training. By contrast, education requires creating an environment of shared activity where the motivations and behaviors of the teacher and the taught are aligned. Dewey’s famous example is the child of a family of musicians who acquires musical talent in the course of her shared family life. Not only is the skill transmitted, but also are its meaning and an interest in its success (Dewey 1916:13-16).

Schooling rarely touches the present; this was a weakness that Dewey felt tethered traditional education and stifled student

engagement. This is why he worried about the schools' capacity to fulfill their prescribed educative function. Because they rely primarily on language (written and spoken) rather than shared activity, schools are not often places where those involved come to any sense of shared interest. Indeed, the school can be a place where nothing is conveyed but "second-hand information as to what others think" (Dewey 1916:18). In too many cases, this perception of schooling is hard-wired long before students enter college. Thus without shared interest, students treat higher education as something to be efficiently managed in the pursuit of high grades. This tendency to superficially treat schoolwork can grow in college, as students' lives become more crowded with paid work and other obligations.

How did Rod Bush foster shared interest in the things he taught in such an environment?

Rod sent email. A lot. He had a listserv for every class he taught, and maintained others for colleagues and former students. I found myself on many of these distribution lists. He forwarded newsletters and announcements which touched every aspect of left and progressive politics. This practice clearly took a great deal of time, and initially I did not understand his intention. But what became clear was that he was trying to convey the world beyond the classroom. Like many students, I thought of school as a place to learn about things that *had happened* or ideas that *had been thought*. But Rod, perhaps the digital Saint Paul, showed me a world in motion by opening up channels that I didn't know existed.

My first exposures to Truthout, Common Dreams, the Black Agenda Report, AlterNet, and the World Social Forum, among others, all came from Rod Bush's emails. Of course, you couldn't read everything he forwarded, but something among the pages would catch your interest enough to read all the way through. Eventually, you might see enough articles coming from the same source that you subscribe to it yourself. Maybe an email came in about an event, and you would decide to attend. Now you've become part of that larger world first-

hand.⁵ This returns us to the earlier emphasis on engagement; knowing the problems and hoping for their solutions is one thing—and can lead to likes, comments and retweets on social media. But to take a step into the fray, that an altogether different and more significant transformation, and the sort that is needed today.

Further, all these emails also have a strange effect on your learning in Rod Bush’s class, and in others; you find out that the struggle is not over. History becomes historical in the Marxist sense; the change that you read about in books becomes change that you can fight for. And you come to class wanting to learn because you see knowledge no longer as a temporary burden to manage, not as something with which to perform and earn a grade, but as part of a real and unfolding world. Retaining and reinforcing what you learn now becomes something you care about, independent of grades and test scores.

In this way, Rod fostered a shared interest in social justice, which could then be translated into action. But what tools did he employ in teaching us how to take action?

V. Dialogue as Praxis

To achieve this praxis, however, it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiqués, monologues, and instructions.

—Freire 1970:48

Paulo Freire, the late Brazilian dissident exile educator, makes no distinction between the revolutionary leader and the radical educator. Indeed, the radical pedagogical act is itself constitutive of revolution. Radical pedagogy is juxtaposed to a ‘banking model’ of education, in which dead facts are crammed into the minds of the youth, and that alone is deemed sufficient as knowledge (Freire 1970).⁶ One could link

5. Other authors in this volume speak at length about how Rod fostered direct action.

6. Alfred North Whitehead expresses a view similar to Freire in his philosophy of education: “a pupil’s mind is a growing organism ... it is not a box to be ruthlessly

this concept both to Dewey's notion of training, and to perspectives which stress the 'human capital' value of higher education and the consequent narrowing of K-12 curricula to little more than basic literacy and mathematics. By contrast, the curriculum for the radical educator often centers on students' experiences of oppression and the possibilities for liberation. The mode of radical education is critical interrogation of those experiences and discussion of how to transgress and overcome.

Pedagogically, radical education blurs the line between teacher and student, and reimagines the classroom outside of its traditional power dynamic. It restructures the classroom into a community of learners who are all capable of and responsible for the role of teacher at different points. The sharing of power is not a choice or something to be done in small intervals as a break from the traditional structure; it is an imperative of radical pedagogy. Only by insisting on this structural choice can the educator hope to foster a radically democratic future. Educators cannot resort to the unidirectional practice of instructing, lest they lead the people "into the populist pitfall." At the same time, they must constantly encourage students or community members to reflect on their learning and experiences, lest their subsequent political action be reduced to "pure activism" (Freire 1970:13).

Thus, a pedagogy of the oppressed is literally *of* marginalized or subaltern groups, not something imparted by any authority. From Freire, we get a model of what radical education can be. Yet as Dewey says of progressive education, radical pedagogy is much harder to practice than traditional education. Rod Bush's example sheds light on how it can be implemented.

How does one blur the line and place students at the center of a community?

Rod's lessons would begin with an engagement of our experiences and perceptions of the world around us. He would first ask a basic question: "What social forces shape our culture?" He would then take many responses from students and write them on the board. These

packed with alien ideas" (Whitehead 1967).

responses would become the reference points for the day's discussion. This documentation placed our perspective on equal footing with his, and did so subtly. In a further act of faith and confidence in us, he would let discussions among students drive the lessons forward, rather than forcing dialog to orbit his thoughts. We learned to speak amongst each other because we were being taught to speak and to listen.

Rod Bush reserved his own intervention for the redirection of statements made without evidence or consideration. When he interjected, he would introduce a different line of thought, or ask a student to reflect further on what they had said, rather than providing an authoritative answer. As such, he guided us toward reflection on our own terms. These moderated discussions among students were invaluable as preparation for the political action in the real world that Rod's lessons implied. To be sure, there were contentious moments, but such moments mirror the experience of working on political and social justice issues. One needs to know the feeling of tense intellectual discussions, and how to maintain composure when faced with opposition; Rod Bush created a safe space to learn both.

Sometimes contrast helps clarify a point. I took a Speech class which instructed me well in the mechanics of public address; it was valuable training, but it was just *training*. Rod Bush's classes were where, beyond articulation, I found my voice by learning to understand my experiences and observations as part of a larger system. Rod created a space where history meant something for the present and students were put on equal footing with the professor—that nurtured my worldview, valorized my experience, and endowed me with confidence to confront the injustice and contradictions of modern capitalist society. It was in this way that Rod practiced radical pedagogy—not by handing us radical ideas, but by nurturing our capacity for critical speech and action, which fostered our own radical ideas. Nonetheless, I feel there is still a missing element in my understanding of Rod's *formula*. I'm still left with the question of how and why to practice some version of radical pedagogy in the heart of what Rod called White world supremacy, in the 21st century, and further within what Louis Althusser calls the world's leading ideological state apparatus.

VI. Taking Risks in Classroom Engagement

*Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students ...
Their empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable
while encouraging student to take risks.*

—hooks 1994:21

I arrive at the work of bell hooks⁷ who, like Rod Bush, was a child of the segregated south. Both go beyond pedagogy to foster a different kind of mentorship. hooks learned to dread schooling as an undergraduate and graduate student and thus sought a different way of practicing higher education. She picks up on the work of Paulo Freire in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), and expands upon it with her notion of engaged pedagogy. Like Freire, she critiques traditional pedagogical process as something that cuts teachers off from their students and objectifies the lessons taught in a way that reinforces the logic of domination. She further shows how even critical educators can be “dictators in the classroom,” even as they speak the language of empowerment.

Engaged pedagogy seeks by contrast to reconnect teachers and students in a space where both are recognized as whole persons and whose intellectual endeavors are not disconnected from their physical and emotional well-being (hooks 1994). It treats education as a fundamentally political project and as a place where students and teachers alike generate excitement and pleasure (if we recall the lessons of psychoanalysis, we know how dangerous even a little pleasure can be for a system based on domination). Ultimately, hooks’s engaged pedagogy is about modeling praxis for students through the totality of one’s own life (hooks 1994:15). She admits this is by no means an easy or fail-safe practice. Indeed, it is the risk of oneself in the process that constitutes the meaning of engaged pedagogy. To recognize every student and to make each feel valued for their contribution, to be the *healer/educator*, involves taking risks and making oneself vulnerable.

Educators have to place the first bet by putting themselves into

7. bell hooks is the pseudonym of the scholar and cultural critic Gloria Jean Watkins. She chose not to capitalize her name to place the focus on her work rather than her name and personality (Quintana:nd).

the arena not as authority figures, but as co-participants who can win or lose. In the classroom, this means sharing personal experiences and feelings so that students don't feel they are the only ones revealing themselves. Rod Bush surely did this: His personal anecdotes of the civil rights movement, and even those of his upbringing, featured prominently in his courses. These initial risks helped us all put ourselves into the spotlight in a way that fostered the classroom as a community and edified us each individually.

How can we engage this sort of radical ethic of care in the university? Should we?

I cannot do justice here to the time Rod Bush spent caring for the well-being of his students; other chapters in the present volume convey this message. One needed only to look down the hall in the sociology department to see the group of students that often camped outside his office. We took many of his hours, well beyond what was 'required' by his position, and he gave them freely. I came to his office not only to mine his wealth of knowledge, but to be encouraged when being a working class first-generation college student left me feeling out of place. At moments like this, Rod would talk about his often difficult experience working in New York City while earning a Ph.D. at SUNY-Binghamton. Lighter interactions happened, too; I would make a music recommendation and he would write it down for later reference. But we also talked about family and tragedy; he told me about the loss of his daughter, and I told him when my brother died. Rod's mentorship was not abstracted from his life, and our well-being and education was not removed from his. This alone was a radical act. Yet it went further, as transgression must.

I borrow my final anecdote from others. It drives home clearly the extent to which Rod Bush was willing to put himself on the line along with his students for the sake of modeling praxis. The university in general (and St. Johns in particular) is not a space where radicalism is tolerated. Rod was the faculty adviser for the sociology club. In my undergraduate cohort, the club had minor scuffles with school

administration; bringing James Cone⁸ to a Catholic college to talk about Liberation Theology was not popular in the era of Pope John Paul II. But the generation of students before me went much further. They attempted to disrupt St. John's powerful athletics programs by challenging the ethics of the university's equipment endorsements from Nike—a company known then and now for using sweatshop and child labor. I had known that this nearly cost some students their degrees, but only later learned that it nearly cost Rod Bush his position. Colleagues advised him against standing alongside the students, but he would not waiver. There was important moral content in the students' action against Nike, and Rod was a risk-taker for and with his students. To me this epitomizes the idea of modeling praxis, putting oneself on the line alongside your students to buttress their strength.

In this final anecdote, I see a boundary, and perhaps a path not everyone can follow—the reader will have to decide for herself. If I am honest, it stretches past the limits of my own courage. But in seeking to learn something about radical pedagogy from the life of a mentor and friend, it is impossible to ignore evidence of this sort. Perhaps such an example serves as a zenith to strive toward, that we should want to be at that level of co-engagement with our students even if we never have the occasion to get there. If we are interested in the possibility of a better world that will persist after we are gone, and we feel that the engagement of young people is a means to that end, then we must be as willing to model for them the practice of risk-taking on the ground as we are to explain to them why those risks are worth taking.

VII. Conclusion: Love as the Guiding Force for Radical Pedagogy

In his capacity as a professor in the university, Rod Bush chose a difficult and at times perilous path for the sake of educating his students.

8. James Cone (1936-2018), Distinguished Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary, is credited with founding the school of thought known as Liberation Theology. He was the author of numerous books and articles, and primarily focused his intellectual career on the connection between black liberation struggles and the Black theological tradition.

His method required energy, trust, conviction, and tremendous risk. Even if he knew that his approach had worked in the past, each new pedagogical encounter necessarily implies uncertainty. Yet from talking with those who studied with him before and after me, it is clear he never deviated from this approach. So why did Rod do all of this?

Love links all the elements of Rod's radical pedagogy. Love allowed him to keep his cool and maintain a community of learners while still challenging our thinking. Love animated his endless efforts to bring us into closer contact with the struggle for justice. Students felt comfortable to open up and hone the craft of speaking truth to power, only because of the safety they felt in Rod's caring presence. In the last analysis, Rod Bush's praxis, his intertwining of theory and action, to which he gave himself wholly, can only be one of love.

Love for what? Love for whom? Knowing Rod Bush first as my teacher, it was first and foremost clear to me that he loved his students. But knowing him as a man and as a friend, it is clear that he also loved his family, his community, and the world. Reflecting years later, and having been part of the collaboration that produced this volume, it is clear that these categories cannot and should not be disentangled. Rod's family and community were indispensable components of his teaching and mentorship; his students in turn were and are viewed as part of his family and community. And so to love one is to love them all, and that integration is precisely what made Rod such a transformative presence in the lives of so many people.

Such love seems central to the practice of radical pedagogy in the university. In a space where nearly everyone else preaches higher training, upward mobility, and the American Dream, Rod Bush offered an alternative way of thinking and being in the world. Today as students and teachers fear losing ground, most recoil at the risks of transgression. Rod's praxis and pedagogy fostered his students' progressive political thoughts and actions by saying in effect "fighting for a better world means taking risks, but I care about you and I'm here with you."

Given the mode and context of its existence, higher education can systematically dim hopes and crush expectations. Students are told

their whole lives that college is an opportunity which must not be squandered, and that diligent obedience is the surest way to succeed. Such pronouncements can stifle creativity and cloud vision, and most certainly dissuade political engagement. I was scared when I arrived at college, as I know others must have been. My education had taken me far from the cultural milieu in which I was born; my political engagement took me even further afield. Despite being academically prepared, I had little solid ground to stand on, much less to demand progressive social change.

Rod provided that solid ground for me through his unfailing love for me and for the complex of family, students, and community that I became a part of. The style of education which his love animated, provided my fellow students and me with a lens to understand the world and the tools to make demands of it. His mode of pedagogy is thus indispensable if the university is to continue to produce radical scholarship and radical scholars, a mission we know is in danger, and which seems more relevant than at any point in my lifetime. Furthermore, even the best scholarly analysis means little if no one feels empowered to understand or utilize it. We are living in a moment when, given the immense stakes and vast consequences of passivity, words must finally resolve to action. The pedagogy of Rod Bush demonstrates how a radical praxis grounded in love not only fosters needed intellectual growth, but also can provide the spark which turns thought into action.

Abstract

This essay authored by Daniel Douglas, titled “Rod Bush and Radical Pedagogy,” is a chapter in the anthology *Rod Bush: Lessons from a Radical Black Scholar on Liberation, Love, and Justice*, edited by Melanie E. L. Bush, and co-edited by Rose M. Brewer, Daniel Douglas, Loretta Chin, and Robert Newby (2019). The US system of higher education is fraught with contradictions, even as it has become accessible to an increasing share of high school graduates. Even though the possibility of politically engaged pedagogy in this institution is increasingly under threat, education remains a fundamentally vital space. In his work as a professor, Rod Bush exemplified the vital possibility for radically transformative higher education. This essay explores four

theoretical premises of radical education—moral authority, shared interest, dialog, and risk—by juxtaposing these principles with examples of Rod Bush’s pedagogy. It concludes by suggesting that the lessons derived from Rod’s practical orientation—specifically his love for and commitment to his students—are of critical importance for sustaining radical pedagogical praxis.

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Daniel Douglas is a Senior Researcher at Rutgers University’s School of Management and Labor Relations. He earned his BA and MA in Sociology at St. Johns University in 2005 and 2008, respectively. He earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in 2017. His dissertation critically examines K-12 teacher evaluation systems. His current research examines the role of mathematics in postsecondary education; the connections between higher education and employment; and college students’ trajectories in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

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