
THE SYLLABUS AS MANIFESTO

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If education is to be transformative, it requires a radical declaration of its intent. The syllabus, contra a course manual, policy statement, or punitive measure, is this radical declaration. The concept is simple: for the syllabus to be transformative, it must be a manifesto. A concept of the syllabus as manifesto is easily articulated.

The manifesto typically poses "some 'we,' explicit or implicit, against some other 'they'" (Caws xx). It "wants to make a persuasive move from the 'I believe' of the speaker toward the 'you' of the listener or reader, who should be sufficiently convinced to join in" (Caws xx). This kind collective proclamation is familiar in American political landscapes: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident'; 'Whose streets? Our streets!'; 'Not me. Us.' Like the manifesto, the syllabus announces its own authority and actualizes itself through the proclamation of its intent. Neither a document that upholds an "explicative order," or "narrating subject,"¹ the syllabus as manifesto makes collective proclamations in two distinct ways.

- 1) The syllabus as manifesto cleaves knowledge production to a collective position as it eliminates the authority one might hold over many. 'We,' the syllabus announces, students and faculty, assert our mutual intent.
- 2) The syllabus as manifesto authorizes those who would produce knowledge as a matter of solidarity. The syllabus invites participation as it identifies its object and asserts its intellectual affinities.

From these generic markers, knowledge is simultaneously included and excluded as the syllabus's political contours are articulated. This tension comes to a head where teaching and learning's mutual demands mirror the manifesto's rhetorical power: how do individual needs coincide with collective authority?

Consider Adam Heiderbrink-Bruno's concept of the syllabus as manifesto at [Hybrid Pedagogy](#). There, he asserts a concept of "Rights of the Learning Community" that declares its collective politics: anti-oppression, useful education, accessibility, and peaceful assembly. This statement of rights controverts what is typically required of a syllabus conceived in contractual terms--an authority mandating the scope and individual conditions of learning. It simultaneously makes space for what is collectively desired: mutual respect, direct input over learning, equity, and adaptability. Where the rights of the learning community are conceptualized as a collective project, the syllabus signifies something more than a

¹ Both Jacques Ranicere and Paolo Friere identify a logic of teaching and learning that they oppose in their respective texts, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The logic opposed is one where the teacher dictates to students who are subsequently expected to internalize the teacher's authority.

rhetorical gesture: the syllabus as manifesto is a persistent negotiation. The rights of the learning community are proven as the syllabus guides individual claims to its benefits at the same time that participation and consensus remain its goal.

To think the syllabus as manifesto in ideal terms is thus to begin to co-construct a radically democratic dialogue that recognizes its context as it also produces alternatives. The questions that follow transcend disciplinary divides. What liberatory futures we might imagine as knowledge is co-created? How might the syllabus as manifesto make this project participatory, especially in a fractured educational landscape?

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