

## Unconventional Learning

By Chad Rountree

I believe a just society, despite it not existing in America's history, is possible.

I believe a liberating education, despite how schools have evolved into implicating themselves in the reproduction of America's injustices, is possible.

I believe an inspired child, despite the vulnerabilities that characterize this stage of life, is possible.

I believe a thoroughly-analyzed past, despite the pain and agony that will be felt, is possible.

I believe a better tomorrow, despite the amount of work that is required, is possible.

For me to discuss my commitment to the pursuit of future learning, I must first deeply engage in what I believe to be possible so that I can fully commit to the processes of actualizing my beliefs. One of the most impactful conclusions that I have drawn from my experience in MSU's master's program is that learning will either serve technical or emancipatory interests. I intended to receive technical knowledge, or knowledge that equipped me with the ability to implement instrumental techniques, methods, and/or strategies, to meet the varying dynamics that exist in the educational landscape. However, along my journey I was also challenged to engage with emancipatory learning, or knowledge that is centered on liberating oneself from restraining institutional or environmental factors, which forced me to deeply reflect on how our nation's past has shaped our country's way of being. In the end, I have become an educator armed with technical skills to meet the challenges of leading in the urban community. But in doing so, I have also become liberated from the life that *is*, to envisioning a life that *could be*. Now, the question becomes, "am I willing to use my freedom to free someone else?" That level of obligation is what it will require to realize my beliefs, to reify my plan, and to epitomize my purpose as an educator.

As I continue moving forward as an urban educator, my success as a leader and my ability to assist with the liberation of others will strongly depend on my capacity to meaningfully engage with the students, families, and communities I serve. I feel the extent of the knowledge that I have gained from MSU will be limited and my ability to implement will become disingenuous if I fail to earnestly build solidarity between my school and its community, the educational processes and the context of my students' lives, and the educational outcomes and the work that is necessary to create equality and instill equity in our country. For Cornel West said it best - "You can't lead the people if you don't love the people. You can't save the people if you don't serve the people."

In order for me to continue developing the love that is required to lead my students and their families, I must continue showing a steadfast commitment to the elevation of their human condition. I must be equally dedicated to following as I am leading. I must continue to be transparent about my passions, so my work is not misinterpreted as mere dedication. I must act kindly and generously to the lives of the marginalized and be willing to leverage my own privileges to assist with the carrying of their burdens. Ultimately, if I intend to lead I must remain steadfast in building the trust that is necessary to facilitate love and enable the authentic empowerment of others.

In order for me to humbly serve the people I intend on saving from the hegemony of the status quo, I must prioritize their perspectives, feelings, and aspirations above the neo-political interests of our nation. I must speak less and listen more so that my actions are not misconstrued as doing something *to* somebody, as opposed to doing something *with* somebody. I must demonstrate an unwavering amount of faith and hope in their abilities

and potential to facilitate the collective movement that is necessary to instill a sense of humanity where society has deemed it absent. Ultimately, if I intend to save I must become more focused on the actualization of mine and their beliefs than the degree of humility that will be demonstrated along this quest, and in result, my servitude will challenge others to arise as leaders.

So while I do have intentions of pursuing additional formal education in the future, it will be my students, their families, and their community where I now must most immediately place my focus. So far, my formal education has given me the language to identify and the understanding to challenge the implications of our nation's past. So far, my personal experience has given me the courage to fight and the resiliency to persevere through the obstacles of today. But I am convinced it will be the deeper learning of my students, their families, and their community that will provide me with the perspectives to guide and the strength to endure the uncertainty of tomorrow.

So what *exactly* does the learning in my future look like? I am not certain. However, I am confident that the liberation that accompanied my formal education, coupled with the intimate shaping that accompanied my personal experiences, has in turn created an eager student who is willing to accept a seat in the classroom of my students' lives. And as unconventional as it may be, I anticipate their teaching, which exists in my future, to be the most impactful of all my learning so far.