

Sep 24, 2018 by Sharif El-Mekki

I often describe myself as an activist and a teacher. Why? Because I firmly believe that a quality education is a basic human right that has been historically and currently denied to so many students of color. And things I believe in require my staunch activism and deliberate action. It is why I view a part of my role as an educator is to create a school-to-activism pipeline. Because teaching our students about equity and justice must be an

activism and separating what they count as their personal success from that of the founding, we must accept that advocacy and activism are inseparable.

Any activist fighting for the housing, health, and education for the most marginalized in their community is also, naturally, advocating for the same. An activist cannot see how fighting for educational justice, for example, can be found in schools or adjacent to schools. They see the urgency at hand and are speaking about and doing the work, in close proximity of the students, to tilt the scales of justice toward children and communities.

And when advocates also see themselves as activists, they are closer to the problem than those who are comfortable just advocating. I can advocate without lifting a finger. I can advocate without truly understanding the depths of despair of those I am claiming solidarity with. I can advocate while I multi-task from the safety of my office sipping on a latte. Often, those with the most privilege take the farthest seat away from the work, eschewing acting big in partnership with those who work closest to the problem and to the people. I have often encountered academics, for instance, who count themselves as

problem, let alone the most effective solutions. Or, they claim advocacy, but you would not be able to tell from their personal choices.

There are too many complacent advocates who build walls between them and who they claim they advocate for. Without proximity to the issues, their advocacy can be ill-informed, tone deaf, and ineffective. It may even perpetuate the very injustice the advocate is claiming they are railing against.

For example, we have far too many advocates for integrated schools, yet their own children attend the most segregated schools. We have housing who choose to live in the most secluded or gentrified neighborhoods. People advocate against parents choosing schools for their children, but pull out all the privilege they can muster to ensure their own children attend the wealthiest or most exclusive schools available. There are too many complacent advocates who build walls between them and who they claim they advocate for. Without proximity to the issues, their advocacy can be ill-informed, tone deaf, and ineffective. It may even perpetuate the very injustice the advocate is claiming they are railing against.

At the root of advocacy must be **direct service to the people**. While an advocate may

