Senese, G. (2026). Remembering Jim Manley [Jim Manley'i Anımsamak]. *International Journal of Educational Policies*. *Vol.20* (1), pp. 55-63.

ISSN: 1307-3842

Remembering Jim Manley

Guy Senese*

Jim Manley was a teacher. He was also part of a movement, a generation following the uprisings of counter-cultural enlightenment and emancipation. A New Left, built on old ideals for a new era. His work and also that of his generation was as bell hooks would say, teaching "against the grain." That grain was the mechanistic grind of schooling which worked to reproduce the human exploitation, alienation, and conformity of regressive inhumane relations in capitalism unchained. He was also my brother, my best friend from a lifetime of great friends I have made as a teacher, and professor of Education Studies. He had so many people in his life and made room for all. He taught elementary school for thirty-five years, and for seventeen years, was Clinical Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Northern Arizona University. He came up the hard way and had been thrown out of his home by his father at age 16. He graduated high school, and as class president, while living in a tent just outside the ground of a high school in California. He was sweet but also very tough. He lived with scars, including the murder of his young sister. He was an "old hippie" self-described "tree hugger" and peacenik to the core. But

* Professor, Emeritus, Northern Arizona University. Email:guy.senese@live.com
The Turkish of the text was published in *Elestirel Pedagogy Dergisi*, No. 80, September, 2026, pp.67-72, with the titled "Dönüştürücü Bir Öğretmenin Ardından: Jim Manley'i Anımsamak".

I saw his temper the first week he arrived and had to stand between him and a much bigger new "progressive" leftist colleague who put down Jim's open methods.

Jim was helped by wise, courageous progressive leadership; humane administrators who led "against the grain." Sure, he had become famous: In 2000 He was honoured as *Arizona Teacher of the Year*, and his memorial service photos showed him standing in the White House, with President Bill Clinton. It showed newspaper articles of his now legendary work as transforming schools and kids with his "projects." It was rare and risky, especially in the conservative environment of Arizona, to hire a radical schoolteacher as a professor, and the political wind had shifted to the Right when he came to us. But Dr. Carolyne White, Northern Arizona University (NAU) Teaching and Learning Department Chair took that risk in 2001, three years after I came to Arizona from the Chicago area, Northern Illinois University. At NAU Jim Manley became a shooting star of energy, creativity, humour, and huge generosity.

There are so many stories. He drove a bright yellow VW "Bug." Forever. One day at school, it wouldn't start. The engine had "blown up." Bob Meko, another risk-taking enlightened school manager, first said it could be pulled into the maintenance shed. One thing led to another, and Jim's fifth grade class spent the entire school year on science and math lessons that he related to that "project." They rebuilt the engine, and as summer vacation began, they cheered as he drove it home. Just like his legacy with tens of thousands of students, and comrades in education, it is still running.

As a classroom teacher, he saw the dry science curriculum in his fifth-grade class and asked permission to take students fishing in the Salt River, in Phoenix, Arizona. He was a passionate environmentalist. From that visit, they did math, science, and environmental observations and recorded data weekly. At the time, the mania for standardization, and test scores began to take over. Critics called so many arts, science, and living democratic activities a waste of time. They wanted more drill and rote memory and worked to destroy so many such programs. Still Jim, and how many others persisted! Jim would argue to any education group, that such work helped kids do BETTER on state and national tests, if conducted properly. His kids at Mendoza Elementary always not only

passed but passed with strong grades. They were from middle and working-class families. His "projects," using the language of science, only reinforced reasons for kids to study. They were inspired and even celebrated as the project gained fame and exposure. The Arizona State Fish and Wildlife department actually used their data to record rise and fall of trout populations, trout health. Jim's legend grew. But he was now fighting new forces as neoliberalism stripped the meaning of human freedom from the word "liberal." The exploitation at the base of property and market "freedoms," began to blot out the sun of democratic schooling. He brought that fight to our College, working diplomatically, yes, but also without showing fear. Incidentally, his "clinical" position came without the protection of the security of the "tenure" he held as a public-school teacher. He was still young and losing his position would put this radical out on a conservative job market.

Last month at the memorial service for his life, two of those "trout fishing kids" now parents themselves, came up to speak. What do you think their stories were, and memories that brought their tears, and ours? Passing their standardized tests? Another man came up who had been Jim's fifth grader. Dave told how he'd been a loner, shunned by other kids. Jim saw he drew puppets in his notebook. It was from little Dave that Jim learned how puppets were magic to kids. He came to love Jim Henson's *Muppets*, and the crazy puppet Gonzo became his call word for freedom in teaching and learning. He called it Gonzo teaching. I knew this and liked sharing when I told him about the Turkish *Karagoz* puppet theater, lovely and a little daring, a little transgressive. As usual, he was fascinated. Like every teacher reading this, on the day you do something special for any student, that which the "wisest" parent would do, you simply do not know what the future will hold. Jim didn't know the future but just made a little puppet game for Dave one day to do a reading lesson built on that interest. Well, Dave became a master puppeteer and made his living in children's entertainment, and as a teacher. He flew all the way from New York to Phoenix for Jim's service.

Another newspaper item on display at the memorial showed the aviaries his students built, the math and planning of building, and maintenance, and experimental observations they made on birds and butterflies. They too were part of the reason Jim won

Teacher of the Year. When he came to our College of Education, he moved into the office next to mine. I began to understand how unique he was. He was, as Freire would describe himself, a "curious being." He seemed more excited than me when I won a Fulbright Fellowship to study and teach at Ankara University. He was most fascinated by all the detail, the complexity of Turkish education, during the times I worked and studied there. Any school, and school movement, anywhere, that promoted equality and the chance for a full life; that was Jim's interest. He really lived the famous lesson from *School and Society* where in 1916 John Dewey wrote:

> We are apt to look at the school from an individualistic standpoint, as something between teacher and pupil, or between teacher and parent. That which interests us most is naturally the progress made by the individual child of our acquaintance, his normal physical development, his advance in ability to read, write, and figure, his growth in the knowledge of geography and history, improvement in manners, habits of promptness, order, and industry -it is from such standards as these that we judge the work of the school. And rightly so. **Yet the range of the outlook needs to be enlarged. What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.**

Jim loved this ideal and used it often in his own teaching.

Before I travelled to Ankara on Fellowship, I had been interested in my mentor Richard Brosio's argument that scholars on the left were dead wrong about Dewey. They downplayed what they criticized as his "reformist" philosophy. Richard was that unusual Marxist who knew better than his opponents did, how Marx encouraged revolutionaries to participate in, and work for, reforms in the workplace, including union building and literacy efforts for workers, and that "democracy in education" was also the detailed daily grind of the "knowledge worker," whoever fits that title.

Before 2014 I had merely "known" that Dewey was in Turkey, and also Mexico and Russia, and did some consulting with new Ministers in the Turkish revolutionary government. During my fellowship at Ankara University, I read much more about the character of these revolutionary developments and the way education was an engine of transformation. I shared with Jim how the special movement of the *Village Institutes* also carried a transformative message of developmental democracy, through student action, work, the arts, and the deliberative, community **activity** which marks a living democracy.

Jim taught his science pedagogy students how language is used in science, that most exacting study. Words, vocabulary: the building blocks of consciousness. Language could be expressive, inclusive, democratic, or punishing, enslaving, regressive, exclusionary, elitist. Words could be revolutionary, little machines toward enlightenment, but only if introduced properly, carefully. Jim would introduce a hands-on biology lesson to a class at NAU and say first how it was an injustice to deny any child the thrill of excitement that comes from trying to solve a problem in science. But the language used had to be first, accessible. He would talk about how it was a "teacher's choice" to light a fire of skill-based curiosity in science and math lessons. But that this fire could warm them for a lifetime or burn down the fragile "house" of their freedom and confidence they were also building. Especially if concepts were too far beyond the really existing language base of students. They could be eased into study, and begin building their taste for knowledge, and start a "toolbox" for skills. Or they could go into the same study, using the same text, or curriculum, and if the words are too strange, too far from ordinary language, they will only learn to have shame, to become merely a blindly obedient servant, selfish and fearful, or maybe worse, bored, apathetic. They will only learn pride, the selfish honour of coming to school with a higher-class vocabulary than their peers. Or learn to hide, or act out, fearing the shame of failure forged by the unequal social relations outside the school and which ironically the democratic school is working to overcome!

He taught lessons to NAU teacher candidates at local primary school. It was the Mountain English/Spanish Academy, MESA, where Hispanic children could be taught in both languages at the MESA site. He decided to give these kids a chance to experience a

college environment, thinking it would build confidence and bring real kids to our faculty environment. The kids were bused on Friday to a row of our classrooms. I was not a teacher in pedagogy and methods, but it was easy to see that one principle was at work; one which fit my lessons. Dewey's idea of "developmental democracy," and education in all higher disciplines *through* the vocations and trades.

The MESA kids were mostly from families living in Flagstaff's Sunnyside neighbourhood. Jim was defiant and said that working class kids from any background should have access to the higher ideals of the mind. On those Fridays I don't recall him or his students using Paulo Friere's name, ever. But their English/Spanish language building lessons were a masterclass in using the meaning of words to explore both the fun and challenge of a new vocabulary, and how keywords had meaning for understanding power. Jim was everywhere on those days, running from classroom to classroom as different lessons were given. He wanted those kids to be familiar and proud that they could come to our campus and got administration to open a classroom on Fridays. I and others taught lessons and really had so much simple fun adapting college ideas to the kid's needs. I had fun teaching Plato's *Ring of Gyges* story, about doing the right, or wrong thing, if you were suddenly invisible. They thought it was "pretty cool" that my College Juniors had the same lesson that week.

In addition to the smaller classes like these "science Fridays" at NAU, he taught Education Foundations to Freshmen and sophomores. It was an Introduction to Teaching and had over two hundred students. Jim and Julie and my wife Jamie and I lived out in the country on the edge of the Navajo Nation, reservation land where it was not the custom to interfere with the lives of dogs. They lived mostly wild. When I first visited Ankara on my fellowship, the big Anatolian Sheepdogs everywhere made me feel right at home!

Jim kept "office hours" at a local restaurant and bar called Flag Brew. It was on Friday at 5. Anybody could join. They were real "free for alls." One student said, Mr. Manley. "With thirty-five kids we don't have time! How do you do it?" "How long does it take to push a seed into the ground? One second! That's 35 seconds!" I can't even order a drink in this place faster than that!"

As I write this, I'm remembering one night there after I had just come back from Ankara in 2015. Jim asked me to do a lesson for his big lecture class. Well, Jim could not pass up a group of those "rez" puppies that were alone on a road, abandoned. He would pick them up, put them in a box, and into the Bug and bring them to that big night class. I said that I would just teach a poem and ask them to think about how they might also teach it, but to children.

Well, Jim was a voracious reader of everything. I had discovered Orhan Veli Kanık and shared the great poem *Bedava*, that work which turns an important word, a teacher's word, inside-out. I shared my lesson with him over coffee, and we went to the lecture hall. For Jim it was a "teachable moment" and I'm not sure if Orhan Veli would approve. But I think likely, yes. The class broke into groups and discussed the poem, about our open democratic public education, and what it could do, what that freedom meant. When the end of the night came, Jim went behind the theater curtain in the hall, and came out with a box of squirming puppies, "Well, goodnight everyone. Have a great weekend!" I can see him now, in a tie-dyed shirt and blue jeans, with his big, sweet grin…

But before you go, you want to have a REALLY GREAT weekend? Take home a puppy. "They're FREE! Every puppy went home with somebody."

One time we both travelled to teach a group of Mexican-American teacher aides, who wanted to become teachers. It was near San Luis near the Mexico and California borders. They were children of poor migrant workers. I taught Education History, and Jim, the sciences and his square meter experiments down by the Colorado river. He started a week before me. On my first day Jim said I should stay in a special hotel. I booked the room in the Lee Hotel, to find out when I checked in it was on the list of most haunted hotels in the U.S. Well, secular man that I am, I could not sleep a wink! I swore I heard scratching and voices. I went to my first class exhausted. But also nervous, a new group with their unique culture and history. I said, good morning class, I'm Professor Guy Senese, etc. etc. Suddenly, as if on cue, they all said. "Buenas dias, professore, how did you sleep!" Then Jim burst through the door with a big coffee for me in hand, and we all had a big laugh. All ice completely broken, and the students happy and eager to go to

work. He too had stayed up all night, scratching around outside my room, probably laughing "into his shirt." It was a "hazing" but a great gift.

Jim was very sick at the end, with prostate cancer, and he was also sick over the way the big dreams of freedom were being damaged here, and education diminished, with teachers playing serious defense just to survive. Back then those MESA Latino kids were learning in two languages, going to class at a college. Today, their kin are despised those who would literally hunt such immigrants, and kids like that are afraid often, and parents hide them at home. The lessons on freedom, applied to the margins of our society, are being rubbed out, and teachers teach anyway, treading lightly. It is a "fugitive" education.

A few months ago, we talked. He was downhearted about his life's work. But we did agree, the buildings, the rooms are still there. Classes are on. Kids still march in with their backpacks. "We wanted to change the world, Guy." I remembered better days, he would bicycle to my house, storm in and hand me a cup of coffee at seven in the morning. My night classes finished late. I was still in bed. "Come on Guy, get up! let's go teach!"

We talked on the phone a few weeks before he passed. He was up in the mountains in Colorado. We even argued a little. Jim loved the ocean, and also Mexico. As sick as he was, he took that tough drive seven hundred miles through mountains, to the Sea of Cortez, and passed away one night near a beach he loved.

Yes, to change the world, Jim. I wonder now what is possible. The view is so narrow. I suppose we can ask, …what do all the children want? Kafka had once written that nobody wants more reforms than children. They still have to go into school.

Jim had a constant method he used and taught. It was "square meter" teaching. It was small. It might be a mild crate full of materials for experiments. It might be a square meter garden. One year he planted that square meter with students, but complaints came. The building manager tore it out. Jim, with his students, replanted it. He got a letter of reprimand. They did it again, the next night. He was required to attend a discipline session. I told him I'd write a letter that he could not have done it. I was with him all night. I might

have been some students. I told a little "noble lie." It worked; the manager figured the students wanted it so bad that she would keep it. She couldn't accuse them all!

Yes, it wasn't the whole world, and yes, it was. Maybe the world is in a square meter, for the moment.

Well, goodnight Jim. May the other stars love you as well as we did, … and all your children.

About the Author

Guy Senese is a Professor Emeritus in Social Foundations of Education at Northern Arizona University and Faculty Adjunct at Pima Community College where he teaches Critical Sociology. A native of Chicago, Dr. Senese drew inspiration from that city's labor history to help found and organize the growth of what is now a statewide union for university teachers and knowledge workers in Arizona. He taught History at Rough Rock High School on the Navajo Nation, studied History and Philosophy of Education at the University of Illinois and in 1991, led by mentor the late Richard Brosio, Dr. Senese did post-doctoral study in Critical Pedagogy, Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School. As guest of the faculty and students at the College of Education Sciences at Ankara University, he was 2014-15 Fulbright Teaching and Research Fellow. Along with several books in education policy, Dr. Senese is co-author of a critical history of American education, School and Society, now in its 8th edition. He has continued study in Turkish Education policy foundations and was 2018 Faculty Teaching Associate in the Foreign Language Teaching Department at Middle East Technical University. With Dr. Fatma Mızıkacı, Yasemin Cakcak-Tezgiden and Sharon Gorman, he co-edited The Language of Freedom and Teacher's Authority: Case Comparisons from Turkey and the US. Dr. Senese has spoken to audiences of Turkish scholars on Dewey's mixed legacy and impact on Turkish education, most recently in Spring of 2024, at Düzce University. He lives in Tucson, Arizona.

International Journal of Educational Policies
ISSN: 1307-3842
http://ijep.icpres.org
http://ojs.ijep.info