



Social Movements and Education: Global Perspectives

Course Description

Instructor: Rebecca Tarlu, Stanford University.

Updated Zoom registration: [HERE](#)

Social movements are among the most influential contemporary actors shaping societies, public policy, and individual consciousness. Beyond their political and social impact, social movements are also powerful educational spaces that transform participants' worldviews, generate new forms of knowledge, and develop innovative pedagogical practices within both formal and non-formal educational settings.

This short course examines the dynamic relationship between education and social movements across diverse global contexts. Drawing on historical and contemporary examples from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the United States, participants will explore how education has been used as a tool for social transformation, political mobilization, resistance, and community empowerment. The course also investigates how social movements themselves function as sites of learning and knowledge production.

Through case studies, critical readings, and interactive discussion, participants will gain a deeper understanding of the educational dimensions of social movements and their relevance for contemporary struggles for social justice, democracy, and human rights.

Course Details

Format: Two interactive online webinars

Session 1: 25 June 2026 | 15:30–17:00

Session 2: 22 July 2026 | 15:30–17:00

Maximum Participants: 15

Instructor: Rebecca Tarlau, Stanford University

Instructor Biography

Rebecca Tarlau is Associate Professor of Education at the Stanford Graduate School of Education. Her ethnographic research focuses on four interconnected areas:

- Theories of the state and state–society relations
- Social movements, popular education, labour education, and critical pedagogy •
Education and development in Latin America
- Teachers' unions, teacher activism, and educators' work

She is the author of *Occupying Schools, Occupying Land: How the Landless Workers Movement Transformed Brazilian Education and Strategies for Transformation: Unions, Schools, and Societies* (Oxford University Press, 2026), which examines teacher unions and teacher activism in Brazil, Mexico, and the United States.

Dr. Tarlau currently leads a multi-country comparative research project exploring the impact of sustainable agriculture education on agroecological knowledge and landscape transformation across Latin America.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- Analyse the relationship between education and social movement activism across different global contexts.
- Examine how social movements create alternative forms of learning, knowledge production, and political education.
- Understand the influence of critical pedagogical traditions, particularly the work of Paulo Freire.
- Compare educational strategies used in liberation struggles, democratic movements, Indigenous movements, and conservative social movements.
- Reflect on the role of education as both a site of social reproduction and social transformation.

Session 1: Education, Popular Pedagogy, and Social Transformation

Facilitator: Rebecca Tarlau

This session explores how education has been used to advance social transformation across Latin America. We begin by examining social movement-led educational campaigns in post revolutionary Mexico and socialist Cuba, highlighting efforts to expand literacy, political participation, and social inclusion.

Participants will then engage with the enduring influence of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and explore the role of Freirean popular education during revolutionary and civil war contexts in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

The session concludes with an examination of the educational initiatives of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Mexico, focusing on Indigenous autonomy, intercultural learning, and educational self-determination.

Key Themes

- Revolutionary education and literacy campaigns
- Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy
- Popular education and social transformation
- Education in contexts of conflict and revolution
- Indigenous education and autonomy

Session 2: Education and Social Movements in Comparative Perspective

This session broadens the discussion to examine social movements and educational practices across diverse international contexts.

Using the U.S. Civil Rights Movement as a case study, participants will explore how scholars have theorised social movements as educational spaces. Particular attention will be given to the contributions of activist educators such as Ella Baker and Myles Horton, as well as organisations including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

The session then turns to national liberation movements in Guinea-Bissau and India, examining the writings and educational visions of Amílcar Cabral and Mahatma Gandhi. Participants will compare their approaches to education, political mobilisation, and social change.

Finally, the course will explore the growing role of education within conservative social movements in the United States, Brazil, and other global contexts, encouraging participants to critically reflect on competing educational projects and ideological struggles.

Key Themes

- Education in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement
- Activist educators and movement learning
- National liberation and decolonial education
- Comparative perspectives on political education
- Conservative movements and educational politics

Recommended Readings

All readings are available through the course portal: [HERE](#)

1. *Education, Pedagogy and Social Movements in Latin America*
2. *Social Movements, Education and Knowledge-Making in the Global South*
3. *Give Light and the People Will Find a Way: Educational Movements and Social Change*

Who Should Attend?

This course is designed for:

- Civil society and social movement activists
- Anyone interested in the relationship between education, democracy, social justice, and collective action

The course offers participants a unique opportunity to engage with diverse social movements across regions and historical periods, while critically examining how education has been used as a tool for resistance, empowerment, and societal transformation.

