

# MOI NATURALE

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## *Problem With Charter Schools*

posted in [activism](#), [disabilities](#), [education](#) by [Evan Seymour](#)



In the fall of 2008, I decided I wanted to transition from journalism to education. While I was in a master's program studying broadcast journalism at the University of Southern California, I started volunteering at a local community center called the Jackie Robinson Community Center. Through this experience, I realized I was passionate about working with young people. I also realized that our young people in inner-city schools were being failed.

At the time, my ex-boyfriend was in his second year of law school at Tulane University, so I decided I wanted to do some research on opportunities for educators in New Orleans.

"You should take a look at KIPP," suggested my mother. She had seen a piece on KIPP on Oprah, and said she was thoroughly impressed with what she saw.

I watched the video, tears in my eyes before its conclusion. What I saw was a video full of passionate students and hard-working teachers who were focused on getting students who many folks had long ago given up on to and through college.

## The Brutal Truth

This is the truth when it comes to charter schools — they aren't working like society has been led to believe they are. There are a variety of problems with the country's charter schools, including these:

- a lack of oversight
- exploitation of teachers
- non-compliance with Federal Law as it pertains to students with disabilities
- fiscal irresponsibility
- hiring practices (see: inexperienced teachers, teachers who aren't interested in remaining in the classroom, teachers who do not at all represent the demographic make-up of the student population they serve)

## New Orleans and the Charter School Movement

One of the cities at the center of the current wave of educational reform is New Orleans. Historically, the schools in the Crescent City have been some of the worst in the nation. Reform was already in the works in the city, but when Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city in 2005, reformers saw a perfect opportunity to come in and completely gut the city's educational system.

I do believe that many of the folks who get into the educational reform movement do so with the best intentions in mind, but at this point, privatization is the name of the game. Doing what is in the best interest of children is not at the epicenter of educational reform.

## My Experience

As a journalist, and as an ethical individual, I would be remiss to neglect to mention that I am currently in the midst of a situation, shall I say, with KIPP New Orleans Schools.

In April of this year, I had a seizure episode, as those of you who have been reading Moi Naturale regularly already know. After the seizure episode, I went to a neurologist who ordered an MRI, and I then discovered there was abnormal scarring for someone of my age on my brain. So not only was I still recovering of the effects of my seizure, but I had to come face to face with the fact that I there was something abnormal about my brain. Great...

I reached out to KIPP New Orleans Schools, and at first, they were incredibly supportive. But that was just in the beginning.

During the summer, I reached out repeatedly to my school leader, requesting a meeting with him so I could discuss my future with the school. Time and again, I received his full voicemail box. Eventually, he got back to me via text message, making excuses about how busy he'd been, but promising to schedule a time

for us to sit down and meet. That meeting never happened.

On July 1, I received a text message from one of the higher ups at KIPP informing me that based upon a text message I'd sent to my boss, after almost a month of trying to get in touch with him, that they were going to start moving forward with "closeout procedures" on my employment with them. In his message, Mr. K said that they wanted me to return my KIPP cell phone and KIPP-issued computer before the 4th of July.

My head was spinning. I couldn't believe that the principal of the school would take such steps without reaching back out to me, especially since I was out on disability.

I reached out to Mr. K, and explained to him my concern with how the situation had been handled (including an announcement made to the entire staff about the fact that I would not be returning). He told me to reach out to the director of human relations for KIPP New Orleans Schools, someone who I had already called and emailed several times, to no avail. Later, I was told she had been on vacation. Must be nice to be able to go on vacation and not respond to emails or voice message for weeks at a time. I have never worked a job that afforded me such a luxury.

Well, soon after that came the news that my health insurance had been cancelled. Let me remind you, readers, that I still was out with an open disability claim, filed through MetLife.

So, now I find myself with no health insurance and a newly-diagnosed auto-immune disease. This is what happens when unions are demonized and folks are left to fend for themselves against major corporate entities like KIPP.

After reaching out to an attorney, I sent an email to the COO of KIPP New Orleans Schools, my principal, the director of human relations at KIPP, and Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, the founders of the schools that preach the motto "Work Hard. Be Nice." Not surprisingly, I never heard back from any of them.

For years, I have observed the inefficiencies of these charter schools, including KIPP, but not limited to KIPP, and I, as much as possible, turned a blind eye. Though it turned my stomach to do so. I have watched laws being broken, have worked at multiple schools that violated all sorts of laws (in regards to staff members and students), and I have had countless conversations with educators across the country about burn-out, broken laws, and broken spirits.

Waiting for Superman is the Disneyfied version of the charter school movement. It is the story of Pocahontas minus the massacre and colonialism.

A couple of months ago, I decided I was no longer going to be a silent observer of our nation's children getting left further and further behind. I started performing research (if you haven't read the work of **Dr. Diane Ravitch**, former Deputy Secretary of Education and a huge opponent of the charter school movement, I highly recommend it!)

This decision came prior to my health insurance being cancelled, and prior to many of the other amoral, illegal actions carried out by KIPP in regards to my personal situation. As a college-educated person with hustle out of this world, I know I can get another position. And eventually, I will get MetLife to continue paying on the policy I paid into (another story of injustice for another day). This has to do with my nagging moral compass, and my love of children.

As my mother could tell you, I have always wanted to make a difference in the world, and I have always loved children. That being said, I am tired of seeing these charter schools touted in mainstream media as some silver bullet to the educational woes of this country. If charter schools are so wonderful, then why are there charter schools that close every year? Why is it that the higher-ups in these organizations do not send their children to these very same charter schools? Why is it that you do not see these charter schools popping up in communities where there are already thriving, or even middle-of-the-road schools? The answer is simple — charter schools aren't the silver bullet. The folks who've founded the schools don't even believe in them. That's why they send their children to private schools, or buy properties in communities with tried-and-true successful public schools.

What Now?

I started Moi Naturale as a place where I could be authentic, and as a place where other folks could come to hopefully be inspired to live their best lives.

In an effort to keep it real, I will continue writing pieces about educational reform, facts and data included.

If you're a teacher, former teacher, or someone with strong thoughts and feelings about educational reform, please feel free to leave comments, or to reach out to me via email. As much as possible, I do respond personally to correspondences.

Have a Fab Friday, and an even better weekend, Moi Naturale Fam!

Xo,

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