

My Experience as a Student and Teacher at the Henry George School in New York

By Scott Baker / 23 March, 2024

I began as a student at the Henry George School in late 2006, a bit after I got laid off and needed a new direction in life. I found this in the teaching of Henry George. The school was a very different place then than it is today. At that time, there were no online classes, nor would there be for over a decade, well after Director Cay Hehner left, and the late Andy Mazzone ([https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/nytimes/name/andrew-mazzone-
obituary?id=20331130](https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/nytimes/name/andrew-mazzone-
obituary?id=20331130)) took over as president of the school from the late Dan Kryston (my wife and I attended his funeral. Andy's was a more private affair but I contributed to his obit page, linked above).

With Cay as the driving force, and Andy as the guiding force, the school was a buzzy happening place, with regular Friday dinners at 3030 restaurant, long extracurricular meetings with Cay and Andy and various committed students. The classes were also lively affairs, with active participation from 5-20 students from all kinds of backgrounds. Economics is the study of getting finite resources to people who have infinite needs and wants. That makes for stimulating discussions anywhere it's encouraged. The school was such a place. Certificates of class completion were given out at the end of every semester in a school-wide celebration ceremony, though I think this stopped with Kryston's death. They were regularly attended. Some students came over and over to the same class, absorbing both new knowledge and forging new personal connections. We thought we were privy to a theory of economics that could change the world, not in a cultish way, but in a way based on knowledge and even some successful real world implementations - never enough, which should have been a more cautionary tale, but some of us (like me) chose to ignore that, for a while. We had an economics book club for two years too, reading related material on money and the economy, like "The Lost Science of Money" written by the late Stephen Zarlenga, who was a guest teacher at the school for a few years. Zarlenga had also been commissioned by the Schalkenbach Foundation to analyze Henry George's views of money, which he did in an 80+ page academic paper.

Cay Hehner had put together a 3-year course curriculum to become a teacher. I completed all the courses, which I later found out from him almost no one else had done, even some of the teachers at the time, and took the teacher's test (attached). I taught a few classes, and had the foresight to record some of them when the internet and social media started exploding on the scene. I soon realized I could reach 1000s of more people from the videos of my lectures than from the 10-30 students who would show up for a class; in-person classes have all but disappeared now, since the school was sold (and had flooded) and then a new building bought, mostly unsuitable for classroom instruction. Prior to that, I had arranged a tour of the then-vacant classically architecturally styled Touro college building just down the block from the old school, on the corner. I invited Cay and Andy to a broker's tour and then wrote about it for Groundswell (scanned copy attached). Unfortunately, when I wrote about it, Dan Kryston, who was still president then, read the article and tried to have me expelled for being critical of

the school as it was and seeking to expand it and reunite it with the Schalkenbach Foundation in the larger (3X) building with tuition courses in addition to the free courses that were unaccredited. Cay Hehner saved me from that fate by basically convincing Kryston that I hadn't done anything wrong by simply having ambitions to "Grow the School, Save the World" - the title of the article. This is an example of how committed and enthusiastic the school's environment had made me, and others too; a number of fellow students thought the proposal to expand the school this way was a good idea. Some of them had joined me by then, in Common Ground-NYC, where I was the new president. Without Cay's intervention I would have been kicked out of the school and the chapter would have collapsed too, since the school was the main source of new members.

Andy and Cay were consistent members and contributors to the common ground chapter. After meeting early on in Rita Rowan's apartment - another teacher at the school whom I learned a lot from and have kept a relationship with still - the membership outgrew her living room and we started renting space for monthly meetings at a local YMCA. The membership grew to 24 but fractional disagreements ultimately doomed the chapter. Andy helped defuse tensions, but ultimately it was not enough. The school camaraderie was not enough to make a successful activist group, which requires a different skill set and thinking.

Even after the school moved again to another building, it was never the same. Andy and Cay were gone by then - Cay due to a stroke that forced him to move back to Germany to be with his sister, who was a doctor, and Andy, who died in 2017. The online classes are sometimes good, though these days I look for things I haven't already covered, with not a lot of homework either. Age, impatience for social change, and life-weariness, have all taken a toll on my idealism. The school also is not the center of learning it used to be, certainly not the New School type vision I had hoped it could become.

Relevant links below.

Best,

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"America is Not Broke!" Tayen Lane Publishing, 2015

Video/Radio/TV Appearances & Slideshows:

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