

## **Critical Education, Critical Pedagogies, Marxist Education in the United States**

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### **Abstract**

*As critical pedagogy becomes more mainstream on the educational landscape in the United States, it is important to revisit the original tenets of critical pedagogy and explore their current manifestations. Since the beginning of “criticalism” from the theoretical/foundational work of the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory, critical theory challenges traditional theory steeped in positivism and calls out for justice and liberation. This article traces the paths of critical education, critical pedagogies, and Marxist education in the United States by examining the tenets of critical pedagogy from a Marxist point of view while providing a historical context. In addition, this piece presents familiar challenges and critiques lodged against the practice of critical pedagogy in the United States. Examples of revolutionary/Marxist critical pedagogy-in-practice in various K-adult contexts are described and questions about vitality or the ability of critical pedagogy to endure in the face of intensified capitalism are also explored.*

**Keywords:** critical pedagogy, social consciousness, revolutionary critical pedagogy

### **Introduction**

After several decades of existing on the educational fringe, it is safe to say that critical pedagogy has entered the mainstream in the United States, with over 7,000 titles alone which address the topic offered on the major book retailer Amazon.com. Academic conferences such as the American Educational Research Association regularly feature hundreds of sessions related to critical pedagogy and there are special interest groups solely devoted to scholarship in the field. Critical pedagogy and its left-centrist derivative social justice is also applied to previously

untouched contexts, from teaching math (Gutstein, 2005; Leonard, 2007) to physical education (Fitzpatrick, 2012). Social justice has even been incorporated into business and sustainability degree programs, including the concept of servant leadership (Rego, Cunha, & Clegg, 2012). The graduate students that we encounter typically have at least some working familiarity with multiculturalism and critical pedagogy, usually having been exposed to Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux's writings at minimum.

Though encouraging to witness as an alternative to the exclusive focus on traditional educational theories such as behaviorism, the mainstreaming of critical pedagogy in the United States isn't without its problems, its practitioners' accommodation to capitalism chief among them. For example, even though there remain alarmist right wing detractors (Buchanan, 2006; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Huntington, 2007), multiculturalism on the whole has been easily absorbed by the corporate sector which sees an interest convergence in cracking down on workplace discrimination in order to preserve the bottom line. Put simply, bigotry is no longer profitable. Capitalism has also shifted gears by altering the methods of maintaining workplace culture, particularly in the higher-paying job sector. Instead of being subject to top-down management, employees are now 'associates' who work in 'teams' and engage in democratic decision making (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Elements of critical education have played a role in building worker consent in such settings.

What this means is that we cannot rely on mainstream notions of critical pedagogy alone to withstand the intensification of austerity that has been launched directly at the working class in the United States. Rather than serving as a means of resistance, schools are only aiding in this process by softening the blow, so to speak:

The educational left is finding itself without a revolutionary agenda for challenging in the classrooms of the nation the effects and consequences of the new capitalism. This situation is only exacerbated by the educational left's failure to challenge the two-party system that is organically linked to the exploitation of human labour and the well-being of corporate profits. Consequently, we are witnessing the progressive and unchecked merging of pedagogy to the productive processes within advanced capitalism. (McLaren, 2005, p.24).

For example, "corporate greed" is pointed to as the problem (Huffington, 2007; Rose, 2005; Sanders, 2011), not capitalism itself, as if there were a gentler version out there somewhere that we have somehow drifted away from. In a similar manner, critical pedagogy can be employed in attempts to reform a capitalist school system without directly challenging capitalism itself.

A Marxian reclamation of critical pedagogy is therefore essential in order to distinguish the dialectical from left-liberal and neoliberal discourses. For example, English and Mayo (2012) note that the field of adult education used to have more clearly articulated Marxist principles which have now been turned into market-oriented concepts like 'lifelong learning' as a way to impose austerity onto workers who now have to fund their own workplace re-training. The

ideology of lifelong learning has now placed people in the roles of consumer and producer, not active citizens. Even citizenship itself is transformed by capitalism into a rejection of collectivist solutions and an embracing of the lone wolf, or atomized citizen, who comes out of his/her burrow every four years to vote. Similarly, Malott (2013a) explains how this easily leads to a disabling form of pragmatism:

It therefore seems clear that even much of the educational left, especially in the United States, have conceded to the inevitability of capital thesis. Consequently, it is not uncommon to hear those on the left proclaim that, the Wal-Marts aren't going anywhere. They will always be here so we should put pressure on them to be socially and environmentally responsible. (p. xvi).

Against the tide of capitalism, Gramsci's (1971) conception of the intellectual is important here. Rather than being a representative of the ruling class or defending established hierarchies as is often presented in popular culture, the intellectual, as Gramsci views it is socially transformative and works to build connections between people for larger political purposes. Public intellectuals are *cultural workers* who are able to use their educational credentials to assist with legitimating struggles. In many respects, these intellectuals are attempting to defend what makes us human against the continual onslaught of capitalism:

Gramsci for his part saw a wide-ranging cultural activity within and across the entire complex of civil society, as a key element in his strategy for social transformation in western society, where a war of position, as opposed to a war of manoeuvre (frontal attack) was to be waged. (English & Mayo, 2012, p.49).

As an opening to this group authored chapter, a review of McLaren's (2005) ten characteristics of a revolutionary or Marxian critical pedagogy is helpful for the purposes of distinction from typical implementation. First, critical pedagogy is reflective and does not present itself as eternal, always existing, or disconnected from history. It rejects religious and idealistic notions of a permanent or natural human condition or 'human nature.' Second, critical pedagogy meets the local needs of people and considers the importance of social context while not walling off people into local or isolated groups, as is often done with postmodern identity politics. Third, critical pedagogy, while emphasizing the importance of the scientific method, is careful to not conflate biological with cultural and political practices that only serve to reinforce inequality in the name of objective rationalism. It therefore rejects notions of inherent differences between racial groups, ethnocentrism, and other ways that science has 'dressed up' oppressive practices.

Fourth, critical pedagogy attacks the notion of normative intelligence "and the ways in which 'reason' has been differently distributed so that it always advantages the capitalist class" (p.94). This makes practices such as standardized testing open to question. Fifth, critical pedagogy accounts for the move from industrial capitalism to its current, neoliberal global form. This creates challenges in communicating how the working class is still the working class even if the outward appearance of labour has changed. Sixth, rather than presenting itself as multicultural, critical pedagogy goes further and is openly anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, and anti-racist.

Seventh, critical pedagogy not only addresses questions of meeting human needs, but seeks to ensure human survival in the face of environmental destruction, even if this means challenging capital.

Eighth and ninth, critical pedagogy does not seek to work within the existing capitalist system, but openly advocates socialist democratic solutions in terms of distribution of existing resources. It rejects locating the source of global poverty in overpopulation and other racist memes and instead asserts that capitalism itself needs to move to the next economic and social phase of meeting all human needs, not just the needs of a few. Finally, critical pedagogy places its alliances with the oppressed, and isn't particularly interested in giving the oppressor 'equal time.' Standpoint epistemology (Wallace & Wolf, 2005), which not only respects but privileges the experiences of the working class, can be an essential component of communicating the tenets of critical pedagogy in a Marxian manner. This does not mean that all working class viewpoints are emancipatory, but it does mean that for a dialectical critical pedagogy the burden of proof of oppression is no longer on the oppressed, who have historically had to work overtime in order to demonstrate that their grievances have merit. Instead, the oppressor should be compelled to demonstrate that oppression does NOT exist.

This chapter opens with Panayota's overview of the history of critical pedagogy and cultural studies in the United States, along with key tenets of each. Next, important challenges for and critiques of critical pedagogy are presented by Jean Ann, including from the field of postmodernism. Though not tied to formally organized schools or programs, some individual examples of revolutionary/Marxist critical pedagogy-in-practice in various K-adult contexts are described by Faith. Finally, questions about vitality or the ability of critical pedagogy to endure in the face of intensified capitalism are posed by Doug.

### **Conceptualizing Critical Pedagogy in the U.S.: History & Key Tenets**

The historical foundation of "Criticalism" begins with the theoretical/foundational work of the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory. Specifically, it is the work of Horkheimer (1975) that lays a clear distinction to what we mean when we say critical theory; that is, a theory in opposition to *traditional theory*: "The traditional idea of theory is based on scientific activity... It corresponds to the activity of a scholar which takes place alongside other activities of a society but with no immediately clear connection with them [society's activities]" (Horkheimer, 2012, p. 428). What traditional theory lacks is a clear connection to the subjectivity of individuals and society, and is predicated on the notion of *positivism* in the sciences: "Anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion; modern positivism consigns it [critical theory and subjectivity] to poetry" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 4). Accordingly, critical theory seeks to take up the subjectivity of individuals and their experiences in a world complicated by capital, reproduction, and irrationality that cannot be wholly represented in numbers or pure logic. In short, critical theory/pedagogy questions the value-laden curriculum of

everyday life (e.g., Apple, 2004), the power structures that manipulate rationality and truth (Foucault, 1984; Giroux, 2007) and how subjectivity becomes a political ontology (Foucault, 1984; Giroux, 2007; McLaren, 2005).

From this starting point we can begin to examine how and why critical theory became the foundation for a ‘radical pedagogy,’ as Giroux (1983b) called it, in the US in the 70s. In conceptualizing critical pedagogy, as it emerged in the US, we must first acknowledge the role that social reconstructionism and progressivism played in its development. Both social reconstructionism and progressivism sought to address social questions and form a better world and society, especially in the context of democratic interventions (e.g., Dewey, 2004; Counts, 1978; see also Stanley, 1992). *In Theory and Resistance in Education*, Henry Giroux (1983a) asserts, “The traditionalists have failed because they refuse to make problematic the relations among schools, the larger society, and issues of power, domination, and liberation” (p.4). It was the goal, then, of critical pedagogy to make problematic these relations within a paradigmatic school of thought. This school of thought was cultivated primarily by US scholars Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, Peter McLaren, who initially draw among other things, from the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire from Brazil (Rikowski, 2007).

### **The History of Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogy**

Culture is more than ideology. Looking at the professed goals of Western civilization and at the claims of their realization, we should define culture as a process of humanization, characterized by the collective effort to protect human life, to pacify the struggle for existence by keeping it within manageable bounds, to stabilize a productive organization of society, to develop the intellectual faculties of man, to reduce and sublimate aggressions, violence, and misery. (Marcuse, 2007, p. 14-15)

The 1970s was a particularly vibrant and difficult era in the US (as well as the rest of the world). The 60s were filled with racial segregation and then integration, the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, the Brown Berets, the Black Panthers, and for Black America the subsequent (i.e. post-civil rights) era became known as the post-soul era to many (and in the 80s the new H.N.I.C. of “head nigga in charge” (see Boyd, 2004) era would come to be in the form of gangsta rap, black on black crime, and, as Cornel West (2001) describes, black nihilism). The 70s also saw the work of a new field named cultural studies (Barker, 2011) call forth a critical lens that incorporated post-colonial theory, youth studies, ethnic studies, queer studies, which was all undergirded by a Marxist framework/orientation (e.g. Hall & du Gay, 2005; Grossberg, 2010; Jameson, 1991). The phenomenon was not isolated to the U.S.; in fact, Europe was a critical part of introducing cultural studies with the Birmingham school (see Grossberg, 1997), the study of subcultures (Hebdige, 2013), and the working class (e.g., Willis, 1977).

While critical pedagogy has not been taken up as a serious mainstream project for educational reform, it has nonetheless spawned a great body of literature and projects under various critical

titles like critical race theory (Delgado & Sefancic, 2010; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009), critical media literacy (Ott & Mack, 2013), critical literacy (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993), critical social studies (Hursh & Ross, 2000), critical urban studies (Davies, 2010; Brenner, Marcuse, & Mayer, 2011), critical youth studies (Best, 2007), and critical curriculum studies (Au, 2012; Ylimaki, 2011) to name only a few. In accordance with such breadth and depth, the field continues to evolve taking up new projects, theoretical motifs, and re-evaluations of previous theses (e.g., Stanley, 1992; Kanpol, 1994; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2008; Fishman, McLaren, Sunker & Lankshear, 2004; Robbins, 2009; Rossatto, Allen, & Pruyn, 2006; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Gounari & Grollios, 2010).

### **Key Tenets of Critical Pedagogy**

Despite the diverse array of scholars and projects, critical pedagogues do share particular philosophical tenets that guide their work.

#### Democracy and Education

Undoubtedly, in developing the disciplinary borders of the field of Critical Pedagogy, Progressive Education has had an important impact, particularly through the seminal work of its major representative and legendary educational figure of the 20th century, John Dewey. The historical conjuncture in which Dewey materializes his pedagogical experiment at Chicago (1896-1904) has been a notable period for the United States in many respects. Thirty years after the end of the Civil War, huge waves of immigrants, the formation of the working class movement and hard social conflicts had given shape to the conditions for a new political settlement to appear. American leaders responded to the economic depression of 1893 and the subsequent social unrest by focusing their efforts on formulating ideas that would account for the crisis and provide practical solutions. The emergence of Dewey's pedagogy can be understood as a response to the crisis of the 1890s with a process of broad social and political reform that would be sealed by the expansion of democracy and scientific experimentation. Dewey proposed that education would be the key for the creation of a new kind of liberal democracy, that is, a democracy that would provide the possibility to materialize the belief that people can actually change. The goal of his pedagogy was the social and political reform that held as its ideal a society of economic stability and welfare, where sociopolitical conflicts would have no place; in other words, an organic society. Students would have to adapt to the existing social functions but also to learn to actively participate in the social and political reform.

According to Dewey, humanism as a fundamental component of democracy must characterize science, art, education, ethics and economy. The development of democracy does not simply require more education but also a wide use of scientific methods. Democracy corresponds to a society where people can participate in its formation, where individual freedom blossoms and

where there is harmonious coexistence among people. The role of education is crucial for the creation of such a democracy (Macpherson, 1994, Aronowitz, 2008). Dewey specifies the purposes of education: through adult transmission and communication, assisting the young to direct their own lives. Consistent with a liberal democratic society, he exhorts educators to organize a new school that provides the necessary discipline, array of learning, and methods by which learning that reforms the existing social order may occur (Dewey 1980). CP has been influenced mainly by Dewey's approach to the relationship between democracy and education. Critical pedagogues, like Dewey, claim that the role of education is crucial for the development of a real democracy and vice versa but they criticized his lack of analysis concerning the role that education plays in modern societies (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986).

Beyond Dewey's impact, Critical Pedagogy has been deeply influenced by the philosophical perspective of Social Reconstruction that emerged in the 1930s also in the United States. The 1930s were scarred by the tragic consequences of the economic crisis and the attempts at overcoming the Great Depression that constituted the ground for the deepening of social conflicts. The goal of Social Reconstruction pedagogues was a reform that would be rooted in the basic principles of the American democratic tradition in order to overcome the economic and social crisis. Schools would need to contribute to the production of a new culture, and curriculum would have to address all facets of modern society with an emphasis in solving social problems (Grollios, 2011).

### The Role of Teachers as transformative intellectuals and Classroom Practices

Social Reconstruction is articulated in the work of George Counts. Subjecting to harsh critique the so-called "child-centered" school, which he accused of being founded on extreme individualism, Counts shifted the attention to the development of an organic relationship with the community, a realistic theory for social well-being and a new vision of social reform that should be founded on democracy. A democracy that fights privileges and economic parasitism, rewards all socially useful work, promotes real equality in opportunities, and cares for improving everyday people's lives. Towards that direction, the role of teachers is crucial. If teachers strengthen their reserves in courage and intellectual power, they can shape curricula and school processes, influencing the ideals and attitudes of the next generation (Counts, 1978).

Critical Pedagogy proposes a similar role for teachers suggesting that they should act as transformative intellectuals. This means that teachers must struggle for social transformation inspired by the goals of democracy, freedom and justice. Moreover, they have the task to be consistent with this struggle by implementing educational practices that seek to shape their students as active citizens. These practices resonate with the work of Harold Rugg, an equally important scholar in the social reconstruction tradition. Rugg proposed that teachers can achieve important results weaving through events, movements, conditions, principles and social, economic and political rules that are interrelated, reinforcing students' independent thinking. He

posited that the curricular content that is built around social problems possesses the potential for abolishing passivity that characterizes school classrooms (Kliebard, 1995; 2002).

Along the same lines, Critical Pedagogy stresses the task for teachers to develop very specific classroom processes designed to promote values and beliefs which encourage democratic, critical modes of teacher-student participation and interaction stripped of egoistic individualism. These values and processes include developing in students a respect for moral commitment and social responsibility. In addition, a non-authoritarian individualism should be fostered, one that maintains a balance with group cooperation and social awareness. Students must be aware of the necessity of making choices of their own, and to act on those choices with an understanding of situational constraints. Another important change in the classroom centres around giving students the opportunity to serve an apprenticeship in teaching. Students, by establishing a close working relationship with teachers and peers, are given the chance to understand that behind any pedagogy are values, beliefs and assumptions informed by a particular view of education. In addition, students should have the right to study alone or in groups at a comfortable learning pace so as to be able to develop an effective learning style having a measure of control over their work and moving beyond the fragmented pedagogies that are established under the tyranny of a rigid time schedule. With the use of peers and modified self-pacing the one-dimensionality of traditional classroom gives way to the possibility of richer classroom social encounters (Giroux & Penna, 1988). In the context of Critical Pedagogy theory teachers are not perceived as objective transmitters of knowledge but rather as consciously acting human beings. They exist in a dialectic relationship with their students, and knowledge and meanings are constantly negotiated and debated upon. The learning process is bidirectional. It is important for teachers to be aware not only of their power in the classroom but also on how they negotiate this power. Teachers would have to develop forms of knowledge and classroom social practices that validate the experiences that students bring to schools. This means confirming such experiences so as to give students an active voice in institutional settings that traditionally attempt to silence them by ignoring their cultural capital. This demands acknowledging the language forms, style of presentation, dispositions, forms of reasoning, and cultural forms that give meaning to student experiences. In other words, the cultural capital of students must be related to the curricula teachers develop or mediate, to the questions raised in classes, and to the problems that are posed in such settings.

### Critical Pedagogy and the Reproductive Role of Schools

It is important to note that the core theory of Critical Pedagogy also built on and drew from a critique of the Sociology of Education of the late 1970s and 1980s that sought to understand how schools constituted subjectivities and produced meaning, as well as how they were linked to issues of power and control. Most notably, Critical Pedagogy capitalized on social reproduction theories, according to which schools use their material and ideological resources to reproduce the social relations and attitudes needed to sustain the social divisions of labour necessary for the



existing capitalist relations of production. Bowles and Gintis (1976) posited that schools essentially serve two functions: first, the reproduction of the labour power; and second, the reproduction of those forms of consciousness, dispositions and values necessary for the maintenance of the existing social order. According to their “correspondence principle,” hierarchically structured patterns of values, norms, and skills that characterize the workforce are mirrored in the social dynamics of the daily classroom encounter. Critical Pedagogy pointed out that this correspondence principle leads to a one-sided economic approach for education. In reverse, we have to think relationally, to think of school knowledge as a product of conflicts and negotiations between different social groups in education and outside education. These conflicts put limits to any cultural actions and reactions but they do not determine them mechanistically. Also, Critical Pedagogy pointed that curricula are not mere products of economic forces (Apple, 1979).

Where social reproduction theories ended, those of cultural reproduction emerged to fill some theoretical spaces and raise different kinds of questions. Pierre Bourdieu, a major theorist in this tradition, attempted to develop a sociology of curriculum that links culture, class and domination with schooling, knowledge and biography. In contrast with social reproduction theories, in his view schools are relatively autonomous institutions only indirectly influenced by more powerful economic and political institutions. Bourdieu considers traits of individual’s everyday way of life that make up what he terms “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital results from a person’s long lasting engagement in and with family, culture, education, as well as neighbourhoods, peers and so forth. The school affirms, rewards, and legitimates the cultural capital that, by and large, resonates with dominant values and is further transmitted and exhibited by the teacher to the students. Accordingly, when the school devalues the cultural capital of disadvantaged students, it reproduces the unequal relations in the form of educational inequalities.

### Critical Pedagogy and the Role of Culture

Critical Pedagogy theory notes that cultural reproduction theories provide us with a set of valuable insights that refer to the construction and function of curriculum underlying those interests that stand behind the selection and distribution of knowledge in schools. These bodies of knowledge usually devalue and marginalize other kinds of knowledge that are valuable for students coming from non privileged social groups. However, theories of cultural reproduction have their own faults. The most obvious refer to their mechanistic views of power, domination and culture as well as their restricted view of agency. Culture is constituted as a dialectical instance of power and conflict, rooted in the struggle over both material conditions and the form and content of practical activity (Giroux, 1983a, 1987). Culture incorporates social and institutional practices, cultural and social significations, cultural and educational capital, language, and forms of knowledge, among other. In the terrain of culture, people understand who they are as agents, they name the world. For Critical Pedagogy, culture is seen as a site of

contestation and at the same time, as an act of intervention. In this context, schooling represents an introduction to, preparation for, and legitimation of particular forms of social life (McLaren, 2007).

In the integration of “culture” as an important theoretical concept in Critical Pedagogy theory the role of Paulo Freire was instrumental. As mentioned earlier, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire was the central figure in the theoretical constitution of critical pedagogy. He became known worldwide in the early 1960s thanks to the implementation of a new pedagogical approach for literacy in Brazil that enabled 300 illiterate peasants to write and read in 45 days (Brown, 1987). After spending sixteen years in exile because of the military dictatorship in his country, Paulo Freire returned to Brazil and became Secretary of Education in the municipality of Sao Paulo (1989-1992) where he implemented a pioneering program of school reform (O’ Cadiz et al, 1998). Freire was in favour of an education that would contribute to finding solutions to the problems of Brazilian people. However, these solutions were not supposed to be imposed upon the people or discovered *for* them; they were to be discovered *with* the people. He proposed an education that would enable people to reflect upon themselves, their responsibilities, and their role in the new cultural climate, but mostly to reflect on or realize their own power of reflection. Such an education would help people to adopt an inquisitive attitude toward their problems, thus contributing to the establishment and operation of an authentic democracy. The emergence and construction of Freire’s educational perspective is connected with Brazil’s social and political crisis at the beginning of 1960s. People’s radicalization in Brazil was due to the deepening of social problems and the fact that the political leadership was not solving them. One of the basic elements of people’s radicalization was the emergence of literacy as an issue of primary political importance. Freire’s focus on people’s active participation was founded on his faith in humanization, which portrayed people as creators of history and culture (Grollios, 2009).

A crucial element in Freire’s pedagogy is the investigation of the students’ thematic universe that refers to the thinking/language they use in order to access reality. Examining the thematic universe not only widens the students’ thinking but also their practice/action. Investigation of the thematic universe is a necessary precondition in order to overcome the banking model of education that is based on the assumption that the teacher possesses knowledge and students are empty vessels that s/he needs to fill. These generative themes are conceived as ‘the building blocks for the construction of a locally relevant curriculum’ (O’Cadiz et al., 1998, p. 85). However, the investigation of the thematic universe and grounding on “generative themes” that constitute it, does not result in marginalizing older and contemporary cultural and scientific achievements. Freire’s goal is the epistemological understanding of reality that goes beyond a simplistic comprehension since he considers it a mistake to connect democratic teaching with low academic expectations and authoritarian teaching with high expectations (Shor & Freire, 1987; Freire & Faundez, 1992).

Critical Pedagogy gives a great emphasis on Freire's concept of "cultural power" that starts at the social and historical particular circumstances, problems, perspectives, and actions that constitute a form of expression. The concept of cultural power focuses on two issues. First, the need for teachers to make students' experiences an object of discussion and legitimize them with the goal of creating the conditions for active expression. Second, the need for teachers to contribute to the critical process of experiences with the goal of revealing their strengths and weaknesses. Freire's pedagogy is based on the students' cultural capital and capitalizes on analytical tools in a critical way in order to examine it (Giroux, 1985). Schools play a crucial role in political and cultural life. Schools are not neutral institutions that transmit useful knowledge. They instead produce and reproduce particular knowledges and therefore, specific kinds of experiences, values, beliefs, cultural capital and social relations.

Critical Pedagogy is situated at the antipode of traditional education and its supporting theories that are built around narrow concerns of behavioural objectives, and principles of learning that treat knowledge as something neutral to be consumed and schools as merely instructional sites designated to pass onto students a set of skills that will enable them to operate effectively in the wider society (Giroux 1988; McLaren 2007). According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) knowledge becomes important not simply because it is legitimized by curriculum experts, but rather to the degree that it helps human beings understand not only the assumptions embedded in its form and content, but also the processes whereby knowledge is produced, appropriated and transformed within specific social and historical settings. Critical Pedagogy claims that schools should teach a discourse of inquiry and analysis and they should encourage students to explore the translation tools necessary for their developing agency that can be broadly understood as the negotiation between constraints and possibilities with the aim to act upon one's personal and social conditions. It assumes that the subjects of the educational process are free-thinking, independent human beings who should be able to make educated choices regarding knowledge and learning.

### **Critical Pedagogy- Key Challenges and Critiques**

This section presents familiar challenges and critiques lodged against the practice of critical pedagogy in the United States. While these critiques are not Marxian in origin, it is important to examine these lines of thought to better respond to common concerns raised about critical pedagogy. Kanpol (2009) organizes critiques of critical pedagogy into three central themes: a) The right of critical pedagogues to speak for the oppressed; b) the opaque language used by critical pedagogues; and c) a lack of practical tools for implementing social change. These themes resonate throughout three critical pedagogy tenets explained in the previous section: a) Democracy in Education, b) The Role of Teachers as Transformative Intellectuals and Classroom Practices, c) Critical Pedagogy and the Reproductive Role of Schools, and d) Critical Pedagogy and the Role of Culture.

A majority of critical pedagogues are situated in university settings and are composed of predominantly white middle class male educators and theorists. For some, this privileged group does not represent a credible population for critiquing injustices in society. Critics assert that those who come from a homogenous middle-class background who have never had to struggle against injustices are ill equipped to provide an authentic voice for social justice. In addition, the tenets of critical pedagogy are frequently criticized to be excessively theoretical and thereby best suited for intellectual pursuits rather than social action to interrupt inequities.

Feminist scholars (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1990; Kenway & Modra, 1989; Lather, 1991; Lewis, 1990) were among the first to take critical pedagogy to task for its exclusivity as well as for its opaque language. A central theme for their critique is that critical pedagogy is driven by a male perspective and technical view of knowledge that is exclusionary to diverse cultures and gender. Ellsworth (1989) critiques the discourse of critical pedagogy as being repressive. Her major argument discussed in an article on implementing critical pedagogy in her university classroom was, “to the extent that our efforts to put discourses of critical pedagogy into practice led us to reproduce relations of domination in our classroom, these discourses were “working through” us in repressive ways, and had themselves become vehicles of repression” (p. 301). This critique of critical pedagogy as a device for oppression is especially harsh and ironic due to the discourses of emancipation and transformation found in critical pedagogy.

Classroom teachers in K-12 settings also voice concerns about the language and intentions of critical pedagogy. However, many of their concerns relate to the dangers associated with indoctrinating students. While teachers may be supporters of critical thinking skills in the classroom, they are sceptical of critical pedagogy. Critical thinking is more concerned with the procedures and skills associated with disciplined inquiry and logic, while critical pedagogy places a focus on social inequities around power structures (Burbules & Berk, 1999). The idea of thinking critically for the purpose of transforming inequities is sometimes seen as indoctrination with a goal in mind. For many teachers creating curricula that teach students how to analyse and think clearly about a problem is to be commended. This procedural instruction maintains the idea that education is neutral. However, once the teacher engages in a critical pedagogy that emphasizes change and collective action towards transforming inequities, the teacher may be accused of indoctrinating her students.

A blog called *Teacher Commons: A Place for Teachers to Share* (April, 2008) features an example of teachers discussing the use and role of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Some of the points discussed claim that critical pedagogy: 1) Ignores the virtues of the dominant culture, 2) Indoctrinates students, 3) Is Limited in Scope, and 4) Is Hypocritical. The comments centre on a critique that critical pedagogy is biased due to its belief that education is not neutral. The teacher voices represented on this blog were also disconcerted that critical pedagogy did not offer practical techniques for implementation. This represents a common line of critique that

critical pedagogy, much like Marxism itself, isn't "doable" or "practical," points with which the authors in this chapter strongly disagree.

A lack of practical tools for implementing social change is a repeated critique of critical pedagogy. For example, Knight and Pearl (2000) assert, "Critical pedagogy fails in offering concrete suggestions on how to implement its values. It has little practical use, but focuses on theorizing; deconstruction with no reconstruction" (p. 197). They continue in their critique with the objection that critical pedagogy fails to offer concrete methods for implementing the values it embraces:

Advocates of critical pedagogy claim to support democratic education. We find power in their analysis. They reveal the pervasive, deep-seated antidemocratic nature of schooling; however, a seeming unending rediscovery of this condition loses importance over time. Protagonists of critical pedagogy, while penetrating critics, have little to say about remedy. (p. 197).

Edwards (2010) suggests, in response to Knight and Pearl's (2000) critique, that critical pedagogy does propose an alternative to the current curriculum policy: "Critical pedagogy urges that we use the problem-posing method to confront issues of social justice, subsequently co-constructing the curriculum by teachers and students" (p. 228). Critical pedagogy practitioners use questioning as a method for problem posing where the students name and co-investigate issues that come from their lives. The tenets and values of both reflect commitment to participation, equity, collaboration, and questioning the dominant. Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2007) elaborate on the connections between critical pedagogy and democratic education as:

an approach to education that is rooted in the experiences of marginalized peoples; that is centered in a critique of structural, economic, and racial oppression; that is focused on dialogue instead of a one-way transmission of knowledge; and that is structured to empower individuals and collectives as agents of social change. (p. 183).

From a critical pedagogy point of view, dialogue is a primary characteristic for collaboration that supports liberatory pedagogy. Students and teachers share common ground. Dialogue represents a horizontal medium of communication where each party is considered equal (Freire, 1970). As O'Donnell (2004) maintains, "The teacher's authority is exercised in the teacher's ability to discuss and dialogue and not based on the positional authority of the teacher's power to compel or manipulate" (p. 59). The emphasis is placed on naming the problem in a collaborative manner. This type of dialogue is in opposition to a vertical communication, top down interaction, whereby communiqués are transmitted. Freire (1970) calls this vertical communication anti-dialogue. Major goals of critical pedagogy and democratic education are student empowerment and active participation.

For the critical pedagogue, reflection without action is meaningless just as is action without reflection. Freire (1970) uses the term *praxis* to describe the process of reflection and action to facilitate transformative understanding towards liberation. Freire's definition is more complex

than a union of theory and practice, in that theoretical understanding generates emancipatory action. Arguing that education should be liberatory and liberation an act of praxis, Freire explains:

We must not negate practice for the sake of theory. To do so would reduce theory to a pure verbalism or intellectualism. By the same token, to negate theory for the sake of practice, as in the use of dialogue as conversation, is to run the risk of losing oneself in the disconnectedness of practice. It is for this reason that I never advocate either a theoretic elitism or a practice ungrounded in theory, but the unity between theory and practice. (p. 19).

Goldstein and Beutel (2007) also make the connection of theory to action in the following:

It is through cooperative and reflective teaching and learning that students and teachers alike are able to evolve beyond the classroom and into the world. Critical educators engage students, providing them with an opportunity to transcend textbooks and ditto-sheets, enabling them to think differently and more democratically, not simply for the sake of doing it, but so that it becomes a state of being in action. (p. 5).

Kanpol (2009) comments on the reasoning behind the lack of procedures in critical pedagogy with, “one cannot give the “ten” steps for a critical pedagogy, especially if critical pedagogy differs in different arenas” (p. 1). The issues and actions required for societal transformation are unique and cannot be prescribed.

In some critiques, there is a venomous demonization of critical pedagogy. An example from Knight and Pearl (2000) follows:

(We) criticize critical pedagogy for the absence of a coherent and testable theory, its lack of understanding of democracy, and its inapplicability to the reality of classroom experience. Critical pedagogy in many ways is the mirror image of the right-wing hostile takeover of schooling. Both are remote from classroom reality, and neither knows what it is talking about. (p. 198).

An example of controversy around critical pedagogy in teacher preparation programs comes from a midwestern state college within a college of education (Foley, 2013). This case study describes an occurrence where teacher educators made curricular decisions to use tenets from critical pedagogy to guide their teaching methods in a teacher preparation program for secondary teachers. There was a hailstorm of resistance and relational disruption among colleagues in the college of education as well as across campus from colleagues in the disciplines of English, science, physical education and art. The dispute centered on a perception of conflict between the tenets of critical pedagogy and the standards associated with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Therefore, practicing critical pedagogy in the K-12 setting as well as at the university level can be risky. Calling into question traditional methods of teaching and empowering students to co-

create curriculum that engages their minds and passions is threatening to institutions embedded in maintaining the status quo. Self-critique is a major component of critical pedagogy and is practiced by lesser and greater degrees in classroom settings as well as theoretical scholarship.

### **Critical Pedagogy: As Practiced in K-Adult Settings**

While the United States has a long history of leftist or progressive open educational movements such as the Highlander Folk School (Adams, 1975) and 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century utopian communities advocating shared ownership of property (Hicks, 2001; Holloway, 1966), none have been openly Marxist in terms of formal institutional orientation. Instead, it is typically up to the individual educators in these or regular public schools or those who join academic groups and present in conferences to advance a Marxist vision both in their scholarship and within the classroom. In some cases, universities can have interdisciplinary programs with a social justice or other liberal left emphasis where critical pedagogical approaches are more welcomed than in the general curriculum. Those who do identify themselves as Marxist educators share an important worldview: “These class-conscious educators, quite simply, are aware that they are part of the working class, which is why they depend on a wage to survive, that is, because they do not own the means of production and the private property it represents” (Malott, 2013b, p.123).

There are several challenges to maintaining a dedication to critical pedagogy, whether one teaches in K-12 or postsecondary educational settings. A major challenge is isolation. Even if one is able to work within a program that shares one’s values, that program is often philosophically and sometimes physically separated from the rest of the school or university. Boucher’s (2010) research focused on state supported universities that had interdisciplinary social justice programs and found that the success of a SJP had to do mostly with having a critical mass of faculty who were committed to the program’s formation- just having an idea wasn’t sufficient to get a program underway. Having administrators on board was essential, especially for securing funding. Participants in the study noted that they each felt isolated from the rest of the university because of the struggle of getting other colleagues to understand the purpose and mission of the SJP, along with continual fundraising and enrolment concerns. Boucher also found that interdisciplinary minors or certification programs are difficult to staff and maintain because of the disciplinary boundaries, teaching loads for full time faculty, and the propensity to hire adjuncts, which contributes to the instability of many SJPs. Additionally, if administrative changes occurred, the future of an SJP could be in danger.

Yet even among individual teachers who advocate for social justice and critical pedagogy, few go further, as McLaren (2005) explains:

In the United States, critical pedagogy has collapsed into left liberal attempts by progressive educators to remediate the educational enterprise...and for all the sincere attempts to create a social justice agenda by attacking asymmetries of power and privilege and dominant power

relations in US society, progressive teachers have, unwittingly, operated under the assumption that these changes can be accomplished within the existing social universe of capital. (p.36).

Malott (2013b) notes that social justice and critical thinking are generally tolerated by educational institutions (and may even be featured in mission statements), so long as teachers don't go further and speak about *economics*. Within K-12 settings, the taboo is greater against educators questioning capitalism. Also contributing to this overall dilution of critical pedagogy is the removal of foundations courses from undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs, to be replaced by methods courses (Aaronson & Anderson, 2013; Elmore, 2013). This de-skilling is done under the pretence of increased state and accreditation regulations, the adherence to which leaves little time for foundations-type approaches which lead to dialectical thought and action. All of this, of course, takes place under the larger neoliberal rubric of learning to earn, billed as lifelong learning (English & Mayo, 2012).

The faculty in Boucher's (2010) study acknowledged that they often soft pedalled the social justice message as a form of self-censorship, to protect not only themselves, but the fragile interdisciplinary programs which were always under the threat of lack of funds from one year to the next:

There was considerable congruence amongst the respondents that both the study of inequality and activism can make people nervous. This nervousness mostly referred to people in the university's administration or positions of power and/or those interested in maintaining the status quo. The interviewees often touched upon how people can get uncomfortable when traditional social structures get questioned. And asking such questions and confronting such structures is one of the tasks of a SJP. Whether one's nervousness is real or perceived, its basis seems to be founded in fear or a threat of change or loss. (p. 293).

Indeed, accreditation agencies such as NCATE often use social justice sounding language while at the same time placing the emphasis on heavily documented assessment, all of which lays the blame on teacher candidates and institutions for their lack of exposure to diversity in the classroom (Aaronson & Anderson, 2013). Faculty commitment to critical pedagogy becomes thin because of this superficial use of social justice which only hastens the removal of foundations courses in lieu of methods ones to meet the NCATE standards, further crippling the ability of teacher candidates to meaningfully address diversity.

Based on recommendations from 250 academics, Powell (2001) catalogued 80 graduate and undergraduate programs in the United States that have a stated mission for social change. As with Boucher's (2010) research findings, these programs are primarily interdisciplinary and represent a range of fields, from sustainable agriculture at Iowa State to the George Meany Center for Labor Studies at the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland which is designed for trade unionists to work full time while getting their BA degree. It is notable that the majority of social justice programs are offered at non-state, or independent schools, many of which are religious. Powell (2001) lists individual faculty members under each program



description, along with their subject area expertise, for a total of 465 faculty mentioned. It is important to note that many of the programs use a form of entrepreneurial justification for social change so it is difficult to conclude if the faculty members are themselves Marxian in orientation. It is also apparent that much depends on the faculty and their areas of expertise and dedication- if the faculty find positions elsewhere, then their knowledge goes with them, a finding also echoed by Boucher (2010).

It can be useful to examine some instances of revolutionary critical pedagogy in practice, as evidenced by practitioners who have written about their experiences and published in formal venues. Pruyn and Malott (2013) describe the origins of a Critical Multicultural Social Studies curriculum they created as a counter to Traditional Social Studies Instruction or TSSI (Ross, 2000) or even milder humanistic approaches:

So there we were, sitting in our tiny office, surrounded by books, listening to music, sharing our lunches, and talking about radical ways to teach the social studies...we were pondering what we might call a social studies informed by our multiple radical ideologies...after these philosophical and theoretical beginnings, we began to more formally develop CMSS in both teaching and academic contexts. (p.170).

In addition to coursework and readings, Pruyn and Malott also published and presented a series of papers about CMSS, so that others could use the ideas in their own departments. A CMSS collective of students, public school teachers, and professors was formed for support and as a continuing study group. As members would step out and try different critical approaches, they would write about their experiences. Courage grew.

Having full time faculty take the lead in this project was strategic because they were the least vulnerable among the group members and instrumental for advancing the vision of the new curricular and pedagogical approaches. A Marxist critical pedagogy embodies an ethics of leadership and responsibility, especially when educational institutions (public schools and universities) are hostile to anything left of liberal educational theory:

It's the obligation of those of us with institutional and social power to 'pay it forward' in terms of social justice, to take risks so that others may have the spaces to create zones of liberty, justice, and self-determination...the more collectively we do this, the easier and more effective this will be (Pruyn & Malott, 2013, p.182).

For example, the work schedules of many K-12 teachers typically do not permit them to publish as frequently as they would like to. As a result, journal articles don't as a rule include the voices of classroom teachers other than as research participants. In the case of this project, professors were able to do the academic writing in partnership with the teachers who were then able to present with them at conferences. The shared workload made this possible.

Teachers who enact praxis can also build upon the tensions which result from injustice and guide students toward action. Lima (2013) provides the example of Tyrone, entering his second year of teaching at the high school level, who encountered students who were angry at being denied entry to a college entrance exam, the PSAT. His skill at effectively channelling the anger is apparent in the following account:

Tyrone asked the upset students and eight other African American males to come talk to him. He said, what do you think is going on here? Kaleen said, “This is social oppression,” the counsellors chose more Latino students and African American female students. Several of the students agreed, “This is unfair.” After a ten-minute conversation drawing on some of Tyrone’s class readings by progressive 20th century African American writers about the forms of racial and social oppression, the students’ critique of their exclusion from the PSAT became stronger and more focused (p.296).

Once the students engaged in focused reflection (which, contrary to detractors of critical pedagogy, didn’t take an enormous amount of time), they were ready to move to the next steps:

Tyrone asked these students, “what do you plan to do about it?” and the students responded, “We should talk to someone, but who?” Tyrone suggested that there were several people in the main office that they could talk to. So the students walked together to the principal’s office. The principal was out and the assistant principal Ms. Wills was able to listen to their complaint. Meanwhile, Tyrone went to speak to Mr. Howard the Dean of Students and then Tyrone went to talk to the 12 African American male students. The head principal and the head counsellor also joined the conversation and further discussed the ways students were selected. Mr. Howard finally offered the concession that the 12 students would be placed first on the list the next time the PSAT was offered and that they would also be placed first on the list for the next college tour (p. 297).

What is important about this account is that Tyrone didn’t simply abandon the students to solve the problem on their own, which would have likely ended in their voices being ignored. He considered his own position as a teacher and utilized it to talk with administration parallel to the actions of the students, who were engaged in praxis together. Tyrone also connected the students’ grievances to institutional racism, making it less of a “customer service” type complaint and more about confronting institutional policies. Lima concluded:

Critical praxis trajectories built on one another and got stronger over time. Those trajectories of actions that were grounded in previous sets of critical praxis trajectories...In fact, the longer those trajectories of critical praxis trajectories built off one another, over time in schools, the stronger that critical praxis trajectories seemed to be. (p. 305).

This echoes English and Mayo’s (2012) description of the learning in adult contexts that takes place in social movements. At the same time there is an individual and reflective “process of becoming” (p.127) where people see themselves in relation to others. This process enables people to overcome false consciousness and forge bonds of solidarity critical for social change.

By being able to collectively test theory, people transform social studies from a remote discipline to an enactment of theory, or praxis (Pruyn & Malott, 2013).

This is in direct contrast to traditional forms of pedagogy, which offers a de-politicization of notions of community. As English and Mayo (2012) explain, when “community” is turned into “citizenship” the focus of the conversation becomes the autonomous individual and not the context in which the individual exists. This results in an ahistorical, “neoliberal tendency to instill in persons the notion that they are responsible for what befalls them” and “displaces the focus on the group and its relationship to the government, funders, and opponents, and places emphasis on personal growth and development as we envisage it” (p.132). Malott (2013a) elaborates further:

Understood within this hyper-capitalist context, the socialist-oriented pedagogies of radical educators, such as Paulo Freire have consequently been reduced to self-reflective, dialogical learning circles abandoning the class analysis of anti-global capitalism. The liberal understanding of educational purpose, now, perhaps more than ever, therefore, assumes that the social function of schooling is to advance democracy by providing a way for the oppressed to achieve equal upward vertical social mobility creating greater equality within capitalism (i.e., social justice), which, it is assumed, is the only option in a world forever capitalist. (p. xvii).

The shifting of the focus from group to individual reflection is therefore also a traditional pedagogical strategy meant to disrupt praxis. Within this context, *dialogue* is not about social movement learning so much as socialization to neoliberal norms, which is to be a reflective *individual* who knows how to work in a *team*.

Ross and Queen’s (2013) pedagogical work across K-12 and postsecondary classrooms attempts to challenge this traditional pedagogical trajectory toward hyper-individualism. As social studies educators, they share the goal of getting students to see current events as the culmination of historical and economic forces rather than the reified fetishism of heroes and great men. Additionally, the goal involves building solidarity with each other as members of the working class, in order to abolish capitalism. Greg Queen, a public school high school teacher in Detroit, explains the curriculum that he has used for several years:

I have identified five themes that are interwoven throughout one semester and fit within the [National Council for the Social Studies] NCSS strands. The five themes are: inequality, capitalism, racism, globalization, and the war in Iraq. These themes interpenetrate each other, but kids begin to realize that capitalism is the primary thread and when they begin to understand this, the other themes make more sense for them. (Ross & Queen, 2013, p.218).

Similarly, in response to the intensified focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), Gilbert (2013) fused critical pedagogy with these curriculum topics in a Critical Science Education (CSE) approach. Finding traditional STEM curriculum to be lacking and exclusionary for minority groups and women, CSE enables students to examine how science is

used in the support of the status quo. At the same time, science can also be used in liberatory projects:

Students were able to make remarkable connections between tobacco use and the larger social and economic contexts. Students were able to engage with the complexity surrounding this contentious issue on many levels. They envisioned how tobacco companies viewed them as mere profits, but interestingly students also identified how government, health officials, and the legal system also relied on the tobacco industry. This type of dialog is an essential component of a critical science framework, and worked to facilitate student understanding for the larger societal and corporate agendas that may not have their best interests in mind (Gilbert, 2013, p.247).

Students found this type of engagement with science and math to be far more relevant and motivating than traditional approaches focusing on isolated content knowledge. Likewise, Anderson (2013) noted an increase in student engagement when he made the textbook the centre of a lesson about assessment in a history classroom: “instead of being tested on history—they tested history themselves” (p.302).

### **Critical Pedagogy: Questions of Vitality**

Some social scientists, as described by Erich Fromm (1956) in *The Sane Society*, suggest that as much as a society functions, it is *normal*. Mental status, in this scenario, is connected to how well-adjusted one is to the dominant parameters of *normally* functioning society. If one is well-adjusted one is considered sane, but if one is *maladjusted*, one will be considered a deviant of sorts, and potentially *dangerous*. The definition of pathology then is an “individual’s lack of adjustment to the ways of society” (pp. 1-12). Fromm then insinuates a crucial question: what if the society itself is insane? Broadly speaking (but with plenty of qualifications), proper *adjustment* to the insane society will result in both irrational and immoral behaviour to the extent that the behaviour participates in the reproduction and perpetuation of the destructive and dehumanizing social order, and *maladjustment* will result in rational and moral behaviour to the extent that the behaviour is working to critique, challenge, overcome, and crucially replace an insane social order with one directed toward serving the interests and well-being of humanity and the rest of nature by working to make real “the promise of democracy” (Derrida, 2000, p. 9).

Ellen Meiksins-Wood (1995) reminds us that under the dominant and dominating system of capital, wrecking the environment, exploiting workers, alienating humans, and engaging in military aggression are indices of success, not failure. The unleashing of capital’s expansionary and accumulative imperatives releases capital’s transmogrifying destructive capacities. Paul Street (2012), referring to research reported in the science journal *Nature*, tells us “humanity is now facing an imminent threat of extinction with human-generated climate change in the vanguard of the menace,” (para. 3) and to clarify the urgency, Noam Chomsky (2011) argues that if we do not address the root causes of climate change, i.e. if we do not challenge and overcome

the rapacious and ravenous capitalist beast and its related threats, “in a generation or two, everything else we’re talking about won’t matter” (para. 38).

Critical pedagogy (CP), as an ethical and political practice “in favour of sanity,” is dedicated to cultivating both a *critical consciousness* among *social individuals* awakened to the public pedagogical force institutions of power exert in constructing values, attitudes, desires, choices, and subjectivities (Kincheloe, 2007), and to their own individual and collective power as *social* and *historical agents* capable of intervening in the world and producing themselves as *subjects* in transformative social struggle. Critically conscious *social individuals* recognize that because of capitalism’s relentlessly expansionist imperative and requirement to rapaciously accumulate at all costs, capitalism poses a profoundly foreboding threat to world peace while being a guarantor of environmental destruction. This recognition, along with CP’s imperative to critically intervene to address, imagine, and build feasible alternatives, is especially pressing “when nothing less than the very survival of humankind is at stake” (Mészáros, 2004, *Preface*).

Because CP is driven to *negate* the forces working to undermine, poison, and corrupt the future, while also working to construct *positive* overall structural alternatives, at its core, CP asks: what kind of society and world is it in which we wish to live and what are the conditions necessary to nurture and nourish free, imaginative and creative human self-realization as an end in itself? (Marx, 1973). And these questions, of course, open into other inquiries about the kinds of social relations we want to construct and what it will require to develop the resources and power to collectively, sustainably, and positively shape the processes of social metabolism in line with overcoming multiple forms of *alienation* consequent with a hyper-commodified culture and society.

Additionally, as part of a continuing construction of *critical consciousness*, CP considers and works to realize what is needed to mobilize the support, self-confidence, and solidarity necessary to live into and out of our moral and political responsibility to name systems and engage systemic analysis and critique, while also actively assuming our collective right and duty, as communicative and affective beings, to invent and reinvent the world in which we are living as active *subjects in* and *objects of* history? With this in mind, CP advises that we make history and history makes us; therefore, we should be very careful about the kind of history we make.

More pointed and directive questions sit on the constructive edge of CP tenets: under conditions of increasing neoliberal privatization of the means of ideological and material production, what are the mechanisms available for the diffusion of critical *revolutionary* consciousness and what level of diffusion is necessary to begin to seriously challenge the status quo; how, given the “substance and complexity” of lives enveloped as “workers [toiling...] under exploitative conditions and antagonistic working relations” (Macedo, 2007, p. 393), do we engage constructively with current struggles for ecological rationality, social justice, peace, substantive education, freedom and dignity? How do we build an *internationalist* consciousness to oppose

capitalist globalization in ways that respect and learn from the enriching global cultural diversity of people grounded in ongoing struggles *against* various forms of racist, sexist and imperialist exploitation and oppression and *for* dignity, freedom, equality, and justice? How do we fulfil people's basic needs for (and right to) health and health care, food, housing, infrastructure, clean air and water, and meaningful education, etc., while also working to create conditions that nurture the development and flourishing of the complex and full-range of individual and collective human creative potentialities and interests?

Learning to think and act *beyond the limits* of a rapacious, relentless, eco-destructive, inequality producing, and militarized global capitalism in order to awaken and energize modes of thought, agency and struggle necessary to construct a “truly participatory and radical democracy” (Giroux, 2013, p. 18) is fundamental to critical pedagogy's project rooted in critique, challenge, hope, transformation, and construction. Transformative critical pedagogies grounded in both struggles for substantive democracy and freedom, and also in workable extrapolations from present conditions and realities, are urgently needed in the face of narrow and narrowing U.S. fundamentalisms operating across multiple authoritarian social spheres, including: religious, military, political, and economic.

These fundamentalisms work to ensure that immoral and irrational economic and social terror will continue to be carried out against the U.S. population. The social and economic terror produces results in which nearly 50% of people live in or near poverty (Buchheit, 2013, para.8); “the real unemployment rate for July 2013 was 23.3%” (Corsi, 2013, para.2); Los Angeles, one of the richest cities in the world, has nearly 650,000 hungry children (Holland, 2013); 22.4% of children are food insecure in the U.S. (Dicker, 2013, para.2); family homelessness has increased by more than 13% since 2007 and the number of homeless school children has surpassed one million (Kaufman, 2013, para.6).

In the face of all of this suffering and hardship, the top 5% control roughly 64% of wealth in the U.S., while the bottom 80% have 12.8%, and the top 10% control nearly 80% of stock market wealth while the bottom 60% control 2.5% (Inequality.org, 2013, para.2-8). Meanwhile, 354-to-1: that is the CEO-to-worker pay ratio at S&P 500 companies in 2012. At Wal-Mart: 1,034-to-1. Target: 597-to-1. “All-American” Disney: 557-to-1. Appaloosa hedge fund manager David Tepper took in a cool \$2.2 billion in 2012 (La Roche, 2013, para.5). If he worked 40-hour work weeks for 50 weeks, he averaged more than \$1 million per hour over the course of the year. The average worker would have to work roughly 25 years to make as much as he made every hour.

These poverty and inequality producing repressive and ruthless fundamentalisms emergent with dominant tyrannical structures, work materially and ideologically to not only persistently shut down alternative thoughts and institutions, especially those that advocate for social justice, peace, critical education, ecological rationality, and equality, but also work to create the “game over” global conditions to which climatologist James Hansen refers. “Game over” conditions are

accomplished through, among other factors, a convergence of corporate tyranny (and its large-scale counter-human pedagogical impacts), a growing police state apparatus, and vicious militarism. One of the key tasks of any critical pedagogy in 2013 and beyond will be (at a minimum) to “alert people to the threat of catastrophic environmental change and try to mobilize them to prevent or minimize it” (Angus, 2013, p. 17).

Critical pedagogies work to think and act *beyond the limits* imposed by authoritarian structures and fundamentalist beliefs. Thus, while critical pedagogies work to never be determinant and autocratic, they are always partial and impassioned (taking positions but *on the move*), and always working to expand the boundaries of the permissible and possible while questioning assumptions, agendas, and presuppositions (including our own). Critical pedagogies are never only vehicles for experiencing or reflecting upon reality, but are always essential to and constructive of experience and reality. In this sense, critical pedagogies are always reflective of context and constructive of context while remaining aware of how contexts are mediated by relationships of power.

Thinking and acting *beyond the limits* is nurtured and nourished by what Henry Giroux (2012) calls a “politics of educated hope”. Educated hope is grounded in recognizing pedagogy as always a moral and political practice that envisions and works to shape a different future by providing learners and teachers (inside and outside formal education) with experiences, support and knowledge to imagine beyond and act beyond both what is familiar and what is properly adjusted to the norms of an unjust and unfair society. Educated hope is part of a larger commitment to keep open avenues of dialogue and debate necessary for enlivening and building new social relations, values, aspirations, and identities grounded in conditions of substantive equality and ongoing collective struggle. Because formal education is not the predominant force inculcating the values and beliefs of the dominant systems, nor a force alone capable of producing substantive emancipatory alternatives to the dominant system, but *is* an integral component of a larger set of pedagogical structures in the society as a whole, CP’s political and pedagogical work of *negation*, *positive liberation* and *alternative institutional construction* is understood to be necessarily engaged inside and outside the framework of formal education.

As part of attending to the political nature of pedagogy, CP urges going beyond modes of politics and structural determinations assumed from the past in order to create social content for *social individuals* to construct social projects directed toward radically social democracy rooted in substantive equality, learning, teaching, and freedom. Critical pedagogy then is a form of mutually informing, influencing, and inhabiting, democratized and democratizing learning and teaching, inside and outside formal schooling, founded on a concept of educated hope that works: (1) to animate discourses that fuel the will, knowledge and ability “to think outside of and against the demands of official power” (Giroux, 2013, p. 155); (2) to invigorate and bolster desire, knowledge, and imagination in order to remain subversive by disrupting dominant narratives, challenging illegitimate and unjust hierarchies, and reawakening and enlivening

memories of popular struggles and victories; (3) to expand the boundaries of the possible by activating the support, self-confidence, and solidarity needed to organize forms of collective direct action requisite for both challenging the multiple forces wrecking possibilities for democracy and a decent future, while also working to build alternatives grounded in substantive forms of schoolroom, workplace, community, and global democracy.

One of the ongoing tasks of critical pedagogy in the U.S. is the indictment of militarized neoliberal capitalism's iniquitous assault on humanity, *the social*, and the rest of nature. The indictment is accompanied by an impassioned call to resist and rebel, and in that combination of critique and struggle one is reminded of Bertolt Brecht's (1964) line: "The present-day world can only be described to present-day people if it is described as capable of transformation" (p. 274). Critical description and analysis of present conditions and the systemic and historical roots of those conditions, for the purpose of understanding why things are the way they are, is essential. CP attempts to carry out the descriptive and analytic labour while rooted in a commitment to informed and informing modes of authority that work in ways that are directive and not dogmatic, self-reflexive and not authoritarian, ideologically contentious and not ideologically sterile, and sceptical and not autocratic. Such forms of critically informed and energized understanding nurture and direct both our constructing of knowledge of a different and better world and our building of pathways for the realization of that knowledge in practice as we work our way through terrains that are often confrontational and destructive.

Transformations, grounded in what Peter McLaren might call *revolutionary* formative cultures of critical reflection, dialogue, deliberation, intervention, and struggle, are directed toward the ongoing and always unfinished building of substantive modes of freedom, equality, and justice as foundational to transitioning to and realizing participatory forms of democracy. Such *revolutionary* formative cultures are nurtured and nourished within a politics and pedagogy rooted in "what first animated [critical pedagogy's] mission...the struggle against the ravages of capitalism, and [the work necessary] to bear witness to a better future" (McLaren, 2013).

A key component of the struggle against capital rests in CP's evaluative standpoint toward systemic transformation: i.e. *transformation is possible and necessary*. Under the regime of capital systemic transformation is seen as impossible and unnecessary. CP encourages and enables an engagement with the systemically produced crises and burdens confronting society and thus calls and works for relevant social remedies (as opposed to imposing another burden of guilt on individuals) while also imagining a better future. CP does not delegate or legislate the better future but keeps alive the reality that different and better futures are possible, and necessary. CP recognizes how the better future must be constructed by *social individuals* who function as active participants in self-reflexively articulating the orienting principles of the better society while also building from the realities of the present the pathways toward the always self-critical realization of the principles. It is in that dialectical interface of articulating and building that we operate politically and pedagogically as both continuing educators and learners.



CP's standpoint of evaluation enables us to operate within a framework that sees social crises and challenges as historical and identifiable, addressable and transformable. To be faced with and to confront demanding (and increasingly harrowing) crises and burdens, however problematic and exacting, is not seen as a *negative constraint* within critical pedagogy (as it is under capital's comprehensive educational modalities), but as a *positive potentiality* intertwined with a flexible and self-reflexive perspective on a consciously, critically, and collectively constructed future. The called for *maladjustment* to capital's inherent refusal to permit any serious discussion, let alone any active enactment of major structural and systemic transformations, leaves open the critically educated hope of activating popular political and pedagogical forces capable of building organizational articulations committed to enlivening and expanding critical consciousness and thus realizing, through the collective work of educated and educating *social individuals*, the envisaged modes of social reconstruction and development on the grand scale needed.

In carrying out such tasks, critical pedagogy is alert to how the problems of social life for *social individuals*, inside and outside the domain of formal education can only be addressed through *collective* work, deliberation, and struggle. Awake to the complex, intractable, and unfinished nature of history and humanity, CP argues that addressing feasible futures will be rooted in arduous intellectual and material struggles carried forth by inclusive, energized, educated, and educating public intellectuals *and* by social movements comprised of educated and educating *social individuals*. Transformative social movements should work in and through organizational articulations comprised of knowledgeable and participatory citizens willing and able to engage political and moral arguments while not only making sense of and giving sense to visions and goals of a *revolutionary formative culture* but also linking the visions and goals to plans and actions (enmeshed in constant critique and reflection) that work to challenge, overcome and replace the current dominant systems and unjust power relations that produce the grotesque economic inequalities, military violence, environmental destruction, and concomitant human suffering and hardship in the U.S. and world.

In summary, we can argue that the vitality of CP depends upon fighting back against the anti-democratic/anti-intellectual/anti-future immoral and irrational capitalist onslaught. This requires critical pedagogies that: (1) disrupt and challenge the dominant discourses imposed and circulated by the apparatuses of power; (2) critique imperious ideologies and institutions; (3) recover and learn from the history of past popular struggles for justice, equality, and dignity; (4) redirect society's guiding questions away from narrow and narrowing inquiries driven by commodity production and distribution, and toward interrogations that advance matters of social justice, substantive freedom and equality, radical popular democracy, an internationalist consciousness, and the cultivation of the common good; (5) retrieve the public character of life as *social individuals*; (6) connect the multiple crises with which we are confronted (political, economic, ecological, etc.) to the crises of education, politics, and agency so we can work in, through, and out of publicly-oriented and problematizing discourses, democratic values, civic-

oriented institutions, and our collective intelligence and imagination; (7) build oppositional formative cultures that bolster the will, knowledge and ability to both resist and also to articulate the vital importance of (a) radical democracy, (b) opposition to all forms of oppression [and exploitation], and (c) the organizing of the working class by itself, for its self to construct movements for liberation; (8) construct possibilities for modes of democratic mass mobilizations and *direct action* that “crack open the present to reveal new horizons, different futures, and the promise of global democracy” (Giroux, 2013, p. 149) rooted in the assumption that transformation comes through engagement and that liberation does not come from above (not from economic, military, political, or religious elites or saviours) but is struggled for, advanced and claimed from below.

## Conclusion

As we have outlined above, there is no doubt that critical pedagogy is alive and well in the United States, at least in its written form. It has a foundational history and a growing body of scholarship, including making its way into previously unaddressed specialized fields. Just about any area of study can be found with the prefix *critical* attached to it in some way, shape, or form. Additionally, even though few formal institutions exist devoted to critical pedagogy, individual educators have increasingly embraced key tenets of critical theory and have incorporated them into K-12 and higher education classrooms, passing the message along to students who are hungry for ways to discern the world and perhaps change it.

However, its very flexibility and adaptability to a range of contexts has made critical pedagogy vulnerable to capitalist co-optation. As Gorz (1968) describes, attempts at social change can fall into the categories of reformist, non-reformist, or revolutionary. For example, critical pedagogy could be reformist in that it ends up being used to maintain the status quo, even assisting in making capitalism more palatable (i.e. social justice rhetoric being applied to business practices). It can also be non-reformist by attempting to challenge the system, but by leaving it intact all the same (such as a social justice charter school). By itself, critical pedagogy is no longer sufficient to fight against the neoliberal onslaught, just as abstract notions of democracy are no longer capable of assuring human rights (Gibson, 2012; McLaren, 2005). For that reason, we need to articulate a clearly revolutionary, or Marxist, critical pedagogy:

A socialist pedagogy takes as its starting point a consciousness of the role that education plays in reproducing the capitalist relations of production. This revolutionary pedagogy takes as its ultimate goal the socialist reconfiguration of capitalist society taking special care to avoid past mistakes, such as any element of Stalinist authoritarianism, prescriptions or attacks on freedom. An education for a socialist future offers students and workers opportunities to develop critical social skills that will assist them in gaining an awareness of—and a resolve to transform—the exploitative nature of capitalist social and economic relations of production (Malott, 2013a, p. xxiv).

More than just teaching students to deconstruct known truths, a Marxist critical pedagogy specifically locates education's role in the reproduction of capital. Educators can play pivotal roles in not only identifying how capitalism operates, but in offering a radically different future at the same time. As revolutionary movements grow in power and scope, public intellectuals can serve an important purpose.

A common centrist liberal critique of critical pedagogy is its lack of vision or ability to move beyond deconstruction or being critical. Far from being merely theoretical, a Marxist pedagogy directly addresses the question: What would a socialist future look like? Cole (2013a) provides a glimpse:

The workers would own and control the means of production and would encourage maximal participation in decision-making. Public services would be brought under workers' control and democratically run by the respective workforces. There would be jobs for all who want them. There would be universal free health care for all, incorporating the latest medical advances. There would be no need for private health care. There would be universal free comprehensive education for all from birth to death. There would be free comprehensive leisure facilities for all, with no fees for health clubs, concerts, etc. There would be full rights for women, for the LGBT communities, for all members of minority ethnic groups, and for disabled people. There would be full freedom of religion. There would be no ageism. There would be no war, no hunger, and no poverty (p.20).

Therefore, when the charge of impracticality is raised against critical pedagogy, it's important to distinguish between "impractical" in terms of not specifically articulating what society should be (which has indeed been a flaw of liberal forms of critical pedagogy focused on deconstruction), or impractical for *capitalism*.

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