

Critical Pedagogy and the Postmodern/Modern Divide: Towards a Pedagogy of Democratization

By Henry A. Giroux

Neither modernity nor democracy has reached the end of its potential development. That is why I prefer the term “democratization,” which stresses the dynamic aspect of a still-unfinished process, to the term “democracy,” which reinforces the illusion that we can give a definitive formula for it.

—*Samir Amin* (2001, p.12)

Beyond the Modern/Postmodern Divide

All over the world, the forces of neoliberalism are on the march dismantling the historically guaranteed social provisions provided by the welfare state, defining profit making and market freedoms as the essence of democracy, while diminishing civil liberties as part of the alleged “war” against terrorism. Secure in its dystopian vision, as Margaret Thatcher once put it, that there are no alternatives, neoliberalism eliminates issues of contingency, struggle, and social agency by celebrating the inevitability of economic laws in which the ethical ideal of intervening in the world gives way to the idea that we “have no choice but to adapt both our hopes and our abilities to the new global market” (Aronowitz, 1998, p.7). Coupled with a new culture of fear, market freedoms seem securely grounded in a defense of national security and a defense of property. Educators and other cultural workers need a new

*Henry A. Giroux holds
the Waterbury Chair
Professorship at
Pennsylvania State
University, University
Park.*

political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing a world in which capital draws upon an unprecedented convergence of resources — cultural, political, economic, scientific, military, and technological — to exercise powerful and diverse forms of hegemony. If educators are to counter global capitalism's increased power to both depoliticize and disempower, it is crucial to develop educational approaches that reject a collapse of the distinction between market liberties and civil liberties, a market economy and a market society. This suggests developing forms of critical pedagogy capable of appropriating from a variety of radical theories — feminism, postmodernism, critical theory, post-structuralism, neo-Marxism, etc., and those progressive elements that might be useful in both challenging neoliberalism on many fronts while resurrecting a militant democratic socialism that provides the basis for imagining a life beyond the “dream world” of capitalism. More specifically, this suggests, on the one hand, resurrecting the living, though blemished traditions, of Enlightenment thought that affirmed issues of freedom, equality, liberty, self-determination, and civic agency. On the other hand, critical theory's engagement with Enlightenment thought must be expanded through those postmodern discourses that problematize modernity's universal project of citizenship, its narrow understanding of domination, its obsession with order, and its refusal to expand both the meaning of the political and the sites in which political struggles and possibilities might occur.

Cultural Politics Matters

Against the growing separation between a postmodern cultural politics and modernist material politics — defined primarily over the issue of what constitutes “real” politics — educators need to avoid the modern/postmodern divide that suggests that we can do either culture or economics but that we cannot do both (Giroux, 1999; 2001). Cultural politics matters because it is the pedagogical site on which identities are formed, subject positions are made available, social agency enacted, and cultural forms both reflect and deploy power through their modes of ownership and mode of public pedagogy. Critical theorists from Herbert Marcuse to Theodor Adorno have always recognized that the most important forms of domination are not simply economic but also cultural and that the pedagogical force of the culture with its emphasis on belief and persuasion is a crucial element of how we both think about politics and enact forms of resistance and social transformation. If radical cultural politics in its various postmodern and poststructuralist forms deepened our understanding of the political value of ambivalence and how culture works within a wider variety of spaces and sites, critical theory politicized its meaning and refused to collapse such an understanding into either the exclusive study of texts or the narrow engagement with the polysemic nature of language. Drawing on the insights of each tradition, the issue that becomes primary is not how culture cancels out material relations of power, or how text overrides politics, but

how each works through and on the other within and across specific historical contexts and social formations.

Affirming Modernity's Democratic Legacy

Modernity's ongoing project of democracy is not something that can be dismissed against the postmodern infatuation with irony, simulacra, or the alleged death of the subject. Critical theory's engagement with modernity and democracy must be rethought and reformulated, but only if taken up through the postmodern assertion that democracy is never finished and must be viewed primarily as a process of democratization. Post-colonial theorist, Samir Amin, echoes this call by arguing that educators should consider addressing the project of a more realized democracy as part of an ongoing process of democratization. According to Amin (2001), democratization "stresses the dynamic aspect of a still-unfinished process" while rejecting notions of democracy that are given a definitive formula (p. 12).

The search for a new politics and a new critical language that crosses the critical theory/postmodern divide must reinvigorate the relationship between democracy, ethics, and political agency by expanding both the meaning of the pedagogical as a political practice while at the same time making the political more pedagogical. In the first instance, it is crucial to recognize that pedagogy has less to do with the language of technique and methodology than it does with issues of politics and power. Pedagogy is a moral and political practice that is always implicated in power relations and must be understood as a cultural politics that offers both a particular version and vision of civic life, the future, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment. As Roger Simon (1987) observes:

As an introduction to, preparation for, and legitimation of particular forms of social life, education always presupposes a vision of the future. In this respect a curriculum and its supporting pedagogy are a version of our own dreams for ourselves, our children, and our communities. But such dreams are never neutral; they are always someone's dreams and to the degree that they are implicated in organizing the future for others they always have a moral and political dimension. It is in this respect that any discussion of pedagogy must begin with a discussion of educational practice as a form of cultural politics, as a particular way in which a sense of identity, place, worth, and above all value is informed by practices which organize knowledge and meaning. (p. 372)

An oppositional cultural politics can take many forms, but given the current assault by neoliberalism on all aspects of democratic public life, it seems imperative that educators revitalise the struggles to create conditions in which learning would be linked to social change in a wide variety of social sites, and pedagogy would take on the task of regenerating both a renewed sense of social and political agency and a critical subversion of dominant power itself. Under such circumstances, agency

becomes the site through which power is not transcended but reworked, replayed, and restaged in productive ways. Central to my argument is the assumption that politics is not only about power, but it also, as Cornelius Castoriadis (1996) points out, “has to do with political judgements and value choices” (p.8), indicating that questions of civic education and critical pedagogy (learning how to become a skilled citizen) are central to the struggle over political agency and democracy. In this instance, critical pedagogy emphasizes critical reflexivity, bridging the gap between learning and everyday life, understanding the connection between power and knowledge, and extending democratic rights and identities by using the resources of history. However, among many educators and social theorists, there is a widespread refusal to recognize that this form of education is not only the foundation for expanding and enabling political agency, but it also takes place across a wide variety of public spheres mediated through the very force of culture itself.

One of the central tasks of any viable critical pedagogy would be to make visible alternative models of radical democratic relations in a wide variety of sites. These spaces can make the pedagogical more political by raising fundamental questions such as: What is the relationship between social justice and the distribution of public resources and goods? What are the conditions, knowledge and skills that are a prerequisite for political agency and social change? At the very least, such a project involves understanding and critically engaging dominant public transcripts and values within a broader set of historical and institutional contexts. Making the political more pedagogical in this instance suggests producing modes of knowledge and social practices that not only affirm oppositional cultural work, but offer opportunities to mobilize instances of collective outrage, if not collective action. Such mobilisation opposes glaring material inequities and the growing cynical belief that today’s culture of investment and finance makes it *impossible* to address many of the major social problems facing both the U.S. and the larger world. Most importantly, such work points to the link between civic education, critical pedagogy, and modes of oppositional political agency that are pivotal to elucidating a politics that promotes autonomy and social change.

At the very least, critical pedagogy proposes that education is a form of political intervention in the world that is capable of creating the possibilities for social transformation. Rather than viewing teaching as technical practice, radical pedagogy in the broadest terms is a moral and political practice premised on the assumption that learning is not about processing received knowledge but actually transforming it as part of a more expansive struggle for individual rights and social justice. This implies that any viable notion of pedagogy and resistance should illustrate how knowledge, values, desire, and social relations are always implicated in relations of power, and how such an understanding can be used pedagogically and politically by students to further expand and deepen the imperatives of economic and political democracy. The fundamental challenge facing educators within the current age of neoliberalism is to provide the conditions for students to address how

knowledge is related to the power of both self-definition and social agency. Central to such a challenge is providing students with the skills, knowledge, and authority they need to inquire and act upon what it means to live in a substantive democracy, to recognize anti-democratic forms of power, and to fight deeply rooted injustices in a society and world founded on systemic economic, racial, and gendered inequalities.

The Responsibility of Teachers as Public Intellectuals

I believe that educators and other cultural workers bear an enormous responsibility in opposing neoliberalism by bringing democratic political culture back to life. This is not meant to suggest that before neoliberalism's current onslaught on all things public that liberal democratic culture encouraged widespread critical thinking and inclusive debate — an argument that allows any appeal to democracy to be dismissed as nostalgic. While liberal democracy offers an important discourse around issues of “rights, freedoms, participation, self-rule, and citizenship,” it has been mediated historically through the “damaged and burdened tradition” of racial and gender exclusions, economic injustice, and a formalistic, ritualized democracy which substituted the swindle for the promise of democratic participation (Brenkman, 2000, p. 123). At the same time, liberal and republican traditions of Western democratic thought have given rise to forms of social and political criticism that at least contained a “referent” for addressing the deep gap between the promise of a radical democracy and the existing reality. With the rise of neoliberalism, referents for imagining even a weak democracy, or for that matter understanding the tensions between capitalism and democracy, which animated political discourse for the first half of the twentieth century, appear to be overwhelmed by market discourses, identities, and practices, on the one hand, or a corrosive cynicism on the other. Democracy has now been reduced to a metaphor for the alleged “free” market. It is not that a genuine democratic public space once existed in some ideal form and has now been corrupted by the values of the market, but that these democratic public spheres, even in limited forms, seem to no longer be animating concepts for making visible the contradiction and tension between the reality of existing democracy and the promise of a more fully realized, substantive democracy.

Part of the challenge of linking critical pedagogy with the process of democratization suggests constructing new locations of struggle, vocabularies, and subject positions that allow people in a wide variety of public spheres to become more than they are now, to question what it is they have become within existing institutional and social formations, and to give some thought to what it might mean to transform existing relations of subordination and oppression. But if such a task is to become meaningful, critical theory's concern with the universal project of modernity must be forged with a deeper understanding of a postmodern notion of difference and how the latter can expand and deepen the democratic project of modernity. Chantal Mouffe (1988) captures this concern well in her claim that:

What we need is a hegemony of democratic values, and this requires a multiplication of democratic practices, institutionalizing them into ever more diverse social relations, so that a multiplicity of subject-positions can be formed through a democratic matrix. It is in this way — and not by trying to provide it with a rational foundation — that we will be able not only to defend democracy but also to deepen it. (p.18)

Critical Pedagogy as a Project of Intervention

In what follows, I want to highlight some pedagogical, though provisional, principles that offer both a language of critique and possibility for referencing pedagogy as a moral and political practice that is informed by a politics and project that takes a position against the scourge of neoliberalism but does not stand still, that points to the possibility of a politics of democratic struggle, without underwriting a politics with guarantees. If educators are to revitalize the language of civic education as part of a broader discourse of political agency and critical citizenship in a global world, they will have to consider grounding such a pedagogy in a defense of militant utopian thinking in which any viable notion of the political takes up the primacy of pedagogy as part of a broader attempt to revitalize the conditions for individual and social agency while simultaneously addressing the most basic problems facing the prospects for social justice and global democracy. This suggests addressing critical pedagogy as a project informed by a political vision while being conscious of the diverse ways such a vision gets mediated in different contexts. Such a project also suggests recasting the relationship between the pedagogical and political as a project that is indeterminate, open to constant revision, and constantly in dialogue with its own assumptions. The concept of the project in this sense speaks to the directive nature of pedagogy, recognizes that any pedagogical practice presupposes some notion of the future, prioritises some forms of identification over others, and upholds selective modes of social relations. At the same time, the normative nature of such a pedagogy does not offer guarantees as much as it recognizes that its own position is grounded in modes of authority, values, and ethical considerations that must be constantly debated in terms of the ways in which it both opens up and closes down democratic relations, values, and identities. Central to keeping any notion of critical pedagogy alive and challenging is the recognition that it must address real social needs, be imbued with a passion for democracy, and provide the conditions for expanding democratic forms of political and social agency.

Critical Pedagogy as a Matter of Context, Ethics, and Politics

In opposition to the increasingly dominant views of education and cultural politics, I want to argue for a transformative pedagogy rooted in a project of

resurgent democracy — one that relentlessly questions the kinds of labor, practices, and forms of production that are enacted in public and higher education. Such an analysis should be relational and contextual, as well as self-reflective and theoretically rigorous. By relational, I mean that the current crisis of schooling must be understood in relation to the broader assault that is being waged against all aspects of democratic public life. As Jeffrey Williams (1999) has recently pointed out, “the current restructuring of higher education is only one facet of the restructuring of civic life in the U.S. whereby previously assured public entitlements such as healthcare, welfare, and social security have evaporated or been ‘privatized’, so no solution can be separated from a larger vision of what it means to enfranchise citizens or our republic” (p 749). But as important as such articulations are in understanding the challenges that public and higher education face in the current historical conjuncture, they do not go far enough. Any critical comprehension of those wider forces that shape public and higher education must also be supplemented by an attentiveness to the conditional nature of pedagogy itself. This suggests that pedagogy can never be treated as a fixed set of principles and practices that can be applied indiscriminately across a variety of pedagogical sites. Pedagogy must always be contextually defined, allowing it to respond specifically to the conditions, formations, and problems that arise in various sites in which education takes place. Rather than treating pedagogy as a commodity, progressive educators need to engage their teaching as a theoretical resource that is both shaped by and responds to the very problems that arise in the in-between space/places/context that connect classrooms with the experiences of everyday life. Under such circumstances, educators can both address the meaning and purpose that schools might play in their relationship to the demands of the broader society while simultaneously being sensitive to the distinctive nature of the issues educators address within the shifting contexts in which they interact with a diverse body of students, texts, and institutional formations.

Critical pedagogy locates discursive practices in a broader set of interrelations, but it also analyzes and gives meaning to such relations by defining them within particular contexts constructed through the operations of power as articulated through the interaction among texts, teachers, and students. Questions of articulation and context need to be foregrounded as both a matter of ethics and politics. Ethically, critical pedagogy requires an ongoing indictment “of those forms of truth-seeking which imagined themselves to be eternally and placelessly valid” (Gilroy, 2000, p.69). Simply put, educators need to cast a critical eye on those forms of knowledge and social relations that define themselves through a conceptual purity and political innocence that clouds not only how they come into being but also ignores that the alleged neutrality on which they stand is already grounded in ethico-political choices. Thomas Keenan (1997) rightly argues that ethics on the pedagogical front demands an openness to the other, a willingness to engage a “politics of possibility” through a continual critical engagement with texts, images,

events, and other registers of meaning as they are transformed into public pedagogies (p. 2). One consequence of linking pedagogy to the specificity of place is that it foregrounds the need for educators to rethink the cultural and political baggage they bring to each educational encounter; it also highlights the necessity of making educators ethically and politically accountable for the stories they produce, the claims they make upon public memory, and the images of the future they deem legitimate. Pedagogy is never innocent and if it is to be understood and problematized as a form of academic labor, educators must not only critically question and register their own subjective involvement in how and what they teach, they must also resist all calls to depoliticize pedagogy through appeals to either scientific objectivity or ideological dogmatism. Far from being disinterested or ideologically frozen, critical pedagogy is concerned about the articulation of knowledge to social effects and succeeds to the degree in which educators encourage critical reflection and moral and civic agency rather than simply mold it. Crucial to this position is the necessity for critical educators to be attentive to the ethical dimensions of their own practice.

Critical Pedagogy and the Promise of Democratization

As an act of intervention, critical pedagogy, as I mentioned above, needs to be grounded in a project that not only problematizes its own location, mechanisms of transmission, and effects, but that also functions as part of a larger project to contest various forms of domination and to help students think more critically about how existing social, political, and economic arrangements might be better suited to address the promise of a radical democracy as an anticipatory rather than messianic goal. Jacques Derrida has recently suggested that the social function of intellectuals as well as any viable notion of education should be grounded in a vibrant politics which makes the promise of democracy a matter of concrete urgency. For Derrida (2000), the promise of a “democracy” to come offers a critical referent for examining the contradiction between what parades as democracy — “the current state of all so-called democracy” — and the conditions and possibilities necessary for democratic transformation (p. 9). Derrida sees the promise of democracy as the proper articulation of a political ethics and by implication suggests that when higher education is engaged and articulated through the project of democratic social transformation it can function as a vital public sphere for critical learning, ethical deliberation, and civic engagement. Moreover, the utopian dimension of pedagogy articulated through the project of radical democracy offers the possibility of resistance to the increasing depoliticization of the citizenry, provides a language to challenge the politics of accommodation that connects education to the logic of privatization, refuses to define the citizen as simply a consuming subject, and actively opposes the view of teaching as market-driven practice and learning as a form of training. Utopian in this sense is not an antidote to politics, a nostalgic yearning for a better time, or for some inconceivably alternative future. But, by contrast, it is an

“attempt to find a bridge between the present and future in those forces within the present which are potentially able to transform it” (Eagleton, 2000, p. 22).

In opposition to dominant forms of education and pedagogy that simply reinvent the future in the interest of a present in which ethical principles are scorned and the essence of democracy is reduced to the imperatives of the bottom line, critical pedagogy must address the challenge of providing students with the competencies they need to cultivate the capacity for critical judgment, thoughtfully connect politics to social responsibility, expand their own sense of agency in order to curb the excesses of dominant power, revitalize a sense of public commitment, and expand democratic relations. Animated by a sense of critique and possibility, critical pedagogy at its best attempts to provoke students to deliberate, resist, and cultivate a range of capacities that enable them to move beyond the world they already know without insisting on a fixed set of meanings.

Against the current onslaught to privatize public schools and vocationalize higher education, educators need to defend public and higher education as a resource vital to the democratic and civic life of the nation. Central to such a task is the challenge of academics, cultural workers, and labor organizers to find ways to join together in broad-based social movements and oppose the transformation of public schools and higher education into commercial spheres, to resist what Bill Readings (1997) has called a consumer-oriented corporation more concerned about accounting than accountability. The crisis of public schooling and higher education — while having different registers — needs to be analyzed in terms of wider configurations of economic, political, and social forces that exacerbate tensions between those who value such institutions as public goods and those advocates of neoliberalism who see market culture as a master design for all human affairs. The threat corporate power poses can be seen in the ongoing attempts by neoliberals and other hyper capitalists to subject all forms of public life, including public and higher education, to the dictates of the market while simultaneously working to empty democracy itself of any vestige of ethical, political, and social considerations. What educators must challenge is the attempt on the part of neoliberals to either define democracy exclusively as a liability or to enervate its substantive ideals by reducing it to the imperatives and freedoms of the marketplace. This requires that educators consider the political and pedagogical importance of struggling over the meaning and definition of democracy, and situate such a debate within an expansive notion of human rights, social provisions, civil liberties, equity, and economic justice. What must be challenged at all costs is the increasingly dominant view propagated by neoliberal gurus such as Milton Friedman, that profit making is the essence of democracy and accumulating material goods the essence of the good life.

Beyond the Pedagogy of Deskillling

Defending public and higher education as vital democratic spheres is necessary

to develop and nourish the proper balance between public values and commercial power, between identities founded on democratic principles and identities steeped in forms of competitive, self-interested individualism that celebrate selfishness, profit making, and greed. Educators also must reconsider the critical roles they might take up within public and higher education so as to enable them to oppose those approaches to schooling that corporatize and bureaucratize the teaching process. A critical pedagogy should, in part, be premised on the assumption that educators vigorously resist any attempt on the part of liberals and conservatives to reduce their role in schools to either that of technicians or corporate pawns. Instead, progressive educators might redefine their roles as engaged public intellectuals capable of teaching students the language of critique and possibility as a precondition for social agency. Such a redefinition of purpose, meaning, and politics suggests that educators critically interrogate the fundamental links between knowledge and power, pedagogical practices and social consequences, and authority and civic responsibility.

By redefining the purpose and meaning of schooling as part of a broader attempt to struggle for a radical democratic social order, progressive educators can begin to vigorously challenge a number of dominant assumptions, policies, and practices currently structuring public and higher education, including but not limited to: ongoing attempts by corporate culture to define educators as multinational operatives; escalating efforts by colleges and universities to deny students the loans, resources, and public support they need to have access to a quality education; the mounting influence of corporate interests in pressuring universities to reward forms of scholarship that generate corporate profits; increasing attempts to deny women and students of color access to higher education through the reversal of affirmative action policies, the raising of tuition costs, and a growing emphasis on classroom pedagogies designed to creating marketable products and active consumers. Rather than providing students with an opportunity to learn how to shape and govern public life, education is increasingly being vocationalized, reduced to a commodity that provides privileges for a few students and industrial training for the service sector for the rest, especially those who are marginalized by reason of their class and race.

Increasingly, the corporatization of education functions so as to cancel out the democratic values, impulses, and practices of a civil society by either devaluing or absorbing them within the logic of the market. Educators need a critical language to address these challenges to public and higher education. But they also need to join with other groups outside of the spheres of public and higher education in order to create a national movement that links the defense of non-commodified education with a broader struggle to deepen the imperatives of democratic public life. The quality of educational reform can, in part, be gauged by the caliber of public discourse concerning the role that education plays in furthering, not the market driven agenda of corporate interests, but the imperatives of critical agency, social

justice, and an operational democracy. In this capacity, educators need to develop a language of possibility for both raising critical questions about the aim of schooling and the purpose and meaning of what and how educators teach. In doing so, pedagogy draws attention to engaging classroom practice as a moral and political consideration animated by a fierce sense of commitment to provide the conditions that enable students to become critical agents capable of linking knowledge to social responsibility, and learning to democratic social change.

Approaching pedagogy as a critical and political practice suggests that educators refuse all attempts to reduce classroom teaching exclusively to matters of technique and method. In opposition to such approaches, educators can highlight the performative character of education as an act of intervention in the world — focusing on the work that pedagogy does as a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and experiences are produced within particular sets of classroom relations. Within this perspective, critical pedagogy foregrounds the diverse conditions under which authority, knowledge, values, and subject positions are produced and interact within unequal relations of power; it also problematizes the ideologically laden and often contradictory roles and social functions that educators assume within the classroom. Pedagogy in this view can also be reclaimed as a form of academic labor that bridges the gap between individual considerations and public concerns, affirms bonds of sociality and reciprocity, and interrogates the relationship between individual freedom and privatized notions of the good life and the social obligations and collective structures necessary to support a vibrant democracy.

Classroom Authority and Pedagogy as the Outcome of Struggles

The question of what educators teach is inseparable from what it means to locate oneself in public discourses and invest in public commitments. Implicit in this argument is the assumption that the responsibility of critical educators cannot be separated from the consequences of the subject positions they have been assigned, the knowledge they produce, the social relations they legitimate, and the ideologies they disseminate to students. Educational work at its best represents a response to questions and issues posed by the tensions and contradictions of the broader society; it is an attempt to understand and intervene in specific problems that emanate from those sites that people concretely inhabit and actually live out their lives and everyday existence. Teaching in this sense becomes performative and contextual, and it highlights considerations of power, politics, and ethics fundamental to any form of teacher-student-text interaction. As I mentioned previously, this suggests the importance of addressing education in political and ethical terms. By drawing attention to pedagogy's productive character, critical educators can highlight pedagogy as the outcome of specific deliberations and

struggles that need to be addressed in terms of the “material and historical specificities of (its) enactments” (Horner, 2000, p. 141) and in doing so reject the conservative notion that pedagogy can be theorized as either an a priori set of prescriptions or as a commodity to be applied in any context.

It is crucial to reiterate that any pedagogy that is attentive to its own democratic implications is always cautious of its need for closure; it self-consciously resists totalizing certainties and answers. Refusing the pull of dogmatism and imperious authority, educators must at the same time grasp the complexity and contradictions that inform the conditions under which they produce and disseminate knowledge. Recognizing that pedagogy is the outgrowth of struggles that are historically specific, as are the problems that govern the questions and issues that guide what and how we teach, should not suggest that educators renounce their authority. On the contrary, it is precisely by recognizing that teaching is always an act of intervention inextricably mediated through particular forms of authority that teachers *can* offer students — for whatever use they wish to make of them — a variety of analytic tools, diverse historical traditions, and a wide ranging knowledge of dominant and subaltern cultures and how they influence each other. This is a far cry from suggesting that critical pedagogy defines itself within the grip of a self-righteous mode of authority or completely removes itself from any sense of commitment whatsoever. On the contrary, at stake here is the need to insist on modes of authority that are directive but not imperious, linking knowledge to power in the service of self-production, and encouraging students to go beyond the world they already know to expand their range of human possibilities. Robert Miklitsch (1990) rightly argues that teacher authority and institutional positioning are pivotal considerations for analyzing the politics of teaching and the ethical responsibilities that define both the project and the articulation of pedagogy to particular effects. He writes:

I want to argue...that teachers must begin from the pedagogic subject-position to which they have been assigned. If the latter position is not necessarily one of mastery (in either sense of the word), it nonetheless remains one of authority. In other words, to attempt absolutely to renounce the pedagogic subject-position — from whatever motivation, liberal or otherwise — is not only to accede to a ‘bad’ egalitarian logic, it is to evade our responsibility as teachers. And that responsibility — which needless to say, is an implicitly political one — involves recognizing those structures (social, cultural, economic, and so forth) that both enable and constrain our activities. (p. 93)

Academics must deliberate, make decisions, take positions, and in doing so recognize that authority “is the very condition for intellectual work” (Michael, 2000, p. 2) and pedagogical interventions. Miklitsch suggests above that teacher authority cannot be merely renounced as an act of domination, but should be addressed dialectically and deployed strategically so as to enable students to become witnesses to the material and cultural relations of power that often prevent

them and others from speaking and acting in particular ways. Authority in this perspective is not simply on the side of oppression, but is used to intervene and shape the space of teaching and learning to provide students with a range of possibilities for challenging a society's commonsense assumptions, and for analyzing the interface between their own everyday lives and those broader social formations that bear down on them. Authority, at best, becomes both a referent for legitimating a commitment to a particular vision of pedagogy and a critical referent for a kind of auto-critique. Any critical notion of authority demands consideration by both teachers and students of how it is used and functions within specific relations of power. Authority that is directive but open, critical but not closed, must be vigilant and self-conscious about its promise to provide students with a public space where they can learn, debate, and engage critical traditions in order to expand their own sense of individual agency while simultaneously developing those discourses that are crucial for defending vital social institutions as a public good.

Educators need to rethink the tension between the pedagogical and the performative by asking how the performative functions pedagogically. While pedagogy can be understood performatively as an event where many things can happen in the service of learning, it is crucial to stress the importance of democratic classroom relations that encourage dialogue, deliberation, and the power of students to raise questions. Moreover, such relations don't signal a retreat from teacher authority as much as they suggest using authority reflexively to provide the conditions for students to exercise intellectual rigor, theoretical competence, and informed judgment. In this way, students can think critically about the knowledge they gain and what it means to act on such knowledge in order to expand their sense of agency as part of a broader project of increasing both "the scope of their freedoms" and "the operations of democracy" (West, 1991, p. 35). What students learn and how they learn should amplify what it means to experience democracy from a position of possibility, affirmation, and critical engagement. In part, this suggests that progressive educators develop pedagogical practices that open up the terrain of the political while simultaneously encouraging students to "think better about how arrangements might be otherwise" (Dean, 2000, p. 3).

At its best, critical pedagogy must be interdisciplinary and radically contextual, and it must engage the complex relationships between power and knowledge, critically address the institutional constraints under which teaching takes place, and focus on how students can engage the imperatives of critical social citizenship. Once again, critical pedagogy must be self-reflexive about its aims and practices, conscious of its ongoing project of democratic transformation, but openly committed to a politics that does not offer any guarantees. But refusing dogmatism does not suggest that educators descend into a laissez-faire pluralism or an appeal to methodologies designed to "teach the conflicts." On the contrary, it suggests that in order to make the pedagogical more political, educators afford students with diverse opportunities to understand and experience how politics, power, commit-

ment, and responsibility work on and through them both within and outside of schools. This, in turn, enables students to locate themselves within an interrelated confluence of ideological and material forces as critical agents who can both influence such forces and simultaneously be held responsible for their own views and actions. Within this perspective, relations between institutional forms and pedagogical practices are acknowledged as complex, open, and contradictory — though always situated within unequal relations of power (O'Shea, 1998).

Making the Pedagogical More Meaningful

I also want to stress the importance of addressing in any viable theory of critical pedagogy the role that affect and emotion play in the formation of individual identities and social collectivities. Any viable approach to critical pedagogy suggests taking seriously those maps of meaning, affective investments, and sedimented desires that enable students to connect their own lives and everyday experiences to what they learn. Pedagogy in this sense becomes more than a mere transfer of received knowledge, an inscription of a unified and static identity, or a rigid methodology; it presupposes that students are moved by their passions and motivated, in part, by the affective investments they bring to the learning process. This suggests, as Paulo Freire (1999) points out, the need for a theory of pedagogy willing to develop a “critical comprehension of the value of sentiments, emotions, and desire as part of the learning process” (p. 48). Not only do students need to understand the ideological, economic, and political interests that shape the nature of their educational experiences, they must also address the strong emotional investments they may bring to such beliefs. For Shoshana Felman (1987), this suggests that educators take seriously the role of desire in both ignorance and learning. “Teaching,” she explains, “has to deal not so much with lack of knowledge as with resistances to knowledge. Ignorance, suggests Jacques Lacan, is a ‘passion’.” Inasmuch as traditional pedagogy postulated a desire for knowledge, an analytically informed pedagogy has to reckon with the passion for ignorance” (p.79). Felman elaborates further on the productive nature of ignorance, arguing, “Ignorance is nothing other than a desire to ignore: its nature is less cognitive than performative...it is not a simple lack of information but the incapacity — or the refusal — to acknowledge one’s own implication in the information” (p. 79). If students are to move beyond the issue of understanding to an engagement with the deeper affective investments that make them complicitous with oppressive ideologies, they must be positioned to address and formulate strategies of transformation through which their individualized beliefs and affective investments can be articulated with broader public discourses that extend the imperatives of democratic public life. An unsettling pedagogy in this instance would engage student identities and resistances from unexpected vantage points and articulate how they connect to existing material relations of power. At stake here is not only a pedagogical practice

that recalls how knowledge, identifications, and subject positions are produced, unfolded and remembered, but also how they become part of an ongoing process, more strategic so to speak, of mediating and challenging existing relations of power.

Conclusion

In the current historical conjuncture, the concept of the social is being refigured and displaced as a constitutive category for making democracy operational and political agency the conditions for social transformation. In this instance, the notion of the social and the public are not being erased as much as they are being reconstructed under circumstances in which public forums for serious debate, including public education, are being eroded. Within the ongoing logic of neoliberalism, teaching and learning are removed from the discourse of democracy and civic culture — defined as a purely private affair. Divorced from the imperatives of a democratic society, pedagogy is reduced to a matter of taste, individual choice, and job training. Pedagogy as a mode of witnessing, a public engagement in which students learn to be attentive and responsible to the memories and narratives of others, disappears within a corporate driven notion of learning in which the logic of market devalues the opportunity for students to make connections with others through social relations which foster a mix of compassion, ethics, and hope. The crisis of the social is further amplified by the withdrawal of the state as a guardian of the public trust and its growing lack of investment in those sectors of social life that promote the public good. With the supreme court ruling that now makes vouchers constitutional, a deeply conservative government once again will be given full reign to renege on the responsibility of government to provide every child with an education that affirms public life, embraces the need for critical citizens, and supports the truism that political agency is central to the possibility of democratic life.

The greatest threat to our children does not come from lowered standards, the absence of privatized choice schemes, or the lack of rigid testing measures. On the contrary, it comes from a society that refuses to view children as a social investment, that consigns 14 million children to live in poverty, reduces critical learning to massive testing programs, promotes policies that eliminate most crucial health and public services, and defines masculinity through the degrading celebration of a gun culture, extreme sports and the spectacles of violence that permeate corporate controlled media industries. Students are not at risk because of the absence of market incentives in the schools. Children and young adults are under siege in both public and higher education because far too many of them have increasingly become institutional breeding grounds for commercialism, racism, social intolerance, sexism, and homophobia (Gaines, 1999). We live in a society in which a culture of punishment and intolerance has replaced a culture of social responsibility and compassion. Within such a climate of harsh discipline and disdain, it is easier

for states such as California to set aside more financial resources to build prisons that to support higher education. Within this context, the project(s) of critical pedagogy need to be taken up both within and outside of public and higher education. Pedagogy is a public practice largely defined within a range of cultural apparatuses extending from television networks, to print media, to the Internet. As a central element of a broad based cultural politics, critical pedagogy, in its various forms, when linked to the ongoing project of democratization can provide opportunities for educators and other cultural workers to redefine and transform the connections among language, desire, meaning, everyday life, and material relations of power as part of a broader social movement to reclaim the promise and possibilities of a democratic public life.

References

- Amin, S. (2001). Imperialization and Globalization, *Monthly Review*, June, p. 12.
- Aronowitz, S. (1998). Introduction. In Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of Freedom*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 7.
- Brenkman, J. (2000). Extreme Criticism. In Judith Butler, John Guillary, and Kendal Thomas (Eds.). *What's Left of Theory*. New York: Routledge, p. 123.
- Cornelius Castoriadis, C. (1996). Institutions and Autonomy. In Peter Osborne (Ed.). *A Critical Sense*. New York: Routledge, p. 8.
- Dean, J. (2000). The Interface of Political Theory and Cultural Studies. In Jodi Dean (Ed.). *Cultural Studies and Political Theory* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p. 3.
- Derrida, J. (2000). Intellectual Courage: An Interview. Trans. Peter Krapp. *Culture Machine* Vol. 2, p. 9.
- Eagleton, T. (2000). *The Idea of Culture* Malden, MA: Basil Blackwell, p. 22.
- Felman, S. (1987). *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 79.
- Freire, P. (1999). *Pedagogy of Freedom*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 48.
- Gaines, D. (1999). How Schools Teach Our Kids to Hate. *Newsday* (Sunday, April 25), p. B5.
- Gilroy, P. (2000). *Against Race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 69.
- Giroux, H. (1999). *Impure Acts: The Practical Politics of Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Giroux, H. (2001). *Public Spaces, Private Lives: Beyond the Culture of Cynicism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Horner, B. (2000). Politics, Pedagogy, and the Profession of Composition: Confronting Commodification and the Contingencies of Power. *Journal of Advanced Composition* 20(1), p. 141.
- Keenan, T. (1997). *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 2.
- Michael, J. (2000). *Anxious Intellectuals: Academic Professionals, Public Intellectuals, and Enlightenment Values*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 2.
- Miklitsch, R. (1990). The Politics of Teaching Literature: The 'Pedagogical Effect.' *College Literature* 17(2/3), p. 93.
- Mouffe, C. (1988). Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern. In Andrew Ross (Ed.).

Henry A. Giroux

- Universal Abandon* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, p. 18.
- O'Shea, A. (1998). A Special Relationship? Cultural Studies, Academia and Pedagogy. *Cultural Studies* 12(4), pp. 513-527.
- Readings, B. (1997). *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 11,18.
- Simon, R. (1987). Empowerment as a Pedagogy of Possibility. *Language Arts* 64(4), p. 372.
- West, C. (1991). The New Cultural Politics of Difference. In Russell Fergusen, Martha Geever, Trinh T Minh-ha, & Cornel West (Eds.). *Out There*. Cambridge: MIT Press, p. 35.
- Williams, J. (1999). Brave New University. *College English* 61(6), p. 749.