

## **The importance of being critical: Opening possibilities and hope in education policy study**

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Without a perspective on the future, conceivable as a desired future, there can be no human venture ... 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 (Simon, 2001, p. 144).

In January 2006, Susan Fuhrman<sup>1</sup>, who was then Dean of the College of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and Chair of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, gave an invited address to an audience at the annual conference of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). In her presentation, Fuhrman made clear her point that we really do not need to have more critical studies in education. After referring to Thomas Friedman's belief that the world is flat and running through a litany of statistics that were intended to strike fear in the heart of every good American citizen, she stated:

We must shed what David Labaree in his book "The Trouble with Ed Schools" calls our romance with progressivism ... to me our collective romance with progressivism has at least two consequences that are unhealthy. First it focuses our research too much in my opinion on critical in caps approaches to schools. Not that we shouldn't be critical, either in caps or small letters, but too much of the research coming from education schools is preoccupied with ever more elegant deceptions of the problems rather than with finding solutions. I think that the problems seem so huge or so despairing of the whole system that we don't tend to focus on aspects of schooling that might be amenable to change, like research on specific curricular or pedagogical approaches. We'd rather focus on sweeping critiques of the whole system ... I think we're shortchanging our students. We all wish K-12 schools were less devoted to sorting and tracking, less inequitable, less focused on testing and assessment, more thoughtful, etc., but if we are preoccupied by dreams rather than reality, we are doing a disservice to our students and to their students. We want our students to fight for better schools, but certainly they learn to teach and teach well in the ones we have, or the children they're teaching will not learn ... We can make judgments, we can

be advocates, but we must be realistic. Realism rather than romance will help focus us on the main imperatives, meeting the challenges of the new world we live in and developing a sound knowledge base for the work that we do.

Fuhrman, Friedman and others among the revisionist left who share these flat world views can imagine no alternative to organize our lives other capitalism (Kelsh and Hill, 2006). As a result, they name competition from India and China, the relative lack of American engineers and scientists, the high rates of poverty in the U.S., and the need to increase test scores and graduation rates as a rationale for turning schools into instruments that serve the American economy, American competitiveness in a globalized world, and unfettered capitalism. Within this perspective, educational research and policy serves technical interests (Habermas, 1973), focusing on functionalist concerns to enhance student achievement within the structures and parameters of a capitalist society as it currently exists so that these students can supposedly compete economically in a flat world. Within the parameters of these interests, teachers may find ways to creatively teach a unit or embellish a lesson, as Fuhrman suggested elsewhere in her talk, but they should accept what Fuhrman called the “reality” of schools as a fact of life and do the best they can with what they have.

Such technical, instrumentalist interests in education have become commonplace in the United States, offered as natural and self-evident directions for schools. These positions have gained uncritical acceptance among many educators, policymakers, and the general population where there is a widely shared unquestioned belief that schools should serve the interests of capitalism, in spite of the problems this presents: exploitation, the establishment of clear winners and losers, and the sacrifice any sense of humanism and the common good (Said, 2004). This logic ignores existing egregious social justice violations that are too often the cause of difficulties students encounter in public education (Giroux, 2005). Such difficulties become masked behind language of ‘achievement gaps,’ making the problems appear to be individual shortcomings rather than social concerns.

In what follows, we argue against this position, suggesting that those who consider schools in this instrumentalist way alone are clearly deceived by the problem, whether elegantly or not. This position is dangerous and leads to a continuing dismal plight if we expect that educators should work within the confines of conditions as they

presently exist, conditions that have been exacerbated by the exploits of capitalism, particularly when we know the dire circumstances that so many of our children and teachers face each day. Instead we need dreams to help us work toward different possibilities. We agree with other educators among the critical left that educated hope (Giroux, 2005) and a new social movement (Anyon, 2006) are needed to enable us to speak to and change this prevailing position and these conditions so that children can be educated and cared for differently in the midst of an unjust world.

#### The limitations of flat world claims

When she addressed AACTE, Fuhrman claimed that the United States' "lack of progress" regarding student performance is directly related to teacher education programs' incapability to produce graduates who are better equipped to reduce flat world threats to our economy through classroom instruction. Fuhrman explained that only "18% of American students graduate [college] on time," while our peers in China and India are arming more students with science and engineering degrees to fill all of the three to five million American jobs that, by 2010, "will have moved from the U.S. to other countries" (Fuhrman 2006). Additionally, Fuhrman presented a comparison between the cost of one United States engineer as being equivalent to the cost of eleven engineers in India as apparent proof that it is time to be "realistic" about our instruction of teachers. As if these issues were problems created, or even exacerbated by teachers, Fuhrman claimed that focusing on teacher education will bring student achievement improvements.

Researchers and educators are certainly interested in teachers and the role they play in student learning, and of course there is a commonsense appeal to the notion that teachers can make a difference in a child's life; however, most recognize that teachers alone are not the guarantors of a child's success in school or in the context of global capitalism. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2005) determined that quality teaching, a term used to indicate a variety of teacher abilities and characteristics, is vital for improving student learning. Yet, according to this report, "the first and most solidly based finding is that the largest source of variation in student learning is attributable to differences in what students bring to school – their abilities and attitudes, and family and community background." Certainly factors such as a child's health, whether or not she has eaten well before

coming to school, and the adequateness of housing and clothing all play a role in school experiences, as does the child's home language, experiences with texts and school-like discourse, and more. In other words, the world is not so flat after all, and it is clear that global capitalism (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005) perpetuates inequalities that factor into a child's school experiences. These factors can never be resolved by a focus on test scores or the amount of time it takes to educate a teacher.

Of course these are not points that instrumentalists will care to acknowledge. In fact, one of the key failures among those who subscribe to the revisionist left is an inability to grasp flat world problems at their root (Kelsh and Hill, 2006). Instrumentalists gloss over the underlying unresolved social issues that give a more realistic explanation of why students in the United States have difficulty measuring up to educational "standards." One place to begin is by considering the contradictions and exploitation evident in the national poverty rate, (lack of) access to health insurance, and income variations as a means of preventing people from having the same chances and resources as their more fortunate peers. According to the 2005 United States Census, the median income was \$46,326, which is more telling when broken down by ethnicity: black households saw a median income of \$30,858, or only 61% of the median income of non-Hispanic white households, which was a much greater \$50,784. Hispanic households clocked in at \$35,967, which is still only 71% of the median white household. While the 2005 national poverty rate was 12.6%, the breakdown of this number by ethnicity reveals another staggering look at the injustices that students face: 24.9% of blacks were considered to be living in poverty, with Hispanics not faring much better at 21.8%. The poverty level among whites, while still significant, was 8.3%. The 2004-2005 child poverty rate in Sweden was 6.5% when compared with 22% in the United States (the highest ranking for child poverty among the 20 OECD – Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development countries). The Netherlands had a higher productivity rate than the United States, and over 45% of poor families overcame their poverty in one year's time, while 14% of U.S. families stay poor for more than three years.

Another factor that impacts Americans is their access to health care. In 2005, 46.6 million Americans had no health insurance (this does not include the 27.3% of Americans who received government-assisted health insurance such as Medicaid,

which is given based on low income). 32.7% of Hispanics, 29.9% of American Indians and Alaska Natives, and 19.6% of blacks were uninsured, compared with 11.3% of whites. In case these statistics are insufficiently patent, the Census states clearly the awful truth: “the likelihood of being covered by health insurance rises with income.” (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p60-231.pdf>) As one can see, the onerous challenges affecting Americans are deeper than not having a teacher who is “effective:” the exploitation inherent in capitalism plays a much bigger role in disenfranchising students and teachers than flat world proponents are willing to concede.

Furthermore, flat world logic is clearly faulty. Even if we did “catch up” to our peers in India and China by awarding more science and engineering degrees, there are inherent problems with the belief that economic success is guaranteed, just as there is a problem with the *a priori* notion that academic achievement equals economic success (see Gereffi & Wadhwa, 2005 for a critique of Friedman’s claims concerning engineers). On the contrary, if academic achievement were the golden ticket to economic success, then it is difficult to explain how India can be so ‘successful’ when a large percentage of the Indian population still remains illiterate (the Indian government states that between 2004-2005, literacy was demonstrated in 64% of males and 45% females in rural areas and 81% of males and 69% of females in urban areas) ([http://mospi.nic.in/nssopress\\_note%20-%20515.htm](http://mospi.nic.in/nssopress_note%20-%20515.htm)). This assumption also ignores other significant social concerns and human suffering clearly linked to the global capitalist economy, including the increasing suicide rates among farmers in India (Shiva, 2004) and struggles for clean water and humane living conditions for the majority of the population living in India (Roy, 2004).

The claim that China’s economy is also improving drastically is counter to the IMF’s employment data on China, which has had a steadily increasing number of unemployed people each year since 1998. While the United Nations’ 2000 census data from China shows a 91% literacy rate, it demonstrates gender inequities that advantage men to a 95% literacy rate versus the 87% of women. Schooling opportunities, as measured in the typical amount of years during which students are in school, are also not as impressive in China as Fuhrman and Friedman and others who share their views would like us to believe. As of 2004, children in China received on

average eleven years of school. Yet as Hao (2003) indicates, education is not accessible to the majority of the people in China. Of 100 primary school children, only 30.2% are able to proceed to senior middle schools, and of these only 39.8% are able to matriculate to a college of some kind. Hao concludes that China's "educated population is so small that China's ability to modernize itself and at the same time deal with attendant problems is seriously impaired" (p. 363). Adding to this, Hao expressed serious concern that student perceptions of the market economy significantly limit choices for study among those who are fortunate enough to enter the university. In other words, students choose those majors that they feel will help them to succeed economically, eschewing studies in the humanities and social sciences to pursue degrees in sciences and technology.

Given the challenges with which India and China are still grappling, we must reevaluate why instrumentalists earnestly come to such tenuous conclusions about the threats these countries are supposed to embody. As they point to potential competition from these countries, instrumentalists fail to indicate the true sources of threat to American and others ways of life, specifically the economic systems that drive this supposed need for competition that in turn perpetuates vast differences in resources and well-being. Macedo et al. (2003) provide a reality check that reminds us of how economy-driven models of success eclipse the prospect of democracy:

Within the confines of a market-driven politics, the market itself becomes tautonymous to democracy, embracing a "convergence dogma" whereby market and democracy converge ... We hear terms such as "free trade" and "free market" when discussing the democratization of a given country, but human rights and social justice, which should be at the center of any democratic proposal, are often relegated to the margins.

A far cry from actually being free and just, the term "free market" is merely a doublespeak concept that fools us into believing we can have a positive influence in the economy, which in turn supposedly provides benefit for those in all socioeconomic levels. If this were so, then the flat world notion of success is actually an enormous failure, as it falls short of addressing the most basic human and ethical needs of the vast majority of people in India, China, the United States, and other parts of the world. Barber (1995) reiterated the ills of how such achievement disgraces us all and tries to squelch any hope for change:

Not only do the rich get richer and the poor poorer, but the rich get freer while the poor are enslaved. Of course in the long term, democracy is served by these ironies in neither the First nor Third Worlds. In the Third World too much state coercion steals liberty from peoples poised potentially for economic takeoff; and in the first world too little state coercion leaves individuals unprotected from market forces over which they have no rational or collective control (p. 56).

If we are genuinely concerned with student success and truly invested in helping teachers improve their pedagogies, we would take seriously the need to contemplate the larger issues that are at play in promoting and attaining social progress. Jean Anyon (2005) explained, “macroeconomic policies like those regulating the minimum wage, job availability, tax rates, federal transportation, and affordable housing create conditions in cities that no existing education policy or urban school reform can transcend” (p. 2). In other words, Anyon argued that so-called failing schools are not a result of failed education policy, but instead are attributable to economic policies that devastate communities and ultimately children’s lives. Anyon argued that economic justice is prerequisite to educational justice, and she offered that providing economic opportunity and hope for urban neighborhoods will in turn create the conditions that are necessary for schools to be successful. As Giroux (2005) stated: “You can’t separate the question of what it means for teachers to do a good job unless you take seriously questions of inequality and power.” Anyon makes the point that change can be achieved through conscious political action among educators, and she concludes her book with examples of community and educational groups that are speaking up and doing things to bring change.

Another point missing in instrumentalist language is a broader context of what success means. Defining success through economic and capitalist lenses only is clearly limited and limiting. Educator Ken Gray (2000) points to flaws in arguments that the “only way to win” or to have financial success is to go to a four-year college. Gray noted that by the mid 1990s, at least one in three college graduates was underemployed, and one in two of those who graduated with degrees in teaching, engineering, and marketing were underemployed. By the late 1990s, college drop out rates were at an all time high. Meanwhile, there was an undersupply of technically skilled people to fill positions in high skill/high wage jobs that did not require a college degree. Rather than making college what Gray referred to as a “default decision” for career building, we should reexamine the purposes of secondary and

post-secondary education to consider what schools should accomplish and for whom. Education should not be only about job training and skill building, it should also foster an understanding of how people can come to live together in a democratic society. Instead of focusing on how well we can potentially compete, it seems to be time to focus on how well we care for one another.

Accepting the premise that the world is flat, and subsequently building an argument for education based on this premise, is accepting doom. Flat-world supporters resign us to a future where there will be ever more vast separations between people, rather than hope to unite. Although Thomas Friedman celebrates *individuals* being able to compete and collaborate as the central dynamic force in this new era of globalization, he fails to acknowledge the personal, public, environmental, and cultural sacrifices that are below the surface of his celebration. Consider Friedman's praise for India for its telemarketing industry, including his approval of the ways in which Indian telemarketers adopt Western names, Western English accents (American, Canadian, or British, depending on the country they call), and Western time zones to regulate their sleep and work patterns. Friedman did not consider the personal and cultural sacrifices that result, nor did he consider who would be making the money and who would not, who had the potential to exploit or be exploited, or who or what would be lost. Through his endorsement, Friedman clearly ignored the work of Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy, who explained:

Fifteen years ago, the corrupt, centralized Indian state was too grand, too top-heavy, and too far away for its poor to have access to it – to its institutions of education, of health, of water supply, and of electricity. Even its sewages system was inaccessible, too good for most. Today, the project of corporate globalization has increased the distance between those who make the decisions and those who must suffer them even more. For the poor, the uneducated, the displaced and dispossessed, that distance puts justice out of reach. (2004, p. 20)

Friedman's vision of a flat world may serve some wealthy people well, but as journalist David Sirota explained:

[Friedman's] utopia is a world where a tiny handful of very rich people use "free" trade to move their capital wherever they please, exploit the most oppressed workers on the planet, and underwrite dictatorships who disenfranchise citizens. It is a world where the term "shared prosperity" means hundreds of billions of dollars being shared only between a tiny



group of sheiks, dictators, businessmen and political elites. It is a world where the President of the United States simultaneously talks about his supposed desire to spread democracy, then publicly fawns all over the world's worst dictators, and then wonders why anti-Americanism is on the rise. (Sirota, 2006)

Even though global capitalism has increased the speed with which communication and trade can occur, it has not changed the basic problems inherent in capitalism or the so-called free market. There are still few winners and many losers, inequities in power and social relations, and tremendous human suffering evident in public schools and communities around the globe. These are not new issues. Instead, they are further exacerbated by instrumentalists, those who William F. Warde once described as:

defenders of the *status quo*. Thus, in the hour of supreme danger, instrumentalism discloses its real class character as a liberal extension of bourgeois ideology, just as progressivism turns out to be but a left shadow of capitalist politics. Step by step, the bulk of the pragmatists became willing or unwilling dupes and defenders of the lies and pretensions of the most reactionary forces in American life. (1957)

This tendency continues today as people are unwilling or unable to imagine life beyond capitalism. Instead, every aspect of life, including education, is subject to the faulty logic and misleading neoliberal claims about the benefits of the free market and competition. The results are criminal as people use deceit and other illegal means to advance their own positions and protect their own privilege, even at the expense of the most vulnerable in our society.

Evidence of this corruption can be found most recently in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of the Inspector General's audit of the Bush administration's Reading First initiative (USDOE, 2006). The audit reports on mismanagement, favoritism, and subversive changes to the law that were both illegal and immoral. Reading First, a key component of the No Child Left Behind policy, is intended to provide money to schools with the neediest children to help them to learn to read. Instead, it filled the coffers of McGraw-Hill and other textbooks publishers that found favor in the eyes of the current administration. Journalist Stephen Metcalfe reported this cronyism as early as 2002, noting that Wall Street analysts identified McGraw-Hill, Houghton-Mifflin, and Harcourt General as "Bush stocks" before the 2000 election. Based on the Inspector General's report, these same publishers were

recommended to Reading First schools, a clear violation of the law. Metcalfe also pointed suspiciously to the generations-long friendship between the Bush and McGraw families.

As a result of the U.S. Department of Education's actions in relation to the Reading First grant process, school districts were forced to purchase expensive reading materials, often against the best judgment of the professional educators teaching in the schools, or they were denied much-needed money because they would not or could not comply with the department's agenda. Information about the sordid connections between government and business is not something that those who hold technical interests in schools would seek out or care to acknowledge. Instead, those who hold technical-only views of schools would work to implement the curriculum recommended to them to the best of their ability.

So what does this uncritical celebration of capitalism and the corresponding acceptance of instrumentalism mean for public education? Must we accept these inequities and immoral and illegal conditions, as exemplified in the Reading First debacle, for our children and teachers, and exercise our creativity and intellect within these bounds as Fuhrman suggested? Must education be conceived only as a tool in service of capitalism, competition, and the attendant military regimes that deal with the conflicts created by corporate control of scarce resources? We think not. Instead, we turn to the work of critical educators, those whom Fuhrman disparages, to consider what the possibilities might be.

#### Critical policy study and emancipatory interests

Part of Fuhrman's reasoning that critical studies are ineffective was because of her anecdotal observations that "second-year doctoral students are profoundly depressed" from reading such work. This is clearly a misunderstanding of critical theory, particularly as it plays out in critical education policy studies. On the contrary, critical policy studies that seek to locate the underlying causes of class exploitation and economic oppression can serve a broader purpose in determining better ways to address social problems in the classroom and community. Such study is enlightening and allows one to begin to consider the institutions and ideologies that inform the status quo so that changes can be realized. Critical policy studies that serve

emancipatory interests begin with a different set of assumptions than other policy studies that are grounded in technical interests. First is an understanding that educational research and policies are historical and political, and as such, they always involve values and relations of power. In critical policy study, there is an assumption that negotiations informing research and policy are not constructed among equals because “social, economic, and political circumstances have given certain segments of society license to assert greater influence over the outcomes” (Shannon, 1991, p. 164).

Because of this, critical policy analysts tend to ask questions that illuminate inequalities and injustices, particularly as these questions lead them to expose contradictions and considerations of what policies offer and what they deny. This in turn allows researchers to strategically advocate for change for teachers and students, schools and society.

In addition, critical policy studies involve careful consideration of the histories and social attachments of policy and research ideals. Critical analyses, then, require not only an examination of a policy's effectiveness on its own terms, but an investigation of the values embedded within it; of the images used to make the research seem necessary and compelling; and of the real, expected, and unanticipated social consequences of the study (Marshall, 1997). In this way, overtly political work is engaged that exposes sources of domination and oppression with the overall goal of searching for an improvement in the human condition. Critical policy studies reject reliance on experience alone, which is the sole source of Friedman's position. Instead, critical theorists recognize the importance of experience in generating knowledge, but they also acknowledge that experience can serve to distort rather than illuminate social reality (Giroux, 2001, p. 21).

Critical policy studies encourage sociological imagination and human agency (Mills, 1959). By acknowledging that research and policies are social and are made by people, we recognize that they can and should be changed. This changing necessarily involves understanding why conditions are the way they are, followed by strategic imagining of how social life could be organized otherwise. In other words, our understandings of how things could be different and our work in this direction must employ an educated hope that stresses how “the contextual nature of learning, emphasizing that different contexts give rise to diverse questions, problems, and

possibilities” (Giroux, 2002, p. 101). With such dire conditions affecting children and teachers in America’s public schools, we must begin to dream of different possibilities as a way to develop new solutions to old problems. While Fuhrman dismisses the idea of dreams as a means to problem solve, dreams are actually what can take educators to a level of moral accountability in dealing with issues of inequality and injustice. In seeking a different direction in which to construct a pedagogy of hope, we can reject current theory developed in a capitalistic framework (Kelsh and Hill, 2006) and begin to define pedagogical change with a Marxian class consciousness.

### Making the leap

Hope makes the leap for us between critical education, which tells us what must be changed; political agency, which gives us the means to make change; and the concrete struggles through which change happens. Hope, in short, gives substance to the recognition that every present is incomplete. (Giroux, 2004, p. 38)

Building on work by Ernst Bloch, Andrew Benjamin, Michael Lerner, Cornel West, and others, Henry Giroux explained the importance of hope as an anticipatory and mobilizing endeavor. To Giroux, it is a pedagogical and performative practice that allows people to see their potential as moral and civic agents who can realize social change. Rather than offering a specific utopian vision or blueprint for the future, educated hope allows people to recognize that a different future is possible.

There are clear examples of places where such educated, critical hope is alive and well and helping people to realize social changes. Youth United for Change is an organization in Philadelphia, PA dedicated to young people who will improve the quality of education and services in their community (see <http://yuc.home.mindspring.com>). With over 100 members representing 7,000 youth in the Philadelphia Public Schools, the group envisions schooling that takes seriously 14<sup>th</sup> amendment rights of equal protection and opportunity for all. This is most clear in the group’s plan for successful public high schools in Philadelphia and their acknowledgment that “education is a right not a privilege.” Recommendations include curriculum, library, technology, counseling, security and climate, accountability and management, facilities, and economic improvements. The group named clean facilities, functioning windows and locks, more desks, and clean classrooms among

their needs, and they demanded \$13,000 per pupil funding, considerably less than the \$25,000 per student spent in some Pennsylvania schools, but more than the \$10,000 per pupil the Philadelphia schools currently received.

These students clearly engaged a critical reading of their world. They were not content to accept life or education as they found it, nor would they continue work creatively within the confines of the wrongs a capitalist society has delegated to them. Instead, they raised banners that declared “Stop Corporate Greed,” and they used sophisticated literacies, a collective sense of agency, and a critical consciousness to begin to bring change to their material conditions and their possibilities for the future.

Another example of young people engaging critical projects to realize social change can be found in the United States Student Association's (<http://www.usstudents.org>) efforts to increase access to higher education for people across racial and economic boundaries. These students recognize that education is a right, and that all people should have access to university education, not just those individuals who are legacies or those who can afford the high tuition fees. This grassroots organization was founded in 1947, making it the oldest student organization in the United States. The group has a history of organizing students to participate in political campaigns that have included expansion of recruitment and retention programs for minority students, improvements in campus safety, and a focus on multiculturalism.

Technology opens up different means for communication, as Friedman noted, but sometimes through forums that run counter to his ideas about a flat world. For example, Parisar is a blog that offers an on-line forum for progressive students. On this website, students can find interviews with progressive educators, articles on issues related to education, and information on movements to resist neoliberalism's influence in education. Readers can find a detailed account of the 70,000-strong membership of the National Union of Education workers taking to the streets in Oaxaca, Mexico their longstanding concerns about on-going neglect of educational issues in Mexico. Their protests against neoliberalism's stranglehold on the Mexican government's decisions about funding and resources for schools and poor children have put public pressure on officials and change may be imminent. Their courage against a repressive and corrupt system should offer hope to educators throughout the world.

These are only a few of many examples of change that are possible when students begin to work critically against the repressive regimes that capitalism perpetuates (see Anyon, 2006 and Scantamburio-D'Annibale, Suoranta, Jaramillo, & McLaren, 2006 for other examples). In light of the possibilities these groups are realizing, it is dangerous to suggest that we need to limit our studies of education and education policy to technical concerns and schooling to instrumentalist ends. It is also naïve to suggest, as Fuhrman did, that test scores will reduce poverty and that the economy will offer solutions to the problems we see in today's schools and communities. Fuhrman, Friedman and those who share their views offer a narrow view of democracy that reduces citizens to consumers and ignores public schools as sites for struggle. To avoid these limited and limiting perspectives, a variety of forms of educational study are needed, with critical policy studies at the heart of conceptualizing any change in education. We clearly need significant work in education research and policy to understand the complex relationships between schools and communities, teachers and students, public education and a democratic society. This necessarily involves articulation of an ideal society and the engagements necessary to realize this ideal. Critical policy studies offer us possibilities to consider how citizens are produced, as well as the ways in which education policies may "animate," or not, particular institutions, practices, and agencies (Lewis & Miller, 2003, p. 2). Such work can be transformational for teachers:

Teachers are going to have to begin to mobilize; they can't do this alone – they can't talk about engaging educational problems and closing the door and inventing a neat pedagogy that nobody knows about. They're going to have to work inside and outside the schools; they're going to have to force policy to be changed. They're going to have to vote people on boards that have power that represent what they're doing. They're going to have to fight for the power that they have; they're going to have to realize that education is not a method, it's the outcome of struggles. It's not a method: it's not some *a priori* discourse that you simply invent and then apply; it's in flux all the time. Different conditions demand different interventions, and they're going to have to understand that that question of difference is crucial. (Giroux, 2005)

This struggle requires educators to become engaged citizens who have deep understandings of the histories and economic relationships that produce inequities for themselves and their students. Fostering these critical intellectual understandings among teachers would have significant impact on teacher education programs where

expertise has typically been reduced to a fixed body of content knowledge (Leistyna, Lavandenz, & Nelson, 2004). Instead, teacher education programs would need to become havens where intellectualism and transformation are valued, critical pedagogical practices are engaged, and new visions for education and policy are formed. As Jean Anyon (2005) has noted:

A new paradigm of education policy is possible — one that promotes equity-seeking school change and that includes strategies to create conditions that will allow the educational improvements to take root, grow, and bear fruit in students' lives (p. 84).

Critical policy studies can move us in this direction, to a world that is not flat so much as it is diverse, rich, and focused on an ethic of care.

#### Toward a different world

All experience has shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. (Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence)

In this article we hope to express solidarity with other contributors to this journal concerning the vital need for critical policy studies and critical work in education that illuminates contradictions and economic injustices, and we hope to contribute to further work that will open spaces for hope and social change through education, particularly teacher education. Because of these commitments, we speak out against Fuhrman, Friedman and those who share their views because we find such perspectives to be both limited and limiting. Critical studies in education, particularly policy studies that engage economic critiques at their core offer different possibilities (Anyon, 2006), and we hope to contribute to discussions about how education can be organized outside the inequalities that capitalism perpetuates.

Because we believe that teachers can make a difference in this struggle, not just for children but also for communities, we look to reconceptualize teacher education and to bring changes in this context that will move us toward the pedagogies of possibility that Roger Simon (2001) and others suggest (Denzin, 2003). We find promise in Joe Kincheloe's explanation of a "critical complex epistemology" where teachers are intellectuals, scholars, and policy makers who are well aware of the contexts and forces that shape education in its current forms (Kincheloe, 2004; Giroux, 1988). This

epistemology for teacher education would work against ‘desanitized critical pedagogy’ (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2005) to instead develop what Kincheloe refers to as knowledges of teacher education: pedagogical, empirical, normative, critical, ontological, and experiential. Engagement with these knowledges will allow teachers to thoughtfully reconsider what it means to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to rethink the ways in which students and classrooms are connected to communities, and to name how communities might be organized with different priorities (Edmondson, 2003).

While we are able to dream and to theorize concerning the ways in which teacher education can move in directions Kincheloe, Anyon, and others suggest, we recognize the challenges inherent in realizing such a project. Among teacher educators, there is a range of opinion, expertise, and perspectives, as there should be, including those who agree with Fuhrman, those who wish to see teacher education focused exclusively on content knowledge preparation, and those who understand teacher education as a critical project. We find our first priority to be that of opening spaces for this range of perspectives to be acknowledged, and for these perspectives to be valued for what they offer yet clearly understood for what they deny. So while Furhman and Friedman’s instrumentalist and technical concerns for education may direct people toward clear career paths and other ‘knowns,’ the points we raise through this article demonstrate the limits of such views in seriously addressing an ethic of care and a revisioning of social life around priorities and values that are directed toward the common good (Said, 2004).

Within this context, we face a series of long- term struggles but not a lack of hope. For strength, we align our concerns with others in the field. We struggle with Zeichner (2007) to protect spaces for a range of opinions to be heard, a breadth of research to be valued, and the voices of teacher educators to be inserted into policy debates. We struggle against the lack of prestige for teacher education that David Labaree (2006) noted, as well as trends that foster anti-intellectualism and the deskilling of teachers (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 1988) and institutional spaces and contexts that can be alienating (Harvey, 2000). Poverty, racism, gender biases, inadequate school buildings and resources, insufficient space and time for teachers’ intellectual work, the perpetuation of myths and the generation of fears about others,



and similar pressing concerns continue to weigh on and challenge the possibilities for providing equal educational opportunities for children in American public schools, and educators and researchers are better positioned than any other group to make these needs known.

Educators, researchers and policy analysts will continue to forward sleek instrumentalist arguments about education and the need for schools to serve the economy. Because of this, it is more important than ever for us to critically understand and engage questions about the purposes of education within a democratic society. There is much work that needs to be done toward this end, and it is certainly not for the faint of heart. Yet we take seriously the need for educated hope to engage these issues. We agree with philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who once stated,

Education is our job, but education in a new sense... Education today must involve the mind and the body, reason and imagination, the intellectual and the instinctual needs, because our entire existence has become the subject/object of politics, of social engineering ... The educational system is political, so it is not we who want to politicize the educational system. What we want is a counter-policy against the established policy. And in this sense we must meet this society on its own ground of total mobilization. We must confront indoctrination in servitude with indoctrination in freedom. We must each of us generate in ourselves, and try to generate in others, the instinctual need for a life without fear, without brutality, and without stupidity. And we must see that we can generate the instinctual and intellectual revulsion against the values of an affluence which spreads aggressiveness and suppression throughout the world.

## Notes

[1](#) This article should not be read as a personal indictment of Susan Fuhrman, who is now President of Teachers College in New York City. Instead, her public comments are representative of an instrumentalist discourse that is commonplace in higher education and teacher education. This discourse is imbued with what McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) define as geopolitical correctness, “a process of paying lip service to the internationalization of profitmaking ... while willfully overlooking the benefits of uneven resources that favor the global ruling class” (p. 39). Devoid of a

legitimately critical perspective, these ideas can be interpreted as threats that face educators and students all over the world if one believes that serving capitalism is the root of the motivating factors behind pedagogical and result-driven reforms.

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