

# Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction

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*A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is insofar democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes.*

—John Dewey  
*Education & Democracy*, 1916

*We believe that Education leads to action.*

—Myles Horton  
Founder of the Highlander Folk School, 1932

*Students live in a historical situation, in a social, political and economic moment. Those things have to be part of what we teach.*

—Herbert Kohl  
Founder of the Open School Movement, 1964

*The dual society, at least in public education, seems in general to be unquestioned.*

—Jonathan Kozol  
*Death at an Early Age*, 1967

*If situations cannot be created that enable the young to deal with feelings of being manipulated by outside forces, there will be far too little sense of agency among them. Without a sense of agency, young people are unlikely to pose significant questions, the existentially rooted questions in which learning begins.*

—Maxine Green  
*The Dialectics of Freedom*, 1988

*Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what the schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance. Once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or escalation leads to success. The pupil is thereby "schoolled" to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new.*

—Ivan Illich  
*Deschooling Society*, 1971

*Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry [we] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.*

—Paulo Freire  
*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1971

*Our analysis of the repressiveness, inequality, and contradictory objectives of contemporary education in America is not only a critique of schools and educators, but also of the social order of which they are a part.*

—Samuel Bowles & Herbert Gintis  
*Schooling in Capitalist America*, 1976

As these words well illustrate, the struggle for public democratic schooling in America has been a multidimensional enterprise that has for over a century occupied the dreams, hearts, and minds of many educators. These educators were not only seriously committed to the ideal and practice of social justice within schools, but to the transformation of those structures and conditions within society that functioned to thwart the democratic participation of all people.

Critical pedagogy loosely evolved out of a yearning to give some shape and coherence to the theoretical landscape of radical principles, beliefs, and practices that contributed to an emancipatory ideal of democratic schooling in the United States during the twentieth century. In many ways, it constituted a significant attempt to bring an array of divergent views and perspectives to the table, in order to invigorate the capacity of radical educators to engage critically with the impact of capitalism and gendered, racialized relations upon the lives of students from historically disenfranchised populations.

The first textbook use of the term *critical pedagogy* is found in Henry Giroux's *Theory and Resistance in Education* published in 1983. During the 1980s and 1990s, Henry Giroux's work, along with that of Paulo Freire, Stanley Aronowitz, Michael Apple, Maxine Greene, Peter McLaren, bell hooks, Donald Macedo, Michelle Fine, Jean Anyon, and many others, was, arguably, one of the most central and potent forces in the revitalization of educational debates regarding democratic schooling in this country. However,

Giroux would be the first to adamantly insist that critical pedagogy emerged from a long historical legacy of radical social thought and progressive educational movements that aspired to link the practice of schooling to democratic principles of society and to transformative social action in the interest of oppressed communities.

#### MAJOR INFLUENCES ON THE FORMATION OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY TWENTIETH-CENTURY EDUCATORS AND ACTIVISTS

The views of the American philosopher and educator John Dewey often referred to as the father of the progressive education movement, had a significant influence on progressive educators concerned with advancing democratic ideals within education. During the early 1900s, Dewey sought to articulate his pragmatic philosophy and expand on the idea of community to explain the purpose of education in a democratic society. His beliefs centered on a variety of basic principles, including the notion that education must engage with and enlarge experience; that thinking and reflection are central to the act of teaching; and that students must freely interact with their environments in the practice of constructing knowledge. Although there are those who have sharply criticized Dewey's faith in creative intelligence as eminently naïve and accused him of underestimating the sociopolitical and economic forces that shape inequality and injustice, Dewey's work is consistent in "his attempt to link the notion of individual and social (cooperative) intelligence with the discourse of democracy and freedom" (McLaren, 1989, p. 199). By so doing, John Dewey provided "a language of possibility"—a philosophical construct that has been of foremost significance to the evolution of critical pedagogy.

Myles Horton, considered by some to be one of the sparks that ignited the civil rights movement in the United States, channeled his belief in the political potential of schooling into the founding of the Highlander Folk School (known today as the Highlander Research and Education Center) in Monteagle, Tennessee. The purpose of the school was to provide a place for the education of blacks and whites in defiance of segregation laws. Over the years, Horton's work resulted in the participation of thousands of people, challenging entrenched social, economic, and political structures of a segregated society. One of the most noted among them was the civil rights activist Rosa Parks, who had attended Highlander just a few months prior to her refusal to move to the back of the bus. Key to Horton's political practice was the notion that in order for education or institutional change to be effective, it had to begin with the people themselves—a particularly significant tenet of critical pedagogical thought.

In the early 1960s, the views of Herbert Kohl provided the impetus for the development of the Open School Movement in the United States. His efforts to challenge and address issues of democratic schooling were fundamentally rooted in a tradition of radical politics and radical history that could counter

the structures of oppression at work in public schools. Kohl's deep commitment to community interactions and his tremendous faith in students set a significant example for the practice of teaching diverse students from working-class populations. And although he has been known to take issue with the academic writings of critical educators today, Kohl's uncompromising political views on schooling and activism were significant in helping to lay the groundwork for the development of critical pedagogical practices in the years to come.

Beginning with his first book, *Death at an Early Age*, the work of long-time social activist Jonathan Kozol consistently examined issues related to racism, class, and schooling through his many efforts to ground his conclusions upon the actual stories and experiences of dispossessed populations in the United States. More importantly, he sought to address the material conditions and expose the social consequences of poverty and racism to those children and their families who were relegated to an existence at the margins of American life. For Kozol, as for educators like Paulo Freire, questions of education could not only be engaged in terms of the theoretical, programmatic or technical, they had to also be reconceptualized along human and spiritual, as well as political grounds. In many ways, Kozol (as did Freire) denounced the immorality of human oppression, particularly as these related to the needs of children across the country.

The internationally recognized philosopher and educator Maxine Greene has played a pivotal role in her work with critical educators in the United States. Often referred to as the mother of aesthetic education, Greene was the first woman philosopher to be hired at Columbia University's Teachers College in 1963. In the midst of the hostility she faced as a woman and a Jew, Greene persevered to become a formidable force in the theoretical arena of aesthetics and its relationship to education and society. Many of her views on education and democracy today still echo thoughts and concerns raised by Dewey almost a century ago. For Greene, democracy constitutes a way of life that must be practiced within both social and political arenas, made living through our relationships, our educational experiences, as well as our moments of beauty and enjoyment out in the world. Greene's contribution to critical pedagogy is most evident by the manner in which her reflective theories of knowledge, human nature, learning, curriculum, schooling, and society have influenced the practice of progressive educators for over thirty years.

In the arena of schooling and the political economy, the work of such noted theorists as Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Martin Carnoy, and Michael Apple all contributed greatly to the forging of a critical pedagogical perspective that upheld the centrality of the economy to the configuration of power relations within schools and society. Through their persistent critique of capitalism, these theorists argued in a variety of ways that the problems associated with schooling were actually tied to the reproduction of a system of social relations that perpetuate the existing structures of domination and

exploitation. Michael Apple, in particular, linked notions of cultural capital with the school's reproduction of official knowledge—knowledge that primarily functioned to sustain the inequality of class relations within schools and society.

Ivan Illich, who in the 1950s worked as a parish priest among the poor Irish and Puerto Rican communities of New York City, has been considered by many to be one of the most radical political and social thinkers in the second half of the twentieth century. His critical writings, including *Deschooling Society* published in 1971, on schooling and society, sought to analyze the institutional structures of industrialization and to provide both rigorous criticism and an alternative to what he perceived as the crisis of a society that endorses growth economy, political centralization, and unlimited technology. In very important ways, Illich's views on education and the institutionalization of everyday life inspired critical education theorists and activists during the latter half of the twentieth century to rethink their practice in schools and communities. Most notable among these educators was the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.

#### THE BRAZILIAN INFLUENCE

While progressive educators and social activists such as Myles Horton, Martin Luther King, Herbert Kohl, Angela Davis, Cesar Chavez, Malcolm X, and many others challenged the disgraceful conditions of oppressed people in the United States, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his contemporary Augusto Boal were also involved in challenging the horrendous conditions they found in the cities and countryside of Brazil—a struggle that was historically linked to the emancipatory efforts of many educators and political activists in other countries across Latin America.

Paulo Freire would be forced to live in exile for over fifteen years for his writings on education and the dispossessed members of Brazilian society. In the early 1970s, Paulo Freire was extended an invitation to come to Harvard University as a visiting professor. It was his presence in the United States during that precise historical moment, along with the translation of his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into English, that became a watershed for radical educators within schools, communities, and labor organizations that were struggling to bring about social change to public health, welfare, and educational institutions across the country.

As a consequence, Paulo Freire is considered by many to be the most influential educational philosopher in the development of critical pedagogical thought and practice. From the 1970s until his death in 1997, Freire continued to publish and speak extensively to educators throughout the United States. Although Freire's writings focused on questions of pedagogy, his thought widely influenced postcolonial theory, ethnic studies, cultural studies, adult education, and theories of literacy, language, and human development.

Most importantly, Freire labored consistently to ground the politics of education within the existing framework of a larger societal milieu.

As with so many of the influential educators previously mentioned, Freire's efforts were never simply confined to discussions of methodology or applications of teaching practice. Instead, Freire forthrightly inserted questions of power, culture, and oppression within the context of schooling. In so doing, he reinforced the Frankfurt School's focus on theory and practice as imperative to the political struggles against exploitation and domination. Through his views on emancipatory education, Freire made central pedagogical questions related to social agency, voice, and democratic participation—questions that strongly inform the recurrent philosophical expressions of critical pedagogical writings even today.

Augusto Boal's book *Theatre of the Oppressed* was released in 1971, the same year as Freire's seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In the 1960s, Boal developed an experimental theater approach whereby the cast would stop a performance and invite members of the audience to provide or demonstrate new suggestions onstage. By so doing, he unexpectedly discovered an effective pedagogical form of praxis that evolved directly from the audience's participation, collective reflection, and the action generated by the participants. Excited and inspired by the process of empowerment he witnessed among the participants, Boal began to develop what was to be known as the "spec-actor" (in contrast to spectator) theater approach.

Seeing the possibilities of his approach as a vehicle for grassroots activism, Boal's work in communities began to give shape to his *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Similar to Freire, Boal's work as cultural activist was repressed by the military coup that came to power during the 1960s. He was arrested, tortured, and eventually exiled for his activities. Boal continued to develop his work in Argentina and later in Paris. He returned to Brazil in 1986, when the military junta was removed from power. Boal's work was first linked to Freire's work in the United States at the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference in 1994. Boal's contribution was to mark a significant turning point for those critical educators and artists who had become frustrated with what they perceived as, on one hand, the deeply theoretical nature of critical pedagogy and, on the other, the absence of more practical and affective strategies to enliven their work. For these critical educators, Boal's theater of the oppressed provided a new avenue upon which to build and rethink their educational practices in schools and communities.

#### GRAMSCI AND FOUCAULT

Although it is impossible to discuss here all the "classical" theorists who influenced the intellectual development of critical pedagogy, the contributions of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault to a critical understanding of education merit some discussion. These philosophers extended the existing under-

standing of power and its impact on the construction of knowledge. Their writings also strengthen the theoretical foundation upon which to conduct critical readings of culture, consciousness, history, domination, and resistance.

Antonio Gramsci, imprisoned by Mussolini during World War II for his active membership in the Communist Party and public rejection of fascism, was deeply concerned with the manner in which domination was undergoing major shifts and changes within advanced industrial Western societies. With his theory of hegemony, Gramsci sought to explain the manner by which this change was being exercised less and less through brutal physical means and more and more through the moral leaders of society (including teachers) who participated in and reinforced universal "commonsense" notions of what is considered to be truth within a society.

This phenomenon can be understood within the context of schooling in the following way. Through the daily implementation of specific norms, expectations, and behaviors that incidentally conserve the interest of those in power, students are ushered into consensus. Gramsci argued that through nourishing such consensus through personal and institutional rewards, students could be socialized to support the interest of the ruling elite, even when such actions were clearly in contradiction with the student's own class interests. As such, this reproduction of ideological hegemony within schools functioned to sustain the hegemonic processes that reproduced cultural and economic domination within the society. This process of reproduction was then perpetuated through what Gramsci termed "contradictory consciousness." However, for Gramsci this was not a clean and neat act of one-dimensional reproduction. Instead, domination existed here as a complex combination of thought and practices in which could also be found the seeds for resistance.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault deeply questioned what he termed "regimes of truth" that were upheld and perpetuated through the manner in which particular knowledge was legitimated within the context of a variety of power relationships within society. However, for Foucault, power did not represent a static entity, but rather an active process constantly at work on our bodies, and our relationships, and our sexuality, as well as on the ways we construct knowledge and meaning in the world. However, it is important to note that power in Foucault's conceptualization is not solely at play in the context of domination, but also in the context of creative acts of resistance—creative acts that are produced as human beings interact across the dynamic of relationships and shaped by moments of dominance and autonomy. Such a view of power challenged the tendency of radical education theorists to think of power solely from the dichotomized standpoint of either domination or powerlessness. As such, Foucault's writings on knowledge and power shed light on a critical understanding of student resistance within the classroom and opened the door to better understanding power relationships within the context of teaching practice.

## THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

Critical educational thought is fundamentally linked to those critical theories of society that emerged from the members of the Frankfurt School and their contemporaries, as they sought to challenge the traditional forms of rationality that defined the concept of meaning and knowledge in the Western world during a very critical moment in the history of the twentieth century. As such, their work was driven by an underlying commitment to the notion that theory, as well as practice, must inform the work of those who seek to transform the oppressive conditions that exist in the world.

The Institute for Social Research (Das Institut für Sozialforschung) was officially established in Frankfurt in 1923 and was the home of the Frankfurt School. The Institute came under the direction of Max Horkheimer in 1930. Although there were a number of other prominent thinkers who worked under the direction of Horkheimer, those most significant to the development of critical social theory included Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse. More recently, the work of Jürgen Habermas was also to receive much attention within the arena of critical theory.

The Institute in its early years was primarily concerned with an analysis of bourgeois society's substructure, but with time its interest focused on the cultural superstructures. This change in the Institute's focus was, undoubtedly, a result of the disruptions and certain fragmentation experienced in the process of emigration and repeated relocation in the 1930s and 1940s—a process that was precipitated by the threat of Nazism, the members' avowedly Marxist orientation, and the fact that most of them were Jews.

One cannot attempt to understand the foundations of critical theory without considering the historical context that influenced its development and shaped the minds of its foremost thinkers. The Frankfurt School came into being as a response to the important political and historical transformations taking place in the early part of the twentieth century. The political shifts in Germany's governing structure had a significant impact on its founders. During the early part of the century, Germany had managed to temporarily contain class conflict. But within two years following the end of World War I, the foundations of the German imperial system were undermined and a republic was declared in Berlin (Held, 1980). What followed were thirteen years of chaotic political struggles between the German Communist Party (KPD) and the more conservative forces of the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

As the KPD became increasingly ineffective in its efforts to organize a majority of the working class, the Social Democratic Leadership of the Weimar Republic supervised the destruction of the competing radical and revolutionary movements. In the process, the SPD not only failed to implement the promised democratization and socialization of production in Germany, but also failed to stop the monopolistic trends of German industrialists and the

reactionary elements that eventually paved the way for the emergence of Nazism. As the forces of the Nazis, under Hitler's control, seized power in Germany, Italy and Spain came under the fascist leaderships of Mussolini and Franco. A similar fate befell the workers' struggles in these countries, where all independent socialist and liberal organizations were suppressed.

In light of the Marxist orientation shared by the members of the Frankfurt School, "the emergence of an antidemocratic political system in the country of the first socialist revolution" (Warren, 1984, 145), consequently, had a profound impact upon the development of critical theory. Moreover, the Russian Revolution had been systematically weakened by foreign interventions, blockades, and civil war, and Lenin's revolutionary vision was rapidly losing ground. After Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin advanced in Russia with the expansion of centralized control and censorship, a process created to maintain European communist parties under Moscow's leadership. In 1939, the Hitler-Stalin pact was enacted representing an ironic historical moment for those committed to the struggle of the working class and the socialist principles espoused by Marx.

A final event that strongly influenced the thinking of the Frankfurt School theorists was the nature and impact of the unconfined forces of advanced capitalism in the West. The rapid development of science and technology and their persuasive penetration into the political and social systems summoned a new and major transformation in the structure of capitalism. This accelerated development of an advanced industrial-technological society represented a serious area of concern.

The major historical and political developments of capitalist society, as well as the rise of bureaucratic communist orthodoxy, affirmed for the founders of critical theory the necessity of addressing two basic needs: 1) the need to develop a new critical social theory within a Marxist framework that could deal with the complex changes arising in industrial-technological, postliberal, capitalist society; and 2) the need to recover the philosophical dimensions of Marxism that had undergone a major economic and materialistic reduction by a new Marxist orthodoxy (Warren, 1984).

The Frankfurt School intended their findings to become a material force in the struggle against domination of all forms. Based upon the conditions they observed, the following questions were central to the work of the Institute (Held, 1980, 35):

The European labor movements did not develop in a unified struggle of workers. What blocked these developments?

Capitalism was a series of acute crises. How could these better be understood? What was the relationship between the political and the economic? Was that relationship changing?

Authoritarianism and the development of bureaucracy seemed increasingly the order of the day. How could the phenomena be comprehended? Nazism and fascism rose to dominate central and southern Europe. How was this possible? How did these movements attain large-scale support?

Social relationships, for example, those created by the family, appeared to be undergoing radical social change. In what directions? How were these affecting individual development?

The arena of culture appeared open to direct manipulation. Was a new type of ideology being formed? If so, how was this affecting everyday life?

Given the fate of Marxism in Russia and western Europe, was Marxism itself nothing other than a state orthodoxy? Was there a social agent capable of progressive change? What possibilities were there for effective socialist practices?

#### PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

In response to many of these questions, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm, and others wrote seminal essays that were to serve as the building blocks for a critical theory of society. It was this critical perspective that ultimately provided the foundation for the philosophical principles that were to determine the set of *heterogeneous* ideas that were later to be known as critical pedagogy. We highlight the use of heterogeneous here because it is important to emphasize that no formula or homogeneous representation exists for the universal implementation of any form of critical pedagogy. In fact, it is precisely this distinguishing factor that constitutes its critical nature, and therefore its most emancipatory and democratic function.

The philosophical heterogeneity of its array of radical expressions is then consolidated only through an underlying and explicit intent and commitment to the unwavering liberation of oppressed populations. Toward this end, a set of principles tied to the radical belief in the historical possibility of change and social transformation can be tentatively fleshed out for the purpose of teaching and coming to better understand what is implied by a critical perspective of education, society, and the world. The following provides a very brief and general introduction to the principles that inform critical pedagogy. However, it is imperative that the reader bear in mind that the multitude of both specific and complex expressions of these philosophical ideas have been articulated through a variety of intellectual traditions—traditions that have sought to explore the relationship between human beings, schools, and society from a myriad of epistemological, political, economic, cultural, ideological, ethical, historical, and aesthetic, as well as methodological, points of reference.

#### CULTURAL POLITICS

Critical pedagogy is fundamentally committed to the development and evolution of a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students. By so doing, this pedagogical perspective seeks to help transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life. Of particular importance, then, is a critical analysis and investigation into the manner in which traditional theories and practices of public schooling thwart or influence the development of a politically emancipatory and humanizing culture of participation, voice, and social action within the classroom. The purpose for this is intricately linked to the fulfillment of what Paulo Freire defined as our “vocation”—to be truly humanized social (cultural) agents in the world.

In an effort to strive for an emancipatory culture of schooling, critical pedagogy calls upon teachers to recognize how schools have historically embraced theories and practices that function to unite knowledge and power in ways that sustain asymmetrical relations of power under the guise of neutral and apolitical views of education—views that are intimately linked to ideologies shaped by power, politics, history, culture, and economics. From this vantage point, schools function as a terrain of ongoing cultural struggle over what will be accepted as legitimate knowledge. In accordance with this notion, a critical pedagogy seeks to address the concept of cultural politics by both legitimizing and challenging students’ experiences and perceptions that shape the histories and socioeconomic realities that give meaning to how students define their everyday lives and how they construct what they perceive as truth.

#### POLITICAL ECONOMY

Critical education contends that, contrary to the traditional view, schools actually work against the class interests of those students who are most politically and economically vulnerable within society. The role of competing economic interests of the marketplace in the production of knowledge and in the structural relationships and policies that shape public schools are recognized as significant factors, particularly in the education of disenfranchised students. From the standpoint of economics, public schools serve to position select groups within asymmetrical power relations that serve to replicate the existing values and privileges of the culture of the dominant class. It is this uncontested relationship between schools and society that critical pedagogy seeks to challenge, unmasking traditional claims that education provides equal opportunity and access for all.

Hence, what is at issue here is the question of class reproduction and how schooling practices are deceptively organized to perpetuate racialized inequalities. This is to say that within the context of critical pedagogy, the relationship between culture and class is intricately linked and cannot be separated within the context of daily life in schools. The concept of class here refers to

the economic, social, ethical, and political relationships that govern particular sectors of the social order. More importantly, critical pedagogy acknowledges the myriad ways in which material conditions within the lives of students and teachers contribute to their understanding of who they are and how they are perceived within schools and society.

#### HISTORICITY OF KNOWLEDGE

Critical pedagogy supports the notion that all knowledge is created within a historical context and it is this historical context that gives life and meaning to human experience. Within the context of this principle, schools must be understood not only within the boundaries of their social practice but within the boundaries of the historical events that inform educational practice. Along these lines, students and the knowledge they bring into the classroom must be understood as historical—that is, being constructed and produced within a particular historical moment and under particular historical conditions.

As such, critical pedagogy urges teachers to create opportunities in which students can come to discover that “there is no historical reality which is not human” (Freire, 1970, p. 125). By so doing, students come to understand themselves as subjects of history and to recognize that conditions of injustice, although historically produced by human beings, can also be transformed by human beings. This concept of student social agency is then tied to a process of collective and self-determined activity. This historical view of knowledge also challenges the traditional emphasis on historical continuities and historical development. Instead, it offers a mode of analysis that stresses the break, discontinuities, conflicts, differences, and tensions in history, all of which serve in bringing to light the centrality of human agency as it presently exists, as well as within the possibilities for change (Giroux, 1983).

#### DIALECTICAL THEORY

In opposition to traditional theories of education that serve to reinforce certainty, conformity, and technical control of knowledge and power, critical pedagogy embraces a dialectical view of knowledge that functions to unmask the connections between objective knowledge and the cultural norms, values, and standards of the society at large. Within this dialectical perspective, all analysis begins first and foremost with human existence and the contradictions and disjunctions that both shape and make its meaning problematic. Hence, the problems of society are not seen as mere random or isolated events, but rather as moments that arise out of the interactive context between the individual and society (McLaren, 1989).

An important emphasis here is that students are encouraged to engage the world within its complexity and fullness, in order to reveal the possibilities of new ways of constructing thought and action beyond how it currently exists. Rooted in a dialectical view of knowledge, critical pedagogy seeks to support the dynamic interactive elements, rather than participate in the formation of

dichotomies and polarizations in thought and practice. By so doing, it supports a view of humans and nature that is relational, an objectivity and subjectivity that is interconnected, and an understanding of theory and practice as coexistent. Most importantly, this perspective resurfaces the power of human activity and human knowledge as both a product and a force in shaping the world, whether it be in the interest of domination or liberation.

#### IDEOLOGY AND CRITIQUE

Ideology can best be understood as the framework of thought that is used in society to give order and meaning to the social and political world in which we live. As important here is the notion that ideology be understood as existing at the deep, embedded psychological structures of the personality. Ideology more often than not manifests itself in the inner histories and experiences that give rise to questions of subjectivity as they are constructed by individual needs, drives, and passions, as well as the changing material conditions and social foundations of society. As such, a critical notion of ideology provides the means for not only a critique of educational curricula, texts, and practices, but the fundamental ethics that inform their production.

As a pedagogical tool, ideology can be used to interrogate and unmask the contradictions that exist between the mainstream culture of the school and the lived experiences and knowledge that students use to mediate the reality of school life. Ideology in this instance provides teachers with the necessary context to examine how their own views about knowledge, human nature, values, and society are mediated through the commonsense assumptions they use to structure classroom experiences. In this way, the principle of ideology in critical pedagogy serves as a starting point for asking questions that will help teachers to evaluate critically their practice and to better recognize how the culture of the dominant class becomes embedded in the hidden curriculum—curriculum that is informed by ideological views that silence students and structurally reproduce the dominant cultural assumptions and practices that thwart democratic education.

#### HEGEMONY

Hegemony refers to a process of social control that is carried out through the moral and intellectual leadership of a dominant sociocultural class over subordinate groups (Gramsci, 1971). Critical pedagogy incorporates this notion of hegemony in order to demystify the asymmetrical power relations and social arrangements that sustain the interest of the ruling class. Moreover, hegemony points to the powerful connection that exists between politics, economics, culture, and pedagogy. Within this context, teachers are challenged to recognize their responsibility to critique and transform those classroom conditions tied to hegemonic processes that perpetuate the economic and cultural marginalization of subordinate groups.

What is important to recognize here is that the process of critique must be understood as an ongoing process, for hegemony is not a static or absolute state. On the contrary, hegemony must be fought for constantly in order to retain its privileged position as the status quo. As a consequence, each time a radical form threatens the integrity of the status quo, generally this element is appropriated, stripped of its transformative intent, and reified into a palatable form. This process serves to maintain the existing power relations intact. Hence, understanding how hegemony functions in society provides critical educators with the basis for understanding not only how the seeds of domination are produced, but also how they can be challenged and overcome through resistance, critique, and social action.

#### RESISTANCE AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY

Critical pedagogy incorporates a theory of resistance in an effort to better explain the complex reasons why many students from subordinate groups consistently fail within the educational system. It begins with the assumption that all people have the capacity and ability to produce knowledge and to resist domination. However, how they choose to resist is clearly influenced and limited by the social and material conditions in which they have been forced to survive and the ideological formations that have been internalized in the process.

The principle of resistance seeks to uncover the degree to which student oppositional behavior is associated with their need to struggle against elements of dehumanization or are simply tied to the perpetuation of their own oppression. As in other aspects of critical pedagogy, the notion of emancipatory interests serves here as a central point of reference in determining when oppositional behavior reflects a moment of resistance that can support counter-hegemonic purposes.

The term *counter-hegemony* is used within critical pedagogy to refer to those intellectual and social spaces where power relationships are reconstructed to make central the voices and experiences of those who have historically existed within the margins of mainstream institutions. This is achieved whenever a counter-hegemonic context is forged out of moments of resistance, through establishing alternative structures and practices that democratize relations of power, in the interest of liberatory possibilities. It is significant to note here that given the powerful and overarching hegemonic political apparatus of advanced capitalist society, there is great pressure often placed upon individuals and groups who, rather than simply conform to the status quo, seek counter-hegemonic alternatives to teaching and learning.

#### PRAXIS: THE ALLIANCE OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

A dialectical view of knowledge supports the notion that theory and practice are inextricably linked to our understanding of the world and the actions we

take in our daily lives. In keeping with this view, all theory is considered with respect to the practical intent of transforming asymmetrical relations of power. Unlike deterministic notions of schooling practice that focus primarily on an instrumental/technical application of theory, praxis is conceived of as self-creating and self-generating free human activity. All human activity is understood as emerging from an ongoing interaction of reflection, dialogue, and action—namely praxis—and as praxis, all human activity requires theory to illuminate it and provide a better understanding of the world as we find it and as it might be.

Hence, within critical pedagogy, all theorizing and truth claims are subject to critique, a process that constitutes analysis and questions that are best mediated through human interaction within democratic relations of power. Critical pedagogy places a strong emphasis on this relationship of question-posing within the educational process. Freire argued that a true praxis is impossible in the undialectical vacuum driven by a separation of the individual from the object of their study. For within the context of such a dichotomy, both theory and practice lose their power to transform reality. Cut off from practice, theory becomes abstraction or “simple verbalism.” Separated from theory, practice becomes ungrounded activity or “blind activism.”

#### DIALOGUE AND CONSCIENTIZATION

The principle of dialogue as best defined by Freire is one of the most significant aspects of critical pedagogy. It speaks to an emancipatory educational process that is above all committed to the empowerment of students through challenging the dominant educational discourse and illuminating the right and freedom of students to become subjects of their world. Dialogue constitutes an educational strategy that centers on the development of critical social consciousness or what Freire termed *conscientização*.

Within the practice of critical pedagogy, dialogue and analysis serve as the foundation for reflection and action. It is this educational strategy that supports a problem-posing approach to education—an approach in which the relationship of students to teacher is, without question, dialogical, each having something to contribute and receive. Students learn from the teachers; teachers learn from the students. Hence, the actual lived experiences cannot be ignored or relegated to the periphery in the process of coming to know. They must be incorporated as part of the exploration of existing conditions and knowledge in order to understand how these came to be and to consider how they might be different.

*Conscientização* or conscientization is defined as the process by which students, as empowered subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities that shape their lives and discover their own capacities to re-create them. This constitutes a recurrent, regenerating process of human interaction that is utilized for constant clarification of the hidden dimensions of reflections and



actions, as students and teachers move freely through the world of their experiences and enter into dialogue once more.

#### CRITIQUES OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

There is no question that the fundamental purpose of this volume is to provide a starting place for the study of critical pedagogy. We have done this through providing a short historical overview of those views that have particularly shaped the manner in which we speak of critical pedagogy today, along with a general description of the philosophical principles that inform a critical theory of pedagogy. However, it would be contrary to its philosophical origins and intent for us not to mention, albeit briefly, some of the fundamental critiques that over the last two decades have fueled major debates within the context of critical pedagogical circles—some of which are included in the articles and bibliographic material contained in this volume.

#### FEMINIST CRITIQUES

Numerous criticisms of critical pedagogy have been rooted in feminist views and articulations of identity, politics, and pedagogy. Some of the most significant critiques have been issued by such notable feminist scholars as Elizabeth Ellsworth, Carmen Luke, Jennifer Gore Patti Lather, and Magda Lewis. As one might instantly recognize in the preceding discussion, the leading recognized scholars considered to have most influenced the development of critical theory and critical pedagogy have all been men, with the exception of Maxine Greene. From this standpoint alone, there has been much suspicion and concern about the failure of critical pedagogy to engage forthrightly questions of women, anchored within the context of female experience and knowledge construction. As such, critical pedagogy has often been accused of challenging the structures and practices of patriarchy in society, solely from a myopic and superficial lens.

Within the context of these critiques, questions have been launched against the underlying *carte blanche* acceptance of the Enlightenment's emphasis on the emancipatory function of cognitive learning that informs the Marxian perspective of reason—a view that underpins critical philosophical views of human beings, knowledge and the world. Along the same lines, there has been concern with the integration of Freudian analytical views within the work of the Frankfurt School—theories that clearly have served as a guiding light for the evolution of critical pedagogical thought. Hence, in an effort to challenge the privileging of reason as the ultimate sphere upon which knowledge is constructed, feminists have passionately argued for the inclusion of personal biography, narratives, and the explicit engagement with the historical and political location of the knowing subject—all aspects that feminist theorists believe are essential to understanding the world and transforming the sexual politics that have limited the participation of women as full and equal contributing members of society.

#### THE LANGUAGE OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

In very practical ways, the language of critical pedagogy has often been a serious point of contention not only among feminist scholars but also working-class educators who believed that theoretical language ultimately functioned to create a new form of oppression, rather than to liberate those who historically had found themselves at the margins of classical intellectual discourse. Hence, the language was not only critiqued in the early days for its incessant use of the masculine pronoun in reference to both male and female subjects, but for its elitism and consequent inaccessibility to those whose practice the language was attempting to inform. On one hand, these critiques challenged critical theorists to rethink the direction of their work and reconsider alternative strategies and approaches to the articulation of theoretical concerns. On another, it encouraged critical theorists to engage forthrightly with the deeper questions that were being stirred by the debate in terms of literacy, class, gender, culture, power, and the emancipatory potential of diverse political projects within the context of different traditions of struggle and pedagogy.

#### CRITIQUES FROM THE BORDERLANDS

As might be expected, similar concerns were raised among those who were intimately involved in the struggle against racialized inequalities within schools and society. Although it cannot be denied that the writings of feminist scholars of color, such as Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Gloria Anzaldúa, Trinh Minh-Ha, and bell hooks, have had an impact on some of the contemporary perspectives on gender, sexuality, and race in critical pedagogy, the work of these scholars remained primarily linked to ethnic, cultural or feminist studies, except perhaps for the writings of bell hooks.

Hence, another “obvious” characteristic of these men once again provoked some controversy—the fact that most of them are “white.” At moments in the history of critical pedagogy, this factor became a major source of contention, as concerns were raised about the failure of critical pedagogy to explicitly treat questions of subordinate cultures from the specific location of racialized populations themselves. When such concerns were raised they were often silenced by accusations of “essentialism.” Hence, questions of voice, agency, and identity politics fueled massive debates that often created great suspicion and strife in efforts to work across diverse cultural perspectives.

From such debates sprang the intersectionality argument, grounded in the notion that critical theorists with their link to Marxist analysis and classical European philosophical roots were not only ethnocentric but reductionistic. Feminists and critics of color insisted that questions of race/gender/sexuality be given equal weight in any critical analysis of schooling in the United States, in an effort to not only produce different readings of history but to reclaim power for those groups that had existed historically at the margins of mainstream life.

## THE POSTMODERN TWIST

In many ways the impact of such postmodernist notions as intersectionality upon the direction of critical pedagogy have been seen by some as truly a double-edged sword. As postmodernist theories brought into question many of the philosophical “sacred cows” of the western Enlightenment, they also stroked the coals of identity politics. Postmodern theories sought to move away from all-consuming metanarratives, rejecting traditional notions of totality, reason, and universality of absolute knowledge. As a consequence, the boundaries of traditional configurations of power and their impact on what constituted legitimate knowledge were suddenly pushed wide open by new methods of deconstruction and reconstruction in the intellectual act of border crossing.

Although such a view appeared to hold real promise for the serious theoretical engagement of questions of cultural hybridity, racialized subjects, sexualities, and the politics of difference, its intense fragmenting influence on formally effective organizing strategies across communities of difference led to systematic dismantling of former political visions—political visions that could have potentially offered some unifying direction to our diverse political projects. As a consequence, the educational left found itself in a disheartening state of disarray, tension, and befuddlement. What is most unfortunate is that this philosophical shift in our understanding of diversity and the multicultural body politic often failed to acknowledge the deep oppressive or privileging similarities at work among members of the same socioeconomic class—a factor that had functioned historically as a significant common ground for social justice struggles in the United States and around the world.

## THE RETREAT FROM CLASS

For almost a decade, postmodernist views dominated much of the debate as post-civil rights education activists attempted to stave off the impact of the rapidly growing conservative trend in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Critical theorists, who were particularly concerned with the totalizing impact of capitalism, its growing internationalization of capital, and its deleterious impact on working-class people in the United States and abroad, lamented the retreat from class in postmodern writings about issues of culture, race, gender, and sexuality. The “postmodern” trend to see “power everywhere and nowhere” (Naiman, 1996) signaled for many a dangerous form of political abstraction that failed to acknowledge forthrightly the manner in which advanced capitalism was very concretely whipping wildly through the global sphere, well-consolidated in its neoliberal efforts to perpetuate the structures of economic domination and exploitation.

Without question, there were critical pedagogical theorists who were also tremendously concerned about the destructive impact that this intensified globalization of the economy was having upon the commercialization of

public schooling. In light of these growing concerns, critical theorists such as Michael Apple, Stanley Aronowitz, Jean Anyon, Peter McLaren, Alex Molnar, and others, urged educators to remain ever cognizant to the centrality of class relations in shaping the conditions students experienced within schools and communities. As a consequence, they worked more rigorously to draw attention to the continuing significance of class analysis by challenging the changing nature of the “postindustrial” economy and its consequences on education. However, in the foreground of this concern remained questions of how to engage class as both an analytical and political category, without falling prey to “red-herring” accusations of economic determinism and reductionism. In response, a number of critical educators began to rethink post-civil rights notions of class, race, and gender, in an effort to begin formulating new language for our understanding of gendered and racialized class relations and their impact on education. Hence, at a time in our history when critical educators most needed an economic understanding of schooling, a revived historical materialist approach began to reinvigorate critical educational debates in the age of “globalization.”

## “CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IS ONLY ABOUT POLITICS”

There are many traditional, as well as liberal, educators and public school administrators who adamantly dismiss the value of critical pedagogy. It is not uncommon to hear such folks rail bitterly against the political nature of critical pedagogy, insisting sarcastically that critical pedagogy has little to no practical value within the classroom. Critical educators would argue that such expressions of opposition are, more often than not, disingenuous proclamations intended to obstruct the establishment of critical approaches to teaching and learning within schools—approaches that seek to transform the oppressive power relations hidden within those educational structures, practices, and relationships that deceptively function to retain control over the majority. ]

More importantly, this critique is often generated by the fear, confusion, and hysteria generated among school officials, mainstream educators, and scholars within schools, communities, and universities when teachers, students, or parents voice oppositional views and begin to challenge the undemocratic contradictions at work in public schools. The tensions are usually heightened when those in power attempt to obstruct efforts by teachers, students, and parents to integrate their voices and participation within the practice of public schooling—an act that if successful might cause substantive changes to business as usual. Here we must note that what is brought into question by the powerful is the legitimacy of critical social action among subordinated groups. Hence, overtures for people to conduct themselves in reasonable and civilized ways, is too often used to not only truncate the expression of legitimate anger, frustration, and concerns, but to deflect the possibility of any

substantive dialogue that might potentially lead to fundamentally new ideas, new language, new practices, and perhaps even new relationships of power within schools.

In response to the political stress and strain faced by many critical educators for their particular perspectives on teaching and learning, Paulo Freire always insisted that it is a political imperative for critical educators to develop a strong command of their particular academic discipline, whether that be within preschool or primary education, the middle or high-school grades, or higher education. By so doing, they can competently teach the "official transcript" of their field, while simultaneously creating the opportunities for students to engage critically in classroom content from the standpoint of their own knowledge and the events and experiences that comprise their living history.

#### THE FUTURE OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Understanding critical pedagogy within a long tradition of progressive educational movements and ongoing struggles offers a possible safeguard against the temptation to inadvertently rely and reduce critical pedagogy to a teaching "method." This is particularly at issue in the current conservative climate that plagues all educational institutions from preschool to universities. Within this reactionary moment in U.S. history, there are those who, in an effort to protect themselves from the malignant criticism and opposition of conservative administrators, colleagues, students, or parents, are willing to placate the opposition by offering more palatable readings of critical pedagogy. Given the nature of schooling and the current conditions that shape the political landscape, such survival politics of appropriation among progressive educators is to be expected. Hence, we should not be too surprised or become too discouraged when we find an acceleration of such efforts. Rather, in keeping with the tradition of critical pedagogy, it signals the importance of learning to read the formal and informal power relationships at work within schools. But even more importantly, it serves as a reminder that no real political struggle can be waged by one lone voice in the wilderness. Emancipatory efforts within schools must be linked to collective emancipatory efforts within and across communities.

Although we have included the work of many prominent thinkers in the tradition of critical theory, critical pedagogy as a school of thought is very often associated with the work of Paulo Freire. Yet, as we have attempted to illustrate here, critical pedagogy does not begin and end with Freire. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Freire's influence as a Brazilian or Latin American, that is to say not "white" or European, played a significant role in the inspiration his writings brought to many radical educators of color in this country and other parts of the world. His presence, consciously or unconsciously, signaled and signified our right to express and define, on our own terms, the educational needs of working-class and racialized students in the United States. But, we

also found in Freire a living politics that defied the iconography of his own contribution to the political project of critical pedagogy. As such, his ethics sought to reinforce the necessity for greater solidarity among critical theorists and critical educators in the years to come—a solidarity that must be willing to break with the politics of competitiveness, internalized notions of superiority, tendencies to demonize difference, and our "colonized" dependence and yearning to be recognized or legitimated by those who hold official power. Only through such a politics of solidarity can critical pedagogy potentially inform the building of an effective emancipatory educational and social movement for a new millennium.

And lastly, in light of a long-standing historical tradition of progressive educational efforts in the United States and around the world, we can safely guarantee that the underlying commitment and intent of critical pedagogy will continue as long as there are those who are forced to exist in conditions of suffering and alienation, and those who refuse to accept such conditions as a natural evolution of humankind.

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