Critical Pedagogy in dark times

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Resumen

En todo el mundo, las fuerzas del neoliberalismo, o lo que podría denominarse la última fase del capitalismo depredador, van por el camino de desmantelar los beneficios sociales garantizados históricamente y otorgados por el estado benefactor. Esta es una razón de peso para que los educadores y otros aborden cuestiones sociales importantes y defiendan la educación pública y superior como esferas públicas democráticas; necesitan un nuevo lenguaje político y pedagógico para abordar los cambiantes contextos y cuestiones y desarrollar formas de pedagogía crítica capaces de desafiar al neoliberalismo y a otras tradiciones antidemocráticas. Se abordan en este artículo la noción de los docentes como intelectuales públicos, la pedagogía y el proyecto de democracia en rebelión, la pedagogía y la política de la responsabilidad, y finalmente la pedagogía como una forma de resistencia y esperanza educada. La esperanza educada es la base para dignificar nuestra labor como intelectuales; ofrece el conocimiento crítico ligado a un cambio social democrático, está arraigada en responsabilidades compartidas y permite a docentes y estudiantes reconocer la ambivalencia y la incertidumbre como dimensiones fundamentales del aprendizaje. Esta esperanza ofrece la posibilidad de pensar más allá de lo dado – y deja abierto un terreno pedagógico en el cual docentes y estudiantes pueden comprometerse en la crítica, el diálogo y una lucha por la justicia social.

Palabras clave: pedagogía crítica, democracia, responsabilidad, esperanza educada.

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Abstract
Across the globe, the forces of neoliberalism, or what might be called the latest stage of predatory capitalism, are on the march dismantling the historically guaranteed social provisions provided by the welfare state. This is all the more reason for educators and others to address important social issues and to defend public and higher education as democratic public spheres; educators need a new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues developing forms of critical pedagogy capable of challenging neoliberalism and other antidemocratic traditions. This paper presents the notion of teachers as public intellectuals, pedagogy and the project of insurrectional democracy, pedagogy and the politics of responsibility, and finally, pedagogy as a form of resistance and educated hope. Educated hope provides the basis for dignifying our labor as intellectuals; it offers up critical knowledge linked to democratic social change, it is rooted in shared responsibilities, and allows teachers and students to recognize ambivalence and uncertainty as fundamental dimensions of learning. Such hope offers the possibility of thinking beyond the given—and lays open a pedagogical terrain in which teachers and students can engage in critique, dialogue, and a struggle for social justice.

Key words: critical pedagogy, democracy, responsibility, educated hope.

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Introduction

Across the globe, the forces of neoliberalism, or what might be called the latest stage of predatory capitalism, are on the march dismantling the historically guaranteed social provisions provided by the welfare state, defining profit making as the essence of democracy, increasing the role of corporate money in politics, waging an assault on unions, expanding the military-security state, promoting widening inequalities in wealth and income, fostering the erosion of civil liberties, and undercutting public faith in the

defining institutions of democracy[1]. As market mentalities and moralities tighten their grip on all aspects of society, democratic institutions and public spheres are being downsized, if not altogether disappearing. As these institutions vanish –from public schools to health care centers– there is also a serious erosion of the discourses of community, justice, equality, public values, and the common good.

We increasingly live in societies based on the vocabulary of 'choice' and a denial of reality – a denial of massive inequality, social disparities, the irresponsible concentration of power in relatively few hands, and a growing machinery of social death and culture of cruelty[2]. As power becomes global and is removed from local and nation-based politics, more and more individuals and groups are being defined by a free floating class of ultra-rich and corporate power brokers as disposable, redundant, and irrelevant. Consequently, there is a growing number of people, especially young people, who increasingly inhabit zones of hardship, suffering, and terminal exclusion.

This is all the more reason for educators and others to address important social issues and to defend public and higher education as democratic public spheres. We live in a world in which everything is now privatized, transformed into "spectacular spaces of consumption," and subject to the vicissitudes of the military-security state[3]. One consequence is the emergence of what the late Tony Judt called an "eviscerated society"—"one that is stripped of the thick mesh of mutual obligations and social responsibilities to be found in" any viable democracy[4]. This grim reality has been called a "failed sociality"-- a failure in the power of the civic imagination, political will, and open democracy[5]. It is also part of a politics that strips the social of any democratic ideals.

The ideological script is now familiar: there is no such thing as the common good; market values become the template for shaping all aspects of society; the free possessive individual has no obligations to anything beyond his or her self-interest; market fundamentalism trumps democratic values; the government, and particularly the welfare state, are the arch enemies of freedom; private interests negate public values; consumerism becomes the only obligation of citizenship; law and order is the new language for mobilizing shared fears rather than shared responsibilities and war becomes the all-embracing organizing principle for developing society and the economy[6].

Given this current crisis, educators need a new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing a world in which capital draws upon an unprecedented convergence of resources–financial, cultural, political, economic, scientific, military, and technological–to exercise powerful and diverse forms of control. If educators and others are to counter global capitalism's increased ability to separate the traditional sphere of politics from the now transnational reach of power, it is crucial to develop educational approaches that reject a collapse of the distinction between market liberties and civil liberties, a market economy and a market society. This suggests developing forms of critical pedagogy capable of challenging neoliberalism and other anti-democratic traditions including the increasing criminalization of social problems such as homelessness, while resurrecting a radical democratic project that provides the basis for imagining a life beyond the "dream world" of capitalism. Under such circumstances, education becomes more than high stakes testing, an obsession with accountability schemes, an audit culture, zero tolerance policies, and a site for simply training students for the workforce. At stake here is recognizing the power of education in creating the formative culture necessary to both challenge the various threats being mobilized against the very idea of justice and democracy while also fighting for those public spheres, ideals, values, and policies that offer alternative modes of identity, social relations, and politics.

In both conservative and progressive discourses pedagogy is often treated simply as a set of strategies and skills to use in order to teach prespecified subject matter. In this context, pedagogy becomes synonymous with teaching as a technique or the practice of a craft-like skill. Any viable notion of critical pedagogy must reject this definition and its endless slavish imitations even when they are claimed as part of a radical discourse or project. In opposition to the instrumental reduction of pedagogy to a method—which has no language for relating the self to public life, social responsibility or the demands of citizenship--critical pedagogy illuminates the relationships among knowledge, authority, and power[7]. For instance, it raises questions regarding who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge. Is the production of

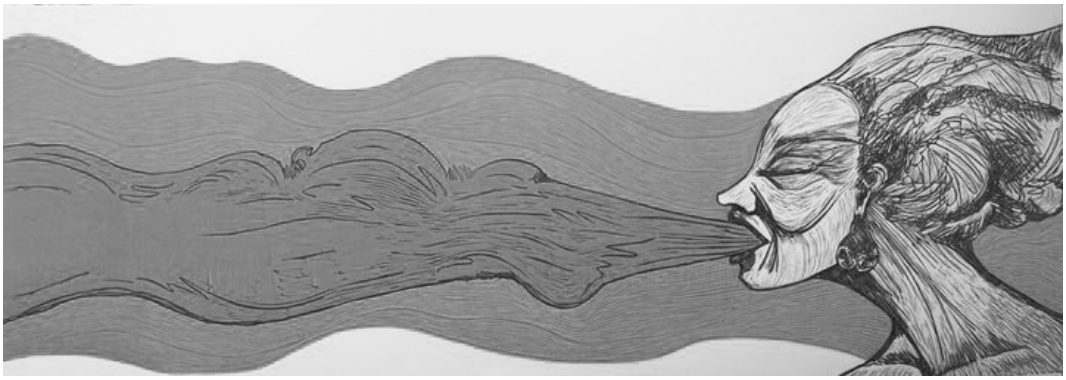
knowledge and curricula in the hands of teachers, textbook companies, corporate interests, or other forces? Central to any viable notion that what makes a pedagogy critical is, in part, the recognition that pedagogy is always a deliberate attempt on the part of educators to influence how and what knowledges and subjectivities are produced within particular sets of social relations. In this case, it draws attention to the ways in which knowledge, power, desire, and experience are produced under specific basic conditions of learning and in doing so rejects the notion that teaching is just a method or is removed from matters of values, norms, and power.

This approach to critical pedagogy does not reduce educational practice to the mastery of methodologies, it stresses, instead, the importance of understanding what actually happens in classrooms and other educational settings by raising questions regarding: what the relationship is between learning and social change, what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and in what direction should one desire. Of course, the language of critical pedagogy does something more. Pedagogy is simultaneously about the knowledge and practices teachers and students might engage in together and the values, social relations, and visions such practices legitimate.

Pedagogy is a moral and political practice that is always implicated in power relations because it offers particular versions and visions of civic life, community, the future, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment. As my late colleague Roger Simon observed, pedagogy is "an introduction to, preparation for, and legitimation of particular forms of social life and always presupposes a vision of the future. But it does more, it also "represents a version of our own dreams for ourselves, our children, and our communities. But such dreams are never neutral; they are always someone's dreams and to the degree that they are implicated in organizing the future for others they always have a moral and political dimension." It is in this respect that any discussion of pedagogy must begin with a discussion of educational practice as a particular way in which a sense of identity, place, worth, and above all value is informed by practices which organize knowledge and meaning[8].

Central to my argument is the assumption that politics is not only about power, but also, as Cornelius Castoriadis points out, "has to do with political judgements and value choices"[9], indicating that questions of civic education and critical pedagogy (learning how to become a skilled citizen) are central to the struggle over political agency and democracy. In this instance, critical pedagogy emphasizes critical reflection, bridging the gap between learning and everyday life, understanding the connection between power and difficult knowledge, and extending democratic rights and identities by using the resources of history. However, among many educators and social theorists, there is a widespread refusal to recognize that this form of education not only takes place in schools, but is also part of what can be called the educative nature of the culture. That is, there are a range of cultural institutions extending from the mainstream media to new digital screen cultures that engage in what I have called forms of public pedagogy, which are central for either expanding and enabling political and civic agency or shutting them down.

Expanding critical pedagogy as a mode of public pedagogy suggests producing modes of knowledge and social practices in a variety of sites that not only affirm oppositional thinking, dissent, and cultural work but also offer opportunities to mobilize instances of collective outrage and collective action. Such mobilisation opposes glaring material inequities and the growing cynical belief that today's culture of investment and finance makes it *impossible* to address many of the major social problems facing the USA, Canada, Latin America, and the larger world. Most importantly, such work points to the link between civic education, critical pedagogy, and modes of oppositional political agency that are pivotal to creating a politics that promotes democratic values, relations, autonomy and social change. Hints of such a politics is already evident in the various approaches developed by the Occupy Movement in the U.S., the student movement in Chile, along with pedagogical strategies developed by the Quebec protesters. Borrowing a line from Rachel Donadio, these young protestors are raising questions about "what happens to democracy when banks become more powerful than political institutions?"[10] What kind of society allows economic injustice and massive inequality to run wild in a society allowing drastic cuts in education and public services? What does it mean when students face not just tuition hikes but a lifetime of financial debt while gov-



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ernments in Canada, Chile, and the U.S. spend trillions on weapons of death and needless wars? What kind of education does it take both in and out of schools to recognize the emergence of various economic, political, cultural, and social forces that point to the dissolution of democracy and the possible emergence of a new kind of authoritarian state?

Rather than viewing teaching as technical practice, pedagogy in the broadest critical sense is premised on the assumption that learning is not about processing received knowledge but actually transforming it as part of a more expansive struggle for individual rights and social justice. The fundamental challenge facing educators within the current age of neoliberalism, militarism, and religious fundamentalism is to provide the conditions for students to address how knowledge is related to the power of both self-definition and social agency. In part, this suggests providing students with the skills, ideas, values, and authority necessary for them to nourish a substantive democracy, recognize anti-democratic forms of power, and to fight deeply rooted injustices in a society and world founded on systemic economic, racial, and gendered inequalities. I want to take up these issues by addressing a number of related pedagogical concerns, including the notion of teachers as public intellectuals, pedagogy and the project of insurrectional democracy, pedagogy and the politics of responsibility, and finally, pedagogy as a form of resistance and educated hope.

The Responsibility of Teachers as Public Intellectuals

In the age of irresponsible privatization, unchecked individualism, celebrity culture, unfettered consumerism, and a massive flight from moral responsibility, it has become more and more difficult to acknowledge that educators and other cultural workers bear an enormous responsibility in opposing the current threat to the planet and everyday life by bringing democratic political culture back to life. Lacking a self-consciously democratic political focus or project, teachers are often reduced either to the role of a technician or functionary engaged in formalistic rituals, unconcerned with the disturbing and urgent problems that confront the larger society or the consequences of one's pedagogical practices and research undertakings. In opposition to this model, with its claims to and conceit of political neutrality, I argue that teachers and academics should combine the mutually interdependent roles of critical educator and active citizen. This requires finding ways to connect the practice of classroom teaching with the operations of power in the larger society and to provide the conditions for students to view themselves as critical agents capable of making those who exercise authority and power answerable for their actions. The role of a critical education is not to train students solely for jobs, but also to educate them to question critically the institutions, policies, and values that shape their lives, relationships to others, and myriad connections to the larger world.

I think Stuart Hall is on target here when he insists that educators also have a responsibility to provide students with "critical knowledge that has to be ahead of traditional knowledge: it has to be better than anything that traditional knowledge can produce, because only serious ideas are going to stand up"[11]. At the same time, he insists on the need for educators to "actually engage, contest, and learn from the best that is locked up in other traditions," especially those attached to

traditional academic paradigms[12]. It is also important to remember that education as a form of educated hope is not simply about fostering critical consciousness but also about teaching students as Zygmunt Bauman has put it, to take responsibility for one's responsibilities, be they personal, political, or global. Students should be made aware of the ideological and structural forces that promote needless human suffering while also recognizing that it takes more than awareness to resolve them.

This is a pedagogy in which educators are neither afraid of controversy nor the willingness to make connections that are otherwise hidden, nor are they afraid of making clear the connection between private troubles and broader social problems. One of the most important tasks for educators engaged in critical pedagogy is to teach students how to translate private issues into public considerations. One measure of the demise of vibrant democracy and the corresponding impoverishment of political life can be found in the increasing inability of a society to make private issues public, to translate private problems into social issues. As the public collapses into the personal, the personal becomes "the only politics there is, the only politics with a tangible referent or emotional valence"[13]. Under such circumstances, the language of the social is either devalued or ignored, as public life is often reduced to a form of pathology or deficit (as in public schools, public transportation, public welfare) and all dreams of the future are modeled increasingly around the narcissistic, privatized, and self-indulgent needs of consumer culture and the dictates of the alleged free market. Similarly, all problems regardless of whether they are structural or caused by larger social forces are now attributed to individual failings, matters of character, or individual ignorance. In this case, poverty becomes a matter of laziness, choice, and flawed character.

Critical Pedagogy as a Project of Insurrectional Democracy

In opposition to the increasingly dominant views of education and pedagogy, I want to argue for a transformative pedagogy–rooted in what might be called a project of resurgent and insurrectional democracy– one that relentlessly questions the kinds of labor, practices, and forms of production that are enacted in public and higher education. The concept of the project in this sense speaks to the recognition that any pedagogical practice presupposes some notion of the future, prioritises some forms of identification over others, upholds selective modes of social relations, and values some modes of knowing over others (think about how business schools are held in high esteem while schools of education are disdained and even the object in some cases of contempt). At the same time, such a pedagogy does not offer guarantees as much as it recognizes that its own position is grounded in modes of authority, values, and ethical considerations that must be constantly debated for the ways in which they both open up and close down democratic relations, values, and identities.

Such a project should be relational and contextual, as well as self-reflective and theoretically rigorous. By relational, I mean that the current crisis of schooling must be understood in relation to the broader assault that is being waged against all aspects of democratic public life. At the same time, any critical comprehension of those wider forces that shape public and higher education must also be supplemented by attentiveness to the historical and conditional nature of pedagogy itself. This suggests that pedagogy can never be treated as a fixed set of principles and practices that can be applied indiscriminately across a variety of pedagogical sites. Pedagogy is not some recipe that can be imposed on all classrooms. On the contrary, it must always be contextually defined, allowing it to respond specifically to the conditions, formations, and problems that arise in various sites in which education takes place. Such a project suggests recasting pedagogy as a project that is indeterminate, open to constant revision, and constantly in dialogue with its own assumptions.

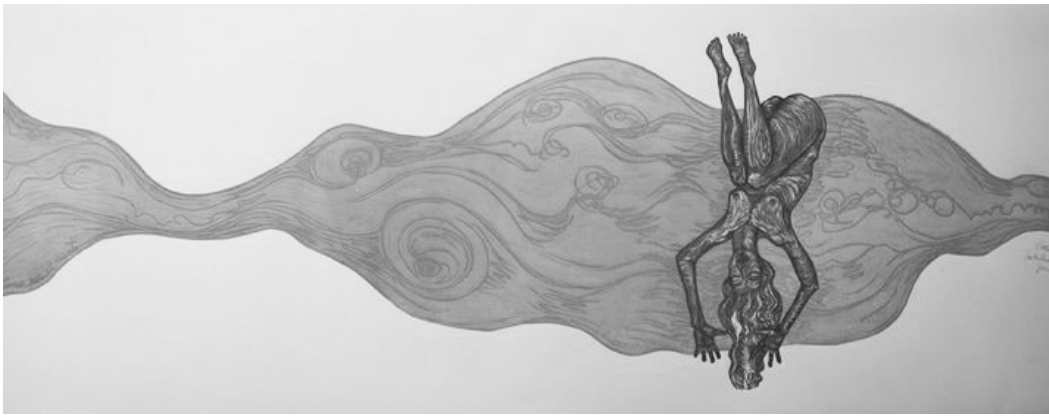
Ethically, educators need to cast a critical eye on those classroom knowledges and social relations that define themselves through a conceptual purity and political innocence that clouds the fact that the alleged neutrality on which they stand is already grounded in ethico-political choices. Neutral, objective education is an oxymoron. It does not exist outside of relations of power, values, and politics. Ethics on the pedagogical front demands an openness to the other, a willingness to engage a "politics of possibility" through a continual critical engagement with texts, images, events, and other registers of meaning as they are transformed into pedagogical practices both

within and outside of the classroom[14]. Pedagogy is never innocent and if it is to be understood and problematized as a form of academic labor, educators have the opportunity not only to critically question and register their own subjective involvement in how and what they teach, but also resist all calls to depoliticize pedagogy through appeals to either scientific objectivity or ideological dogmatism. This suggests the need for educators to rethink the cultural and political baggage they bring to each educational encounter; it also highlights the necessity of making educators ethically and politically accountable for the stories they produce, the claims they make upon public memory, and the images of the future they deem legitimate. Hence, crucial to any viable notion of critical pedagogy is the necessity for critical educators to be attentive to the ethical dimensions of their own practice.

Critical Pedagogy and the Promise of a Democracy to Come

As an act of intervention, critical pedagogy needs to be grounded in a project that not only problematizes its own location, mechanisms of transmission, and effects, but also functions as part of a wider project to help students think critically about how existing social, political, and economic arrangements might be better suited to address the promise of a radical democracy as an anticipatory rather than messianic goal. The late Jacques Derrida suggested that the social function of intellectuals as well as any viable notion of education should be grounded in a vibrant politics which makes the promise of democracy a matter of concrete urgency. For Derrida, making visible a "democracy" which is to come as opposed to that which presents itself in its name provides a referent for both criticizing everywhere what parades as democracy--"the current state of all so-called democracy"–and for critically assessing the conditions and possibilities for democratic transformation[15]. In this instance, a transformative pedagogy, articulated through the project of radical democracy, resists the increasing depoliticization of the citizenry, provides a language to challenge the politics of accommodation, and rejects defining education through the logic of privatization, commodification, religious dogma, and instrumental rationality. Such a pedagogy refuses to define citizens as simply consuming subjects, and actively opposes the view of teaching as market-driven practice and learning as a form of training. Understood as a form of educated hope, pedagogy in this sense is not an antidote to politics, a nostalgic yearning for a better time, or for some "inconceivably alternative future." Instead, it is an "attempt to find a bridge between the present and future in those forces within the present which are potentially able to transform it"[16].

In opposition to dominant forms of education and pedagogy that simply reinvent the future in the interest of a present in which ethical principles are scorned and the essence of democracy is reduced to the imperatives of the bottom line, critical pedagogy attempts to provoke students to deliberate, be thoughtful, engage in critical dialogue, address important social issues and cultivate a range of capacities that enable them to move beyond the world they already know without insisting on world trapped in circles of certainty, rigidity, and orthodoxy.



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What educators should challenge in the current historical conjuncture is the attempt on the part of neoliberals to either define democracy exclusively as a liability or to enervate its substantive ideals by reducing it to the imperatives and freedoms of the marketplace. This requires that educators consider the political and pedagogical importance of struggling over the meaning and definition of democracy and situate such a debate within an expansive notion of human rights, social provisions, civil liberties, equity, and economic justice. What must be challenged at all costs is the increasingly dominant view propagated by neoliberal gurus such as Ayn Rand and Milton Friedman that unbridled individualism, self-interest, and selfishness are the supreme values in shaping human agency, profit making is the most important practice in a democracy, and that accumulating material goods the essence of the good life. Such a pedagogy has enormous power in teaching students how to influence those who already have power and to inspire and mobilize those who don't. Most importantly, critical pedagogy should provide the conditions for students come to grips with their own power, master the best histories and legacies of education available, learn to think critically and be willing to hold authority accountable. But, once again, changing attitudes is not enough. Students should also be pressed to exercise a fearsome form of social responsibility as engaged citizens willing to struggle for social, economic, and political justice.

Defending public and higher education as vital democratic spheres is necessary to develop and nourish the proper balance between public values and commercial power, between identities founded on democratic principles and identities steeped in forms of competitive, self-interested individualism that celebrate selfishness, profit making, and greed. Educators also must reconsider the critical roles they might take up within public and higher education to oppose those approaches to schooling that corporatize, privatize, and bureaucratize the teaching process. A critical pedagogy should, in part, be premised on the assumption that educators vigorously resist any attempt to deskill them, weaken their role in shaping governing structures, and define them as simply entrepreneurs. Instead, educators might redefine their roles as engaged public intellectuals capable of teaching students the language of critique and possibility as a precondition for social agency. Such a redefinition of purpose, meaning, and politics suggests that educators critically interrogate the fundamental link between what we know and how we act, the connection between, pedagogical practices and social consequences, and the complex relationship between authority and civic responsibility. It also means eliminating those modes of corporate governance in the public schools and higher education that reduce teachers to the status of clerks, technicians, and with respect to higher education a subaltern class of part-time workers, with little power, few benefits, and excessive teaching loads.

What has become clear in this current climate of casino capitalism is that the corporatization of education functions so as to cancel out the teaching of democratic values, impulses, and practices of a civil society by either devaluing or absorbing them within the logic of the market. Educators need a critical language to address these challenges to public and higher education. But they also need to join with other groups outside of the spheres of public and higher education in order to create broad national and international social movements that share a willingness to defend education as a civic value and public good and to engage in a broader struggle to deepen the imperatives of democratic public life. The quality of educational reform can, in part, be gauged by the caliber of public discourse concerning the role that education plays in furthering, not the market driven agenda of corporate interests, but the imperatives of critical agency, social justice, and an operational democracy.

Educators can highlight the performative character of education as an act of intervention in the world, one that moves beyond simple matters of critique and understanding. Pedagogy is not simply about competency or teaching young people knowledge, skills, and values, it is also about the possibility of interpretation as an act of intervention in the world. Within this perspective, critical pedagogy foregrounds the diverse conditions under which authority, knowledge, values, and subject positions are produced and interact within unequal relations of power [some kids have Olympic swimming pools while others endure holes in their classroom ceilings]; it also problematizes the ideologically laden and often contradictory roles and social functions that educators assume within the classroom [such as cop, educators, salesperson, etc.] Pedagogy in this view also stresses the labor conditions necessary for teacher autonomy, cooperation, decent work-

ing conditions, and the relations of power necessary to give teachers and students the capacity to restage power in productive ways–ways that point to self-development, self-determination, and social agency.

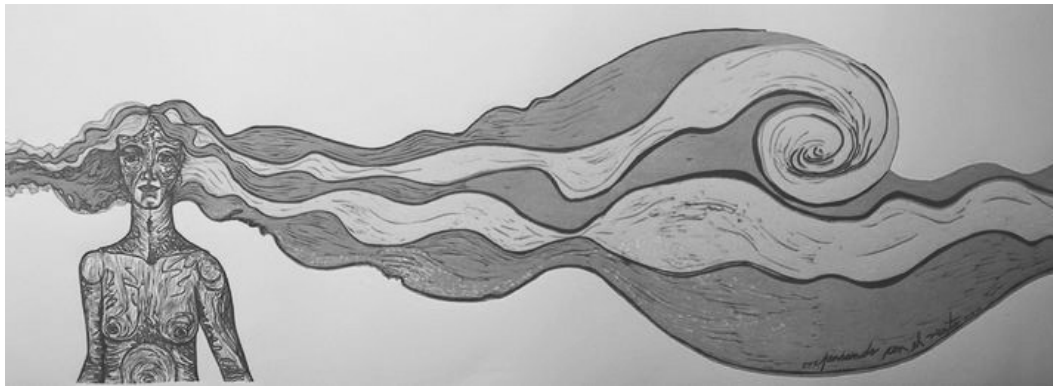
Critical Pedagogy and the Issue of Authority

In opposition to some misrepresentations of Paulo Freire's work –whom I worked with for over 17 years– critical pedagogy is more than a conversation between students and teachers and should not suggest that educators renounce their authority. On the contrary, it is precisely by recognizing that teaching is always directive-- that is, an act of intervention inextricably mediated through particular forms of authority that teachers *can* offer students –for whatever use they wish to make of them– a variety of analytic tools, diverse historical traditions, and a wide range of knowledge. This is a form of authority that opens up the possibility for dialogue, exchange, and thoughtfulness while refusing to collapse into a pedagogy of opinions, uncritical articulations of experience, or other uncritical modes of exchange. This is a far cry from suggesting that critical pedagogy define itself either within the grip of a self-righteous mode of authority or be completely removed from any sense of commitment whatsoever [Florida banned interpretation of history—just present the facts]

Educators must deliberate, make decisions, take positions, and in doing so recognize that authority "is the very condition for intellectual work" and pedagogical interventions[17]. Authority in this perspective in not simply on the side of oppression, but is used to intervene and shape the space of teaching and learning to provide students with a range of possibilities for challenging a society's commonsense assumptions, and for analyzing the interface between their own everyday lives and those broader social formations that bear down on them. Authority, at best, becomes both a referent for legitimating a commitment to a particular vision of pedagogy and a critical referent for a kind of auto-critique. It demands consideration of how authority functions within specific relations of power regarding its own promise to provide students with a public space where they can learn, debate, and engage critical traditions in order to imagine otherwise and develop discourses that are crucial for defending vital social institutions as a public good. At issue here is a pedagogical practice that should provide the conditions for students to learn and narrate themselves and for teachers to be learners attentive to the histories, knowledge, and experiences that students bring to the classroom and any other sphere of learning.

While pedagogy can be understood performatively as an event where many things can happen in the service of learning, it is crucial to address the importance of democratic classroom relations that encourage dialogue, deliberation, and the power of students to raise questions. Moreover, such relations suggest using authority reflexively to provide the conditions for students to exercise intellectual rigor, theoretical competence, and informed judgments. Thus students can think critically about the knowledge they gain and what it means to act on such knowledge in order to expand their sense of agency as part of a broader project of increasing both "the scope of their freedoms" and "the operations of democracy"[18]. What students learn and how they learn should amplify what it means to experience democracy from a position of possibility, affirmation, and critical engagement. In part, this suggests that educators develop pedagogical practices that open up the terrain of the political while simultaneously encouraging students to "think better about how arrangements might be otherwise"[19].

At its best, critical pedagogy should be interdisciplinary, contextual, engage the complex relationships between power and knowledge, critically address the institutional and broader constraints under which teaching takes place, and focus on how students can engage the imperatives of critical citizenship and civic responsibilty. Critical pedagogy must be self-reflexive about its aims and practices, conscious of its ongoing project of democratic transformation, but openly committed to a politics that does not offer any guarantees. But refusing dogmatism does not suggest that educators descend into a laissez-faire pluralism or an appeal to methodologies designed to "teach the conflicts." On the contrary, it suggests that educators afford students diverse opportunities to understand and experience how politics, power, commitment, and responsibility work on and through them both within and outside of schools. In this instance, critical pedagogy should enable students to learn how to govern rather than be governed.



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Making Pedagogy Meaningful in order to make it Critical and Transformative

Any analysis of critical pedagogy must address the importance that affect and emotion play in the formation of individual identity and social agency. Any viable approach to critical pedagogy suggests taking seriously those maps of meaning, affective investments, and sedimented desires that enable students to connect their own lives and everyday experiences to what they learn. Pedagogy in this sense becomes more than a mere transfer of received knowledge, an inscription of a unified and static identity, or a rigid methodology; it presupposes that students are moved by their passions and motivated, in part, by the affective investments they bring to the learning process. It is important to note here that any viable notion of critical pedagogy must make knowledge meaningful in order to make it critical and transformative. This suggests connecting what is taught to the range of experiences and identifications that students bring to a classroom.

Once students see a connection between what is being taught and the everyday experiences they inhabit, it becomes possible to move beyond the taken-for granted experiences that inform daily life and delve more deeply and critically into a "critical comprehension of the value of sentiments, emotions, and desire as part of the learning process"[20]. Ideologies are not just a constellation of ideas, stereotypes, and modes of commonsense; they also represent specific forms of knowledge and beliefs rooted in strong emotional investments. Such attachments need to be understood, analyzed, and deconstructed, often not simply as a form of uncomprehending knowledge but as an active refusal to know and the refusal "to acknowledge one's own implication" with such attachments[21]. If students are to move beyond the issue of understanding to an engagement with the deeper affective investments that make them complicitous with oppressive ideologies, they must be positioned to address and formulate strategies of transformation through which their individualized beliefs and affective investments can be articulated with broader public discourses that extend the imperatives of democratic public life. An unsettling pedagogy in this instance would engage student identities, identifications, and resistances from unexpected vantage points and articulate how they connect to existing material relations of power [Difficulty of talking about Disney critically with students]. At stake here is not only a pedagogical practice that recalls how knowledge, identifications, and subject positions are produced, unfolded, and remembered but also how such knowledge can be unlearned, particularly as it functions to become complicitous with existing relations of power.

Conclusion

At the dawn of the 21st century, the notion of the social and the public are not being erased as much as they are being reconstructed under circumstances in which public forums for serious debate, including public education, are being eroded. The public is now viewed as a pathology just as shared responsibilities are being replaced by shared fears. Within the ongoing logic of neoliberalism, teaching and learning are removed from the discourse of democracy and civic culture--defined as a purely private right rather than a public good. Divorced from the imperatives of a democratic society, pedagogy is

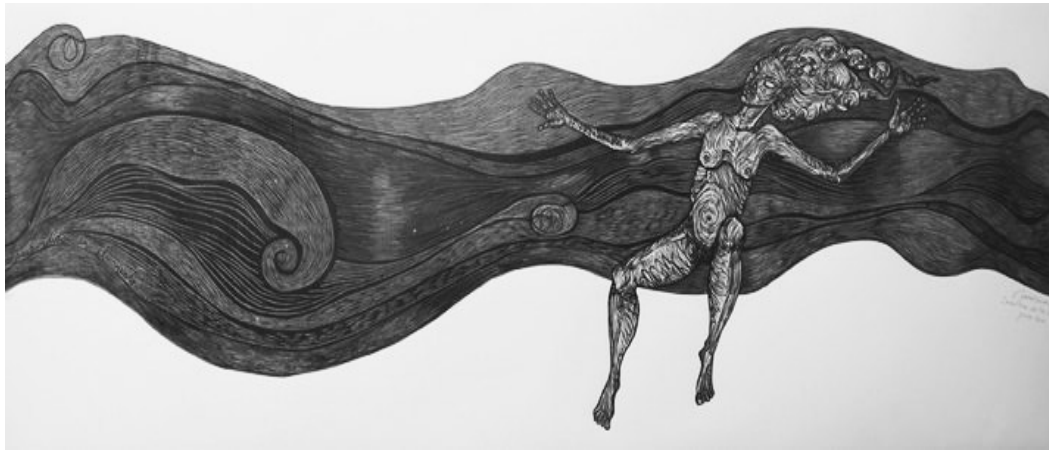
reduced to a matter of taste, testing, individual choice, home schooling, and job training. Pedagogy as a mode of witnessing, a public engagement in which students learn to be attentive and responsible to the memories, suffering, and narratives of others disappears within this market-driven notion of learning. Corporate pedagogy both numbs the mind and the soul, emphasizing repressive modes of learning that promote winning at all costs, learning how not to question authority, and disdaining the hard work of learning how to be thoughtful, critical, and attentive to the power relations that shape everyday life and the larger world. As learning is privatized, depoliticized, and reduced to teaching students how to be good consumers, any viable notions of the social, public values, citizenship, and democracy wither and die.

The greatest threat to young people does not come from lowered standards, the absence of privatized choice schemes, or the lack of rigid testing measures. On the contrary, it comes from societies that refuse to view children as a social investment, consigns millions of children to poverty, reduces critical learning to massive mind-deadening testing programs, promotes policies that eliminate most crucial health and public services, and defines masculinity through the degrading celebration of a gun culture, extreme sports and the spectacles of violence that permeate corporate controlled media industries. Students are not at risk because of the absence of market incentives in the schools, they are at risk because schooling is being stripped of public funding, handed over to corporate interests, and devalued as a public good. Children and young adults are under siege in both public and higher education because far too many of these institutions have become breeding grounds for commercialism, racism, social intolerance, sexism, homophobia, and consumerism, spurred on by the right-wing discourse of conservative pundits, politicians, educators, and a supine mainstream media.

As a central element of a broad based cultural politics, critical pedagogy, in its various forms, when linked to the ongoing project of democratization can provide opportunities for educators and other cultural workers to redefine and transform the connections among language, desire, meaning, everyday life, and material relations of power as part of a broader social movement to reclaim the promise and possibilities of a democratic public life. Critical pedagogy is dangerous to many educators and others because it provides the intellectual capacities and ethical norms for students to hold power accountable, fight against poverty, ecological destruction, the misrepresentation of history, and the dismantling of the social state, but also because it contains the potential for instilling in students a profound desire for learning about marginalized histories, struggles, modes of knowledge and a "real democracy based on relationships of equality and freedom"[22]. How else to explain the banning of ethnic studies from classes in the public schools in Tucson, Arizona?

What role might public school teachers play as public intellectuals in light of poisonous assaults waged on public schools by the forces of neoliberalism? In the most immediate sense, they can raise their collective voices against the influence of corporations that are flooding societies with a culture of war, consumerism, commercialism, and privatization. They can show how this culture of commodified cruelty and violence is only one part of a broader and all-embracing militarized culture of war, arms industry, and a Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest ethic that increasingly disconnects schools from public values, the common good, and democracy itself. They can bring all of their intellectual and collective resources together to critique and dismantle the imposition of high-stakes testing and other commercially driven modes of accountability on schools. They can mobilize young people and others to defend education as a public good by advocating for policies that invest in schools rather than in the military-industrial complex and its massive and expensive weapons of death [Canada wants to buy a number of F35 jets from the US which cost $6.39 billion each]. They can educate young people and a larger public to fight against putting police in schools, modeling schools after prisons, and implementing zero tolerance policies which largely punish poor minority children.

Instead of investing in schools, children, health care, jobs for young people, and much needed infrastructures, neoliberal societies celebrate militarism, hyper-masculinity, extreme competition, and a survival of the fittest ethic while exhibiting disdain for any form of shared bonds, dependency, and compassion for others, advocates of neoliberalism have eliminated social provisions, destroyed pension plans, eliminated health care benefits, allowed inequality to



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Dini Calderón

run wild, and have done so in order to safeguard and expand the assets of the rich and powerful. As social bonds and the institutions that support them disappear from such societies so do the formative cultures that make civic education, critical literacy, and cultures of questioning possible. Too many school systems operate within disciplinary apparatuses that turn education into either an extension of the prison-industrial complex or the culture of the mall. When not being arrested for trivial rule violations, students are subjected to walls, buses, and bathrooms that become giant advertisements for consumer products. Increasingly, even curricula are organized to reflect the sound of the cash register, hawking products for students to buy and promoting the interests of corporations who celebrate fossil fuels, sugar filled drinks, and a Disney-like view of the world. University student centers are being modeled after department stores, complete with an endless array of vendors trying to sell credit cards to a generation already swimming in debt. **A**tomization, fragmentation, bullying, and isolation are the collateral damage inflicted on too many young people in our schools by neoliberal educational reforms.

One of the most serious challenges facing teachers, artists, journalists, writers, and other cultural workers is the challenge of developing a discourse of both critique and possibility. This means developing discourses and pedagogical practices that connect reading the word with reading the world, and doing so in ways that enhance the capacities of young people as critical agents and engaged citizens. In taking up this project, educators and others need to work under conditions that allow them to speak out against economic, political, and social injustices both within and outside of schools. At the same time, they should attempt to create the conditions that give students the opportunity to become critical and engaged citizens who have the knowledge and courage to struggle in order to make desolation and cynicism unconvincing and hope practical. Hope in this instance is educational, removed from the fantasy of idealism unaware of the constraints facing the dream of a democratic society. Educated hope is not a call to overlook the difficult conditions that shape both schools and the larger social order. On the contrary, it is the precondition for providing those languages and values that point the way to a more democratic and just world. As Judith Butler has argued, there is more hope in the world when we can question common sense assumptions and believe that what we know is directly related to our ability to help change the world around us, though it is far from the only condition necessary for such change[23].

Educated hope provides the basis for dignifying our labor as intellectuals; it offers up critical knowledge linked to democratic social change, it is rooted in shared responsibilities, and allows teachers and students to recognize ambivalence and uncertainty as fundamental dimensions of learning. Such hope offers the possibility of thinking beyond the given—and lays open a pedagogical terrain in which teachers and students can engage in critique, dialogue, and an open-ended struggle for justice. As difficult as this task may seem to educators, if not to a larger public, it is a struggle worth waging.

I want to end by insisting that democracy begins to fail and political life becomes impoverished in the absence of those vital public spheres such as public and higher education in which civic values, public scholarship, and social engagement allow for a more imaginative grasp of a future that takes seriously the demands of justice, equity, and civic courage. Democracy should be a way of thinking about education, one that thrives on connecting equity to excellence, learning to ethics, and agency to the imperatives of social responsibility and the public good[24]. We may live in dark times, but the future is still open. The time has come to develop a political language in which civic values, social responsibility, and the institutions that support them become central to invigorating and fortifying a new era of civic imagination, a renewed sense of social agency, and an impassioned political will.

Notes

1 See, for example, David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Wendy Brown, *Edgework* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Henry A. Giroux, *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008); Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press, 2010),

2 See, for instance, on the rise of the racist punishing state, Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010); on the severe costs of massive inequality, Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York: Norton, 2012); on the turning of public schools into prisons, see Annette Fuentes, *Lockdown High: When the Schoolhouse Becomes a Jailhouse* (New York: Verso, 2011).

3 Quoted in Michael L. Silk and David L. Andrews. "(Re) Presenting Baltimore: Place, Policy, Politics, and Cultural Pedagogy." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 33 (2011), p. 436.

4 Terry Eagleton, "Reappraisals: What is the worth of social democracy?" *Harper's Magazine*, (October 2010), p. 78.online at: http://www.harpers.org/archive/2010/10/0083150

5 Alex Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 188.

6 For an excellent analysis of contemporary forms of neoliberalism, Stuart Hall, "The Neo-Liberal Revolution," *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 6, (November 2011, pp. 705-728; see also David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Henry A. Giroux, *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008).

7 For examples of this tradition, see Maria Nikolakaki, ed. *Critical Pedagogy in the Dark Ages: Challenges and Possibilities*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2012); Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

8 Roger Simon, "Empowerment as a Pedagogy of Possibility," Language Arts 64:4 (April 1987), p. 372.

9 Cornelius Castoriadis, "Institutions and Autonomy." In Peter Osborne(Ed). *A Critical Sense* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 8.

10 Rachel Donadio, "The Failing State of Greece," *New York Times* (February 26, 2012), p. 8.

11 Greig de Peuter, Universities, Intellectuals and Multitudes: An Interview with Stuart Hall," in Mark Cote, Richard J. F. Day, and Greig de Peuter, eds. *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 113-114.

12 De Peuter, Ibid. P. 117.

13 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," Public Culture 12, no. 2 (Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 305-306.

14 For a brilliant discussion of the ethics and politics of deconstruction, see Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 2.

15 Jacques Derrida, "Intellectual Courage: An Interview," Trans. Peter Krapp, *Culture Machine* Vol. 2 (2000), p. 9.

16 Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA: Basil Blackwell, 2000), p.22.

17 This expression comes from John Michael, *Anxious Intellects: Academic Professionals, Public Intellectuals, and Enlightenment Values* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 2.

18 Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in Russell Fergusen, Martha Geever, Trinh T Minh-ha, and Cornel West, eds. *Out There* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), p. 35.

19 Jodi Dean, "the interface of Political Theory and Cultural Studies," in Jodi Dean, ed. *Cultural Studies and Political Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 3.

20 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), p. 48.

21 Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 79.

22 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2004), p. 67

23 Cited in Gary Olson and Lynn Worsham, "Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification," *JAC* 20:4 (200), p. 765.

24 Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).