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CHAPTER 5

SEEKING DEMOCRACY IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Countering Epistemic Violence Through Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter begins by describing how America's ideal of democracy is impossible under today's capitalist system that denies human beings access to true equality and freedom. The authors then explore how schools—organized according to the competition and self-centered individualism of capitalism—teach children to believe in a superficial form of “multiculturalism” through a process of epistemic violence that denies them an understanding of how knowledge is produced according to power relations. Finally, this chapter explains how revolutionary critical pedagogy can help counter such epistemic violence and shallow multiculturalism, and offers suggestions for what real teachers can do in their own schools today.

Modern life means democracy, democracy means freeing intelligence . . . emancipation of mind as an individual organ to do its own work. We naturally associate democracy, to be sure, with freedom of action, but freedom of action without freed capacity of thought behind it is only chaos. If external authority in action is given up, it must be because internal authority of truth, discovered and known to reason, is substituted.

—Dewey, 1968, p. 229

The undemocratic structure of economic life in the United States may be traced directly to the moving force in the capitalist system: the quest for profits.

—Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 54

DEMOCRACY AND CAPITALISM—WE WANT ONE BUT HAVE THE OTHER

Walking down the fluorescent-lit, linoleum hallway of a local American elementary school soon after the morning bell has rung, a heavy aroma of tater-tots and sloppy joes greases your nostrils as squeaky, patriotic incantations greet your ears. Young children pledge their allegiance to a polyester flag hanging limply from a plastic pole, perhaps wondering what kind of broom “there public for witch” rides, as they bravely attempt to pronounce words like “indivisible.”¹

Almost every American remembers memorizing songs about amber grain and purple mountains at ages five or six, laughing over how none of it made any sense in their young lives. Almost any seventh grader can tell you that we live in a democracy and can proudly recite various pledges, songs, and the names of the thirteen colonies to prove it. However, few can describe what democracy means. And in our current neoliberal capitalist universe—in which multinational and transnational corporations control the social, economic, and political policies of state governments that are witnessing a grotesque under-funding of public education, social security, and welfare programs for poor working-class Americans, immigrants, and minorities—no American can say that he or she knows what democracy feels like, especially in America’s post-Bush financial Katrina. America is not, and never has been, a democracy.

While many rejoice that we are a lot closer to democracy today than we were when only white, male landowners could vote, and while democracy continues to be privileged as the cardinal ideal worth fighting for (most often “democracy” in concept and not in practice, and most often with violence and not with peace), the United States continues to poison the soil in

which its unique brand of democracy is supposed to take root through its neoliberal policies and practices, both domestic and foreign.

Indeed, our country does not uphold the ideals of democracy which our classroom dictionaries commonly define as “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections; the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges” (Democracy, 2009). Instead, we continue to exploit immigrant bodies of color in factories and on farms while denying them access to health care or education, reporting them to *La Migra* just before having to pay their non-living wages. We continue to hold indigenous people hostage—on this continent and neighboring islands—while exploiting their lands for our own greedy benefit. We continue to allow conservative politicians declare that our newly elected, half-Black president signals “post-racial” times despite the fact that cities are becoming more segregated while schools are resegregating and racially tracking children at alarming rates with students of color denied equal access to educational resources, language support, healthy school environments, and higher learning. We continue to experience severe poverty disproportionately among people of color, with unemployment and homeless rates skyrocketing, despite being one of the wealthiest countries in the world. The deregulatory policies of free marketization and the neoliberal religiosity of corporate intermarriage that took place during the 1980s and 1990s has ensured the suffering of the popular majorities, making democracy seem forever impossible. This is because the capitalist system in which we currently dysfunctionally function stratifies people by class, race, gender, sexuality, and religion, as they fight for the table scraps of the wealthy few. As noted by Resnick (1997), “All of us live and experience a central paradox on a global scale: vastly expanding technological and productive power, great riches being produced, yet most people getting poorer, less secure, more anxious, and the environment more threatened” (p. 12). Democracy is simply impossible under capitalism because social equality is impossible under capitalism. If we want to see all people treated with respect in an egalitarian society that values human life over money, then we must follow Mészáros’s (1995) call to eradicate the world of capitalism itself.

Certainly the end of capitalism is an idealistic dream that makes Uncle Sam’s sagging belly ache with laughter. But so too is democracy. While many contend that it is impossible to end capitalism or achieve democracy, we are certain it is possible to accomplish both—yet only if attempted together and simultaneously, because capitalism, through a systematic exploitation of human labor power, spawns asymmetrical systems of power and privilege that deny people true direct, participatory or “protagonistic” democracy and the opportunity to unite against conditions of oppression. The social division of la-

bor constructed through capitalism also directly shape, what Omi and Winant (1986) have outlined as “a *system* of racial meanings and stereotypes, of racial ideology, [that] seems to be a permanent feature of US culture” (p. 63), further denying people access to equity and democracy based on race as well.

Capitalism fosters the malignant idea that it’s acceptable for the majority of struggling humanity to compete for meager resources while a privileged few eat and live in excess. However, democracy teaches us that people should care for the well-being of all individuals for the collective success of entire communities. To illustrate the contradictions between democracy and capitalism, we believe it is worth quoting Bowles and Gintis (1976) at length:

The U.S. economy is a formally totalitarian system in which the actions of the vast majority (workers) are controlled by a small minority (owners and managers). Yet this totalitarian system is embedded in a formally democratic political system which promotes the norms—if not the practice—of equality, justice, and reciprocity. . . . For the political system, the central problems of democracy are: insuring the maximal participation of the majority in decision-making; protecting minorities against the prejudices of the majority; and protecting the majority from any undue influence on the part of an unrepresentative minority. . . . For the economic system, these central problems are nearly exactly reversed. Making U.S. capitalism work involves: Insuring the minimal participation in decision-making by the majority (the workers); protecting a single minority (capitalists and managers) against the wills of a majority; and subjecting the majority to the maximal influence of this single unrepresentative minority. A more dramatic contrast one would be hard pressed to discover. High school textbooks do not dwell on the discrepancy. (p. 54)

The words that Bowles and Gintis wrote over thirty years ago are even more apposite today. What is important to note here is that learning to believe in the ideals of democracy, while living amidst the anti-democratic ideals of capitalism, begins in school.

SCHOOL—THE BREEDING GROUNDS FOR EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

It is easy to pinpoint which politicians and CEOs are pushing the capitalist agenda that “divides and conquers” the world, pitting worker against worker in the fight to survive, yet many often overlook the ways that schools are (wittingly or unwittingly, manifestly or latently) guilty of pushing this same agenda. Schools do not prepare students to engage critically in civic participation and democracy, but instead nurture the development of compliant citizen-consumers who embrace the competition and self-centered indi-

vidualism necessary for capitalism (and also racism, class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, etc.) to exist. Whether we return to the oft-cited work of Gramsci (1971) illustrating how schools socialize individuals to maintain the status quo, or of Freire (1970) describing banking education in which students are treated as empty vessels holding the uncritical knowledge necessary to live as cogs in the national machine, or if we examine concrete school examples resulting from our unimaginative and confining national content standards that privilege white, European-American perspectives over all others, it becomes clear how education primes students with specific ideologies that make them easier to mold as capitalist consumers. Academic curricula in schools have been modified to link education more securely to the job requirements of “the new work order,” with a focus on change, speed, flexibility, and innovation as translated into testing measures, institutional tracking, and uncritical technology use (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996).

Yet, with the globalization of capitalism, today’s world is also experiencing new cultural homogeneity in which diverse cultures are fused into a single consumer culture—stage-managed by the transnational capital class—that bases its values and beliefs on commodities and brand names moving rapidly across the globe (Jusdanis, 1996). In tune with the growth of such consumer-based cultural uniformity in which people worldwide buy the same Prada bags, Hollywood blockbuster DVDs, or McDonald’s Happy Meals, and in response to today’s neoliberal global economy and postindustrial labor market, American schools are uncritically supporting an assimilationist ideology that fuses diverse cultures into one common, homogenizing, “national” capitalist culture that marks European-American lifestyles as superior to all others. Yet, in superficial response to America’s increasingly diverse student body, schools are combining assimilationist ideologies with conservative, institutional “multicultural” education that pays shallow homage to “respecting difference” by celebrating “ethnic” holidays with treacherous decorative posters and “international” potlucks (Davies & Guppy, 1997; Giroux, 1996; Lassalle & Perez, 1997; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Mitchell, 1993). As Davies and Guppy (1997) argue, “Educational homogeneity is leading to a ‘monolithic structure of education’ ” (p. 449), which propagates dominant ideologies and cultural values instrumental in reproducing social and economic inequalities while falsely marching beneath a banner of “multiculturalism.”

Such monolithic education is rooted in specific epistemologies and ontologies that undergird schooling practice and policy. Schools value specific ways of thinking about knowledge production and transfer. As described by Allman (2007),

It is important to note that these are rarely made explicit because educators and policy makers usually do not recognize that these theories are implicit in

their thinking; nevertheless, they are inescapable as one or another epistemology and ontology always underpins and is imparted through educational practice and policy. I begin with the epistemology that, paradoxically, arises from both idealism and mechanical, unhistorical materialism . . . Knowledge either results from the correct philosophical thinking about reality or, alternatively, is derived from the empirical/scientific observation of reality. In both cases, knowledge, and also truth, once grasped or derived, is basically immutable, thus transhistorical, and it is also conceptualised as existing separately and distinctly from the real world. Therefore, this knowledge is unchangeable and static (although it can be added to) and by implication so too is the basic structure of the reality to which it refers. Epistemologies always suggest that particular ways in which people are or should be related to knowledge. The only possible relation to knowledge afforded by this epistemology is an acquisitive one. Knowledge is conceptualized and thus related to as a thing, often a reification, to be acquired and accumulated. (p. 60)

Knowledge treated as a static, ahistorical thing to be amassed and hoarded keeps students from connecting learning to lived experiences and vice versa. Education that is not rooted in students' realities is often alienating and, in some cases, violently so.

As McLaren (see Kumar, 2009; Leban, 2008) has noted (after William I. Robinson), transnational corporations rooted in the nation-state are being superceded by multinational corporations whose main allegiance is not to a nation-state identity but to profits. Transnational corporations have been able to erode the constraints for profit accumulation provided by nation-states and owe their allegiance to the transnational capitalist class. Schools have always been about the struggle for democracy and producing a democratic citizenry (albeit one grounded in the reproduction of wealth through profit accumulation), but since we have been moving from the factory model of schooling under industrial capitalism to the business model of schooling under multinational capitalism—and now transnational capitalism—we are arriving at schools becoming corporations in their own right under transnational capitalism.

The concern we saw with the struggle for a uniquely American citizenry is diminishing as part of the function of capitalist schooling (Quartz, 2009). As a result, we are finding that conflicts of academic freedom are breaking out (Nocella, Best, & McLaren, in press) as universities, colleges, and public schools position themselves to deliver technocratic “means–ends” knowledge to students and to retreat from the meaningful knowledge that was once connected to the debates over the character of American society. In other words, schools have become less and less concerned with the debates over the character of American identity and more concerned about fostering consumer identities that are clearly transnational.

Drawing from Gayatri Spivak and Michel Foucault, we wish to highlight the ways that today's shallow forms of multicultural education—the trite

“food, festival, folklore, and fashion” approaches that one could call assimilationist, institutional multiculturalism (González, 1995; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Nieto, 1994; Meyer & Rhoades, 2006)—lend themselves to a form of “epistemic violence” in which the process of knowledge production that homogenizes culture and preaches false diversity violently strips students of their sociohistorical contexts, heritage, lived cultures, and agency. The ways that schools engage in assimilationist, institutional multiculturalism, and fail to acknowledge true diversity, illustrates how “the word ‘culture’ is comparable to Foucault’s use of ‘power’” (Spivak, 1999, p. 353). Those who have power over educational institutions are those who can decide how culture is taught and which cultures should be valued. Thus, schools most often teach culture as if it were a static “thing” to be bottled up and deposited into students’ brain-banks in order to accrue interest in the form of shallow “cultural sensitivity.” As a result, teachers and students often lose sight of their own agency as those who breathe and give life to culture itself. As Spivak (1999) notes: “It is therefore altogether salutary to remember, again, that ‘culture’ is also a regulator of how one knows: Foucault’s famous capacity-to-know doublet: *pouvoir/savoir* as the ability to know is ‘culture’ at ground level. (Of course, Foucault uses other words, most noticeably ‘discourse.’)” (p. 357). While the relationship between culture and power has been analyzed extensively by critical scholars and theorists globally, we believe that this topic is important to revisit when considering multicultural education in a capitalist framework today. However, we caution readers that while an understanding of cultural discourses and epistemologies important, and while these discourses and epistemologies profoundly affect the historic development of society, they do not do so outside of the particular mode in which we all gain our livelihood—the material relations that share patterns of development with capitalist and other social formations (Jaramillo & McLaren, 2008; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007).

First, let us begin by addressing the idea of culture itself. If we define culture as the ways in which social groups live out and make sense of their personal circumstances and conditions of life, while also defining culture as the dynamic sets of practices, ideologies, and values with which different people understand the world, then we can consider how the ability individuals have to express such culture is related to the power they are able to wield in the social order (McLaren, 2003). Thus, one can understand how: (1) culture is closely related to social relations based on class, gender, sexuality, age, etc.; (2) culture is a form of production through which different groups both define and realize their aspirations through unequal power relations; and (3) culture is the space in which specific forms of knowledge and experience are produced, legitimized, and circulated in ways that ultimately mean that “othered” forms of knowledge are made illegitimate.

Thus, the knowledge production process and the ways students make sense of culture can be dangerously controlled by school curriculum writers and teachers who have more power than students and their families in the hierarchical structure of educational institutions. In this sense, we are applying the term “epistemic violence” to describe the disengaged, disempowering, and depotentializing knowledge production practices used in assimilationist and many mainstream forms of multicultural education that ignore student diversity while marking non-white cultures as deviant and exotic.

The reasons why assimilationist, multicultural education can result in epistemic violence include the following. In current assimilationist, institutional, multicultural schooling—that privileges white life-ways within the Anglosphere and socializes children to share the uniform values of European-American culture, and teaches students to recognize difference but not understand or critically embrace it—teachers avoid discussions of racism and class exploitation while teaching children that white Anglo culture is the true American norm and all non-white cultures are “different.” By ignoring deeply engrained problems in our schools (such as racist textbooks, unequal school resources based on class and race, homophobia, etc.), Whiteness becomes the invisible but dominant culture against which all non-white life-ways must measure their value and civility-or-savagery, and be marked as “other.” Knowledge and knowledge production are non-neutral forces in schools affected by the motives, politics, and social conditions under which educators and administrators operate, and we have noted elsewhere that these conditions can be traced to capitalist social relations of exploitations (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005).

Furthermore, when right-wing conservatives (see Schlesinger, 1993) pushed whitewashing agendas in the 1980s and 1990s while calling for “unifying ideals” and a “common culture” in history education in order to preserve good old American values of “tolerance,” “democracy,” and “freedom,” schools ended up concealing (and, by implication, reproducing) both past and present forms of oppressive economic and social inequality. Unfortunately, most mainstream/whitestream (Grande, 2004) multicultural teaching practices do the same when they divorce culture from its sociohistorical contexts. As Nieto (1995) explains,

Such strategies as international fairs, diversity dinners, and plays about ‘brotherhood’ . . . are often well-intentioned but safe and incomplete ways of focusing on more significant issues . . . divert[ing] attention from other realities such as racist textbooks, low expectations based on race, ethnicity, and gender, and the interethnic violence and hostility faced in school every day by students. (p. 195)

When the knowledge imparted on students in schools is disconnected from those students’ lived experiences and larger contexts of race, class, gender, sexuality, and more, students can be denied access to the real life connections that they should be making in school. Indeed, as described by San Juan (2002):

Multiculturalism in its diverse modalities has indeed become the official policy designed to solve racism and ethnic conflicts in the North. Contextualized in the history of transnational capitalism, however, multiculturalism tends to occlude, if not cancel out, the material conditions of racist practices and institutions. It conceals not only the problematic of domination and subordination but also reconstitutes this social relation in a political economy of difference where privatized sensibilities and sensoriums become the chief organs of consumerist experience. (p. 9)

By failing to define social inequality and connect students to an understanding of their diverse, lived histories, mainstream multiculturalism often perpetuates epistemic violence through class exploitation and racist, sexist, heterosexist practices. Similarly, as noted by Giroux (1997b), “in its conservative and liberal forms multiculturalism has placed the related problems of white racism, social justice, and power off limits, especially as these might be addressed as part of a broader set of political and pedagogical concerns” (p. 235). Thus, students experiencing extreme forms of racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism can be violently silenced by assimilationist multicultural education that fails to critically analyze lived experiences in American culture.

As an example, let us examine the ways California State Standards for Social Studies avoid topics of racism, class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and more, while instilling students with very specific European-American centered, individualistic values. A review of content standards for all grades reveals that concepts of “world” history in America is Euro-centric in nature. Content standards for 1st through 12th grades only mention China, India, Africa, Central and South America when referring to ancient history (in ways that describe the past as something dry, disconnected to the present, and seemingly objective) or when referring to Western European and American wars and economic conquest (for example, Japan is described as relevant to world history only when acting as an “evil” force in World War II). Although California has a diversity of immigrant families with children of varying cultural-historical backgrounds, none of their lived realities are addressed in the California Social Studies standards, disconnecting students from the Chicano, Asian American, Black Power, and American Indian Movements of students’ parents or grandparents. Similarly, little to no mention is made about the powerful influence of Marxism and anti-capitalist ideals on leaders and beliefs of these movements, as visible in the

Civil Rights Movement or the Black Panther party. Thus, these standards represent a form of epistemic violence that denies students the opportunity to connect history to their lived experiences or recognize multiculturalism in their community's daily practices and socio-historical contexts. Students are refused access to their own family and cultural ways of knowing when primed to think in assimilationist, white-American terms.

Similarly, after living only half a decade in this world, kindergarten students are primed to become workers in the capitalist system as Standard K.3 declares that "Students [should be able to] match simple descriptions of work that people do and the names of related jobs at the school, in the local community, and from historical accounts" (California Department of Education, 2000). The fact that students are already forced to think about jobs when so young illustrates how they are being prepared for working in a capitalist economy. Similarly, at ages eight or nine years old in third grade, Standard 3.5 states that students are expected to "Discuss the relationship of students' 'work' in school and their personal human capital" (California Department of Education, 2000). Students are prepared at a young age—as described through these content standards—to consider their lives and daily practices in relation to a capitalist system so that they understand their roles as workers in the larger economy. We argue that students' educational experiences as reflected through these content standards illustrate epistemic violence in the ways they control how children both see their roles in, and engage with the world.

REVOLUTIONARY CRITICAL PEDAGOGY—COUNTERING EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS

In order to counter epistemic violence inflicted on American students through assimilationist, institutional multicultural education, we propose that educators embrace revolutionary critical pedagogy—a term first coined by Allman (2001)—to reframe the way we think about knowledge production and the purpose of learning. Rooted in an understanding of capitalism's negative effects on American schooling practices, revolutionary critical pedagogy sets as its goal the decolonization of subjectivity while also targeting the material basis of capitalist social relations. What makes this educational approach revolutionary yet critical is the ways it urges educators to not only envision a new society unconstrained by capitalist ideologies and to denounce the manifest injustices of neoliberal capitalism, but also to serve as a counterforce to it by establishing conditions for such a new society in the classroom itself.

The first requirement of revolutionary critical pedagogy is that we—as honest, reflexive educators always open to learning—consider the histori-

cal specificity of the concept of revolutionary critical pedagogy itself, recognizing in what ways it stems from white, male, Western, heterosexual, academic perspectives and in what ways it has, and must continue to learn from traditionally "othered" ways of thinking including feminist pedagogies, Latin American theologies of liberation, African diaspora, indigenous pedagogies, Asian American resistance movements, and more. Revolutionary critical pedagogy fails to be critical or revolutionary when it is no longer self-critiquing nor reflexive of its purpose and origins. Secondly, revolutionary critical pedagogy must directly address the context-specific issues of diverse communities while not limiting itself to only local accounts. In this sense, revolutionary critical pedagogy must address today's globalized contexts and consider the spatiality of human life in its sociohistorical meaning, recognizing the genderizing and racializing of rural and urban cityspaces that occur through knowledge and power relationships (Soja, 2000; Harvey, 1973). As educators and students, we cannot function only according to narrow national terms, but must think in international—and transnational—terms as well. Thirdly, revolutionary critical pedagogy must continue to speak to basic human needs, but without close-mindedly embracing only modern, Western grand theories of historical and philosophical endpoints to the human condition. In the search for revolutionary praxis and social change, educators cannot forget to teach students the fundamental skills of reading, writing, arithmetic, science, history, art, music, and physical health. However, these skills must be centered in a revolutionary critical pedagogy that recognizes the racist, class-driven, sexist, heterosexist ways that such skills are often taught when teachers are not self-reflexive or aware of their positionality in relation to their students. And finally, revolutionary critical pedagogy needs to address the process of knowledge production and ideas about "reason" itself, as discussed by Allman (2007). We believe that the best way to address issues of current forms of educational epistemic violence—that divorces learned knowledge from students' lived experiences—is by approaching education with Marx's epistemology that:

begins with recognizing that knowledge is historically specific and also never complete or finished. Since the historically specific reality of capitalism is comprised of dialectical contradictions, there is constant tension and movement in the world we are seeking to know and understand... Knowledge must be constantly scrutinised and tested rather than simply acquired. Therefore the acquisition of knowledge is the beginning rather than the end of a particular learning effort, at which point the original knowledge might have been accepted, rejected or considerably transformed... Rather than relating to knowledge as if it were a thing to be acquired or possessed, with Marx's epistemology, knowledge is a tool that we use to delve deeply into reality, and it is a tool that we constantly test in order to ascertain whether it is enabling us

to develop a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the world and our existence and experiences within it. (Allman, 2007, p. 61)

Recognizing how knowledge can be used as a *tool* that mediates our understanding of the world and the ways we interact as human beings—rather than as a commodity accumulated in school spaces—is central to how we believe revolutionary critical pedagogy can address counteracting the effects of epistemic violence while helping to build sincerely multicultural, democratic education.

The first step to applying revolutionary critical pedagogy requires that educators, researchers, policy writers, parents, and students be made aware of how schools have been structured over the decades under what indignant scholar, Sandy Grande (2004), describes as “The Deep Structures of Colonialist Consciousness.” Drawing from diverse analyses of modern, Western culture, Grande (2004) outlines how American schools are organized according to the following beliefs: (1) Progress defines change and change defines progress. Both are measured in terms of material gain as acquired through economic and technological growth and are based on a capitalist ethic in which numerous individuals fight for limited resources; (2) the world is based on positivistic, empirical ways of knowing in which faith and reason are completely separated. Rational ways of knowing and intellectual authority are only valued when they are “neutral” and “culture-free”; (3) “reality” is defined as “impersonal, secular, material, mechanistic, and relativistic” with any divine conceptualizations of reality being marked as “primitive superstition”; (4) individualism is valued over community; (5) humans—as the only creatures capable of rational thought—are superior to all other creatures and separate from nature (p. 69–70). This system of beliefs shaped by Euro-centric colonialist consciousness needs to be critiqued openly in our schools in order to deconstruct the hierarchical structure of American education that continues to privilege white, European-American ways of thinking and knowing despite the growing numbers of non-white students coming from non-European-American life-ways both in the United States and globally. Schools also need to recognize the humanity in students and their families, recovering the sacred in teaching and embracing peoples’ diverse life-ways rooted in, often, spiritual consciousnesses and more holistic ways of thinking (Hooks, 2003; Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, & McLaren, 2009) If we are to live in a truly democratic society that embraces the cultural wealth of diverse epistemologies, our country needs to recognize that varying ways of knowing can make educational institutions stronger and more equitable sites for exchanging ideas that can improve this world for all.

Even the storied liberal John Dewey recognized the dangers of America’s increasingly individualistic ways of thinking—modes of intelligibility that

divide rather than unify and that narrow peoples’ ways of thinking rather than assist them in engaging the diversity of American people—when calling for the need to look at the “individual” not as standing alone, but as part of a larger, more inclusive framework that makes a country better by working *with* other individuals. Dewey (1939/1968) wrote:

We are apt to look at the school from an individualistic standpoint, as something between teacher and pupil, or between teacher and parent. That which interests us most is naturally the progress made by the individual child. . . . Yet the range of the outlook needs to be enlarged. . . . All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members. All its better thoughts of itself it hopes to realize through the new possibilities thus opened to its future self. Here individualism and socialism are at one. Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself. (p. 5)

Schools today are in dire need of attending to each individual’s needs while remaining conscious of each individual’s diverse histories, life-ways, languages, epistemologies, and ways of being if we are to work towards creating a non-capitalist, multicultural democracy.

But what does revolutionary critical pedagogy actually look like in practice? What does revolutionary multicultural education for a non-capitalist (i.e. socialist) democracy look like in our classrooms? Critical pedagogy and revolutionary critical pedagogy have often been criticized for their lack of practical application to today’s American schools that are deeply entrenched in oppressive, hierarchical, No Child Left Behind Act practices. How can teachers who juggle numerous responsibilities both inside and outside school walls use revolutionary critical pedagogy in their daily lesson plans? Keeping in mind the diverse challenges educators face in American public schools while remaining aware of the epistemic violence inflicted on students through assimilationist education and superficial multiculturalism, we wish to offer some practical suggestions for real teachers.

REAL SOLUTIONS FOR REAL TEACHERS

Applying revolutionary critical pedagogy to classroom practice is never easy. This is because revolutionary critical pedagogy requires that teachers be constantly reflexive about their own practices, continuously critical of what and how they teach, and acutely aware of students’ varying wants and needs. In short, revolutionary critical pedagogy and teaching for social change can be exhausting. However, all teachers know that the art of teaching is both complicated and never “easy” anyway, but always worth it.

We believe that the following teaching approaches are essential to addressing the ills of assimilationist, institutional multicultural practices and will be useful tools for moving education towards truly democratic multiculturalism.

Addressing Racism—Decentering Whiteness

Democratic multicultural education must directly address all forms of racist oppression. As noted by Nieto (1995), “Multicultural education without an explicit focus on racism and other systems of exploitation is like a movie set made of cardboard: while it may appear authentic, it will take little to knock it down and reveal it as a sham” (p. 195). In order to directly address such systems of exploitation, we must decenter the whiteness that persists within both teachers and school curricula.

But what is “whiteness”? We choose to turn to Marable’s (1996) definition of whiteness as “a power relationship, a statement of authority, a social construct which is perpetuated by systems of privilege, the consolidation of property and status” (p. 6). As eloquently explored by Zeus Leonardo (2004), whiteness is also a racial perspective supported by material practices and institutions that people labeled “white” uphold because of the benefits given them. Drawing from Frankenberg (1993), Leonardo notes that “As a collection of everyday strategies, whiteness is characterized by the unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group, the minimization of racist legacy, and other similar evasions” (2004, p. 119). With neoliberal globalization, one can find that the concept and power of whiteness have become so commonplace that “like the economy, whiteness as a privileged signifier has become global” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 117). In short, whiteness as both a racialized discourse and set of material practices preserves the political and economic privilege and power of the capitalist class.

Naming racism by decentering whiteness requires that educators critically examine the development of pedagogical discourses and practices that marginalize non-white individuals and transform them into absence or deviance. By critically questioning the dominant meaning systems taught in classrooms—meaning systems that interweave with a history of Western imperialism, patriarchy, and capitalism—teachers can begin to reflect on words, practices, and behaviors that naturalize whiteness as the cultural marker against which otherness must be defined. This can begin with dismantling discourses of whiteness and how these discourses either affirm or do not affirm students’ racialized experiences as “real” or “not real.” As elaborated by Leonardo (2004),

Students of color benefit from an education that analyzes the implications of whiteness because they have to understand the daily vicissitudes of white discourses and be able to deal with them. That is, in order to confront whiteness, they have to be familiar with it. In the process, they also realize that their ‘colorness’ is relational to whiteness’s claims of color-blindness and both are burst asunder in the process. Thus, the goal is for students of color to engage whiteness while simultaneously working to dismantle it. (p. 119)

However, decentering whiteness must be a dialectical process so that whiteness is not understood only as “bad” or white people labeled as enemies of students of color (Giroux, 1997b; Ellsworth, 1997). All students should feel safe to discuss, and even disagree, when approaching the concept of whiteness and racial formation.

For the classroom, one approach to decentering whiteness could be to engage students in research projects about the way racialized words are used in the school, community, and local media. For example, careful analysis and discussion of media reports surrounding Barack Obama’s race during the recent election could be conducted as a class. Students can review the ways in which both Michelle and Barack Obama spoke about race and race relations in public speeches, then consider the ways that the media responded to their different speeches, reflect on the reality that Michelle Obama was forced to tone down her perspectives about racism, and imagine how different the election may have been if Barack Obama had focused more on racism than he did in 2007–2008. Discussions can center around the primacy of whiteness in America and the ways such whiteness influences how people speak about race in politics and the media. Opinion pieces by conservatives describing Obama’s election as proof that America is “post-racial” can be contrasted with the insightful work of scholars like Bonilla-Silva (2008a, 2008b) who discuss how Obama’s political campaign proved the ways in which people of color are pushed into a new “colorblind racism.” Students can be given opportunity to reflect on multiple perspectives of Obama’s election in relation to whiteness and consider how the election may have been different if he discussed his African American roots more than he did throughout the campaign.

Of course, decentering whiteness requires that teachers themselves must be ready to engage in intense, self-reflective discussions. The process of decentering whiteness can be painful, but when approached rigorously, it can be incredibly enlightening.

Teacher Education

Applying revolutionary critical pedagogy to multicultural education requires that teachers themselves address their own racism, sexism, hetero-

sexism, and personal insinuation into the production of class exploitation that all support ideas of the social “norm.” Teachers must be willing to reflect on their own racial formation and ask themselves challenging questions such as: how do I identify myself and how do other people identify me (racially, sexually, etc.)? In what ways am I similar or different from my students? What types of expectations do I have for my students, and where do these expectations stem from? Do I treat different students in varying ways based on class, gender, etc.? And if so, why? Teachers need to directly address their deficit ways of thinking about others different from themselves (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2001).

While these are questions that teachers must continuously ask themselves throughout their lives as educators, the opportunity to learn such reflexivity must begin in teacher education programs. Educators must be taught early on about the importance of making themselves vulnerable enough to question their own racist, classist, heterosexist, and sexist ideologies so that open and honest change can happen. Although many teacher education programs engage student-teachers in journaling activities, these are often conducted in superficial ways such that reflection seems more like a chore than a valuable growing process. Educator programs today need to question how journaling and reflection are used for new teachers and help develop strategies for teachers to openly address their own thinking and practice. Even more important, teacher education programs need to directly address issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion. Teachers need to be open to considering how their own positionalities—as women or men, rich or poor, etc.—influence how they engage with others around them.

Teacher education programs must also recognize that the process of teacher self-reflection and growth can take many different forms. While many find space for change in the quiet spaces of personal diaries, others might find space to reflect in other activities such as recording conversations on a handheld recording device when speaking with a close teacher-friend, partner, or family member about the challenges or joys of the classroom. Others may find a place for self-reflection in music composition, making films, meditation, or drawing. Whatever form self-reflection takes for new teachers, all teachers should be pushed to challenge their own comfort zones and ask themselves regularly about their own roles, motives, and desires both locally and globally.

Yet simply changing the way programs help teachers become reflexive is not enough. Teacher education programs need to be radically transformed so that they directly address issues of racism, sexism, and so forth and the ideologies our schools are founded upon. This is no easy task. However, if our country reframes “teacher education as a political problem” as sug-

gested by Cochran-Smith (2004), by recognizing the non-neutral nature of teacher education itself, then one step forward will be taken by programs that understand how “all policies take a stance, whether implicitly or explicitly, on the purposes of schooling for a democratic society, the current social structure of schools and society, and the distribution of resources and opportunities in that society” (p. 20). We need to rigorously critique the ideologies structuring teacher education programs and reorganize them to provide educators with new consciousness of self and the world towards a revolutionary critical pedagogy.

Engaging Media and Popular Culture

Revolutionary critical pedagogy for democratic multiculturalism requires that both educators and students are given the tools with which to question how media and popular culture affect, and are affected by, socio-historical contexts. Teachers and students must be taught how to deconstruct popular media and the ideologies they spread while recognizing how media images and celebrities have replaced schools, families, and religious institutions as definers of values, fashion, style, behavior, identity, and more (Kellner, 1995). In this sense, students and teachers must join together to consider the ways knowledge is formed in society through the media in order to counter oppressive epistemologies—epistemic violence—as experienced by diverse Americans on a daily basis. Educators must engage in a critical media pedagogy that, as Morrell (2008) describes, “targets populations that have been targeted by the media industry” by offering students the means necessary to counter the ways popular media molds them through their own media production. Morrell (2008) explains:

Rooted in the Gramscian project of cultural production and the Freirian project of conscientization, the critical media pedagogy translates the media consciousness into the creation of new/critical/counter media artifacts that are themselves a part of the pedagogy of others. Producing counter-knowledge through the manipulation of media tools is the mission of the critical media pedagogical project. . . . Acquiring the critical language to deconstruct media narratives is important, but not enough. (p. 158)

Democratic multicultural classrooms should be able to recognize how the popular media instills specific values and norms that maintain a white supremacist status quo while marginalizing non-white life-ways in America.

One way to put critical media literacy into practice is by engaging both students and teachers in careful analyses of popular films such as *Crash*

(2004) or *Gran Torino* (2008). Classrooms can discuss the ways that these movies represent race, class, gender, and sexuality or how they dehistoricize issues related to race, class, gender, and sexuality. How are Latinos and Asian Americans portrayed in *Crash* in ways that oversimplify their lived realities and cultures or disempower them? How does Clint Eastwood in *Gran Torino* play the role of white “savior” for the Hmong refugee family? How is this problematic? What is the role of history in both of these films and how do the directors both illuminate and disfigure it?

In his recent book, *Critical Media Literacy*, Morrell (2008) offers several brilliant strategies for classroom practice that address how students can counter hegemonic media practices. Morrell (2008) describes how students can engage in several different projects including youth investigation of access to media in the local community (through interviews with media personnel and representatives of mainstream media, daily analyses of newspaper coverage and topics discussed, and careful research regarding techniques used in photographs and visual media) as well as youth construction of their own *iMovies* about media in their communities (with digital cameras and user-friendly movie-making programs on school computers). As described in this book, Morrell’s students both explored how media was used in their community and created their own films to speak back to such media in successful ways that also built upon their English literacy skills.

Another valuable project could involve carefully analyzing cyberspace and the types of knowledge/ideologies both produced and spread through websites such as Myspace, Facebook, YouTube, and other popular sites. Such a project could connect well with English content standards for American teachers by allowing them to teach critical research skills—showing students how to be cautious about what they read as “truth” and “propaganda” online, how to judge the validity of website creators, how to use email or Myspace pages in self-conscious and ethical ways, and so on—while also allowing them to focus on media literacy. Students can learn—through internet practices—how to lobby for their own community’s rights, school resources, and personal needs for social change.

Projects such as these would be important to a revolutionary critical pedagogy for democratic multiculturalism because they provide students with the space not only to analyze their lived experiences and how race, class, gender, and sexuality are constructed in their communities through the media, but also to provide the space to react to such constructions and find agency in what is learned. Multicultural education, in this sense, is not something *done* to the students, but something that the students are able to take charge of through the field of critical media studies.

Student Agency

As with critical media literacy, an important aspect of revolutionary critical pedagogy in democratic multiculturalism is student agency. Classrooms need to be dialogic spaces in which the hybridity of formal schooling structures and informal classroom practice—in what Kris Gutiérrez and colleagues (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda 1997, 1999) call “third space”—are recognized as rich sites of learning where students can truly question the status quo, normative thinking, and the potential value of multiculturalism in society. Students need to be given the opportunity to give input on curriculum, instructional practice, and the ways schools are organized at large with distinct attention given to the diversity of students’ family histories and lived experiences. As Nieto (2000) notes:

Although almost all of us have an immigrant past, very few of us know or even acknowledge it. But because schools have traditionally perceived their role as that of an assimilating agent, the isolation and rejection that accompany immigration have simply been left at the schoolhouse door. The rich experiences of millions of our students, and of their parents, grandparents, and neighbors, have been lost. Rather than using students’ experiences as a foundation, curriculum and pedagogy have been based on the myth of a painless and smooth assimilation. (p. 3)

Nieto (2000) believes that schools need to first acknowledge students’ migrant histories, but that this journey into lived history must begin with teachers “who themselves are frequently unaware of or uncomfortable with their own ethnicity. By reconnecting with their own backgrounds, and with the suffering as well as the triumphs of their families, teachers can lay the groundwork for students to reclaim their histories and voices” (p. 3). Alongside teachers, students should be given the opportunity to reclaim their own family histories and, with these histories, help shape school curricula and classroom practice. National social studies content standards need to change significantly away from their European-American centered agenda and towards the diverse lived histories of all public school students.

Yet what would such a practice that embraces students’ family histories and diverse cultural backgrounds actually look like in a classroom? We believe that Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)—as outlined by contributors to *Revolutionizing Education* (Cammarota & Fine, 2008)—may be one answer. YPAR can help define a new era of learning and teaching that highlights students’ diverse lived experiences and that recognizes their families’ immigrant histories because, as explored by Jenifer Crawford (in press), educational access and equity, democratic knowledge production, and civic engagement are central to youth-led action research carried out in places like schools or community-based organizations. Drawing from the basic understanding that

every student brings his or her own valuable “funds of knowledge” to the classroom community (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, 1992, 2000), YPAR can help youth of all backgrounds engage in researching, learning, and sharing about their different family histories and epistemologies, building a truly multicultural classroom space. As outlined by McIntyre (2000), three principles guide participatory action research: (1) collective inquiry into a social problem; (2) relying on indigenous and local ways of knowing and understanding; and (3) taking action on the problem researched. Thus, participatory action research conducted with and by youth not only privileges the students’ ways of knowing the world, but also provides the student with skills to actively research the world around them in order to change it for the better of the greater community; “YPAR is transformative for individuals and the social context in which they are situated” and “is a process that situates an individual’s learning in his or her socio-historical context—the basis of what some scholars believe is sound pedagogical practice” (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 7). YPAR research practices with students would be essential to reframing multicultural education.

Examples of how YPAR can be organized in the classroom and conducted in the community are well described by youth/adult, collaborative research groups who investigated the everyday lives of home neighborhoods on the Lower East Side of New York City or explored educational access in New York, Tucson, and Los Angeles public schools as described in *Revolutionizing Education* (Cammarota & Fine, 2008) and *The Art of Critical Pedagogy* (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Students were given the opportunity to carefully research their own communities and access to education for students of color. Such a research process helped change the hierarchical structure of classrooms and build a new community camaraderie that included the teacher as learner and the students as experts. We believe that YPAR can be used to illuminate the diversity of immigration histories of all students—including white students—and validate all ways of knowing in a democratic, multicultural classroom space. Youth can enrich school curricula in immeasurable ways through their own YPAR projects if educational institutions would be willing to acknowledge their home knowledge and innate abilities. Current national content standards should be reframed to embrace YPAR for all students with the understanding that students have the ability to change communities for the better when given the opportunity and respect they deserve.

Working With Communities

Parents and families should also be engaged in multicultural curricula for democracy. The voices and experiences of students’ family members

should be welcomed and valued in all classroom spaces. Whether parents are invited as guest-speakers in the classroom or encouraged to help design curricula that addresses their lived histories and immigration stories, families can be incorporated into classroom communities in multiple ways. Of course, in order for schools to truly embrace family, current administrative practices in educational institutions need to change dramatically. In most public schools, many parents and guardians feel unwelcome because parent conferences and meetings are often held when parents are at work; little to no translation support for non-English speaking parents is provided at school functions; parents are usually contacted only when something “bad” has happened with their student; and many schools judge and academically track students based on race, class, sexuality, home language, and so forth.

Although engaging home and community is also challenging, the BRIDGE project—which tried to understand the mathematical practices used in households and apply them to teaching mathematics in the classroom—is a testament to the great potential in recognizing how families can contribute to the ways student engage in multicultural, democratic education (González, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2001). Researchers in this project formed a mathematics study group with local women (parents) in the community to learn about how students’ families engaged in mathematical practices. At one study group, a female tailor and parent was invited to teach people how she designed and made a dress pattern (González et al., 2001). This tailor used very complicated mathematics in her dress pattern practices, which helped researchers/educators both recognize how everyday practices include mathematical thinking as well as how the tailor’s use of math could be applied to classroom teaching. Students familiar with mathematical practices used at home—math that is often not labeled “academic” or “math,” but that is deeply rooted in math, nonetheless—may be encouraged to learn math if schools engaged what they already know about home math practices. Such teaching would validate students’ lived, home cultures. This is just one way that multicultural, democratic ways of thinking can radically transform how math is taught today.

If teachers are encouraged to engage with the families of their students and actively seek out students’ home knowledge, privileging home knowledge as valuable in the classroom, varying family histories and lived experiences would be able to come to life in the classroom in richly democratic, critical multicultural ways.

Addressing Language Diversity

Finally, no multicultural curriculum for democracy is truly multicultural or democratic if it fails to acknowledge the diversity of students’ home lan-

guages. The racist undercurrent of political policies such as Proposition 187 in California—disgustingly labeled by white supremacists as the “Save Our State” initiative—which sought to deny immigrant students the right to speak their home languages in public schools, actively works against multiculturalism and democracy itself (Crawford, 2000; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Asato, 2000). If we are to fully embrace the value of diversity and multiculturalism in today’s schools, we must be willing to also value students’ languages and varying epistemologies learned and used through such languages. Bilingual education needs to be both supported and restructured in ways that use home language literacy practices as tools for learning all subjects, while English should be recognized as just one of many possible common languages in which to communicate.

Literacy in out-of-school settings can be incorporated into classroom practice in valuable ways. As illustrated by Hull and Schultz (2001), when writing is used as a mediating tool for thinking and learning—rather than an end-point skill to learn uncritically—and when literacy incorporates local ways of knowing, students can build both strong reading/writing skills as well as the self-confident identity formation necessary to connect with diverse people and change the world for the better. The different ways students engage in communication with their families, in other media (i.e., internet, computer games, etc.), and in the classroom can be openly addressed by teacher and student alike and worked into the ways topics are discussed and explored on a daily basis.

For example, applications of revolutionary critical pedagogy that embraces diverse student home languages could incorporate Carol D. Lee’s (2001) cultural modeling activity system that uses language as a tool for intellectual reasoning. In her own work, Lee uses cultural historical activity theory as a framework for curricular design and teaching strategies in order to align classroom practice with students’ funds of knowledge—particularly among African American students. Teachers wishing to apply critical multicultural education for democracy in their daily educational practice should consider how Lee (2001) builds on students’ use of language (in this case, African American Vernacular English) to engage student-generated questions about complex literary texts, scaffold learning across lessons, develop new critical reading norms, and build the ability to create intertextual links. When students’ home languages are viewed as a resource and part of their learning toolkits instead of as a deficit to overcome, teachers can engage in deeper forms of learning that support democratic thinking and multicultural values.

Acknowledging the Exploitation of Human Labor in Capitalism

Finally, American education cannot achieve a true, multicultural democracy that addresses racism, sexism, heterosexism, and all “isms” of social

oppression as long as capitalist exploitation continues to exist. San Juan (2002) carefully analyzes exactly why this is so in his book *Racism and Cultural Studies* which all educators, who wish to understand the possibilities of multicultural education, should read. San Juan (2002) notes:

Race constitutes the wily mask of the nationalist gospel in the United States. It conceals the predatory system of class relations by inventing ‘buffer’ races, criminalizing people of color, and exacerbating a retrograde politics of identity. . . . As Amiri Baraka memorably puts it, ‘Racist national oppression . . . is the fundamental philosophy of the American social system, reflecting its imperialist economic base’; and white supremacy serves as ‘the philosophical justification for the exploitation and oppression of most of the world’s peoples’ (1998, 392). It is time for progressives to examine the hegemonic discourse of the U.S. racial polity, and with it the parallel aesthetic essentializing of American national purpose and ‘self-evident’ national character. (p. 59)

In order to support a truly democratic education for all students, our schools must offer space for students to learn about and openly critique capitalist practices (Macrine, McLaren, & Hill, 2009). The reality of social inequality that is upheld by America’s economic practices must be directly addressed. Schools should be the fertile space in which new ideas about how to live without capitalism can be both imagined and realized. State and national content standards need to fairly address capitalism in both local and international forms, historically and currently.

CONCLUSION

In order for America to fulfill its promise of democracy—one that embraces all humanity across all differences—radical changes must take place in the educational system. Schools need to address the many ways that curricula and teacher practice instill white, European-American centered values and epistemologies that eviscerate students of their varying family histories, cultural knowledge systems, and understandings of the world based on class, race, gender, sexuality, age, and religion.

While the suggestions for educators shared in this chapter begin to address how schools can apply revolutionary critical pedagogy to a multicultural education for democracy, we wish to reiterate that true multiculturalism and true democracy are impossible under capitalism. As convincingly argued by San Juan (1996), in order to work towards the development of counter-hegemonic struggles by the poor and dispossessed of the planet, critical multiculturalism must work directly against transnational capitalism that oppresses working class people and people of color and develop the conditions of possibility for a socialism for the twenty-first century (McLaren

& Jaramillo, 2007). Today, we need a human praxis that can achieve the transcendence of alienation. This necessitates a subjective praxis connected with a philosophy of liberation that is able to illuminate the content of a post-capitalist society and that convinces the popular majorities that it is possible to resolve the contradictions between alienation and freedom. While we value the work of scholars including Ramon Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano, who have addressed how alienation through imperialism and colonization have resulted in epistemological genocide linked to Eurocentric forces, we believe that educators today must distinctly recognize the exploitative force of capitalism to engender change.

The power relationships enforced through capitalism that antagonize interactions across race, gender, sexuality, religion, and age are the driving force of social inequity and epistemic violence based in white supremacist thinking today. As E. San Juan, Jr. (2002) writes:

To lay the groundwork for a genuine popular-democratic esteem for cultural differences, class divisions must be abolished first with the socialization of productive property and the equalization of competencies. Power relations need to be overhauled according to egalitarian principles. Multiculturalism, as long as it is conceived within the existing framework of the racial polity, of a hegemonic order founded on class inequality, cannot offer the means to realize justice, fairness, and recognition of peoples' singular identities and worth. (p. 8)

The reality is that the totalizing power of capital creates constitutive limitations in which subjectivities—ethnic, multicultural, religious, and so on—are formed. This is visible in the controlled consent made possible by corporate media's production of social amnesia that dislocates humanity from its lived struggles and experiences. Democracy has become synonymous with profit-making, requiring a rollback of trade union power and a generalized hollowing out of social democracy, not by military dictatorship but by an endless stream of maledictions and execrations against leftist movements and Marxist analyses that deal with the totality of capitalist social relations and address questions of universality. We are immersed in a popular culture unswervingly saturated by endless spectacles meant to divert attention from substantive political issues and debates, and geared towards proselytizing in order to create silent accomplices in the ravages of corporate expansionism and imperialism.

Through revolutionary critical pedagogy, we can directly address how capitalism assimilates diverse individuals into homogenous and helpless consumers (Sandlin & McLaren, 2009). A truly multicultural education geared towards democratic practice that embraces varying perspectives and life-ways must openly critique how oppression today is spurred on by the greed of capitalist hegemony. We believe that revolutionary critical pedagogy can directly counter epistemic violence by self-consciously acknowl-

edging the ills of capitalism itself through reflexive teaching, decentering whiteness, engaging media and popular culture, giving students agency, empowering the community, and recognizing the value in all home languages across the globe.

NOTE

1. Children in kindergarten or first grade who are too young to read the Pledge of Allegiance yet who are memorizing its words by sound often lose the Pledge's actual meaning as words collide in pronunciation. One of the authors of this chapter (J. J. Ryoo) clearly remembers thinking that the phrase: "...the Republic for which it stands" was "there public for witch" when she was five years old.

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