



Critical Pedagogy, Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Resistance



ED 229 (Urban Schooling elective)

Wednesdays, 5-9.

Moore Hall, Room 3030

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A culture of domination demands of all
its citizens self-negation. The more
marginalized, the more intense the demand.

-- bell hooks

Course Overview

The premise that guides the course is that education is a set of political, economic and cultural relationships that reflect the dominant social arrangements in society. Issues of power and powerlessness are central to the course as they illuminate how social arrangements are imagined, constructed and challenged. We pay particular attention to those communities and individuals who are part of the periphery-those outside official spheres of power - as opposed to those in power. We consider questions such as who is part of the periphery and why? How does one become part of the periphery? What is the impact of center/periphery relations in a so-called democratic society?

We begin with an analysis of the argument that education is a political activity. After this discussion the course moves to address the following topics:

1. global capitalism and education
2. identity, representation and resistance
3. power and knowledge
4. critical pedagogy
5. revolutionary multiculturalism
6. postcolonialism and pedagogy

Opportunities will be provided for each class member to express ideas, opinions, and experiences in relation to schooling. This will require such skills as critical reading, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Recognizing the limited time available, only selected topics will be introduced, but every attempt will be made to provide a wide range of resources and approaches that should be useful when students are able to investigate topics in more depth.

Required Texts

After Race: Racism After Multiculturalism

by [Antonia Darder](#), [Rodolfo D. Torres](#)

Red Pedagogy by Sandy Grande, Rowman and Littlefield

Revolutionary Multiculturalism, Peter McLaren, Westview Press

Culture and Truth, Renato Rosaldo. Beacon Press

What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question

by George Yancy

Suggested Texts:

Christine Sleeter and Peter McLaren, eds. **Multicultural Education and Critical Pedagogy**. State University of New York Press.

THE CONTEXT OF THE COURSE

This seminar invites students to analyze and reflect upon the way in which individuals and groups have created ideals, images, and constructs of education as part of (primarily) US culture. It does so in the context of providing an overview of how the educational system in its myriad of constructions addresses the issues of racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and difference. The course focuses upon the US educational system as an integral part of a diverse and conflictual society and how school administration, teaching, the curriculum, and policy shape our understanding and reproduction of, as well as our resistance to, such a

society. Unlike in-service workshops - often, but not always valuable in tackling problems of student and teacher motivation, curriculum design, implementation and evaluation, etc. - this class emphasizes in-depth reading and the cultivation of intellectual reflection. It does this not to raise itself above practical workshop approaches, but to help ground students in the various intellectual traditions of critical theory, feminist theory, critical pedagogy and multicultural education. It takes the position that only labor-intensive intellectual pursuit produces a self-reflexive and self-critical praxis.

This course takes the position that reading the word and the world is a dialectical process and that how you read the world influences but does not necessarily determine the manner in which you choose to live in the world. In this course, theory is unashamedly emphasized yet the practical is always within reach. However, the student is held mainly responsible for making the necessary link between the theory and the lived experiences of students, teachers, parents, administrators, and the community. Critical pedagogy is not a recipe or a methodology to be implemented. It is praxiological, resulting from bringing theoretical frameworks to bear on the context of groups and individuals in real world struggles.

We live at a precarious point in time in which relations of subjection, suffering, dispossession, and contempt for human dignity and the sanctity of life remain at the center of our social existence. Emotional dislocation, moral sickness, and individual helplessness remain a ubiquitous feature of history. Our much heralded form of democracy has become, unbeknownst to many US citizens, subverted by its contradictory relationship to the very object of its address: human freedom, social justice, and tolerance, and respect for difference. In the current historical juncture, discourses of democracy continue to masquerade as disinterested solicitations, and to reveal themselves as incommensurable with the struggle for social equality. The reality and promise of democracy in the United States has recently been invalidated by the ascendancy of new postmodern institutionalization of brutality and the proliferation of new

and sinister structures of domination. This has been followed by an ever fainter chorus of discontent as the voices of the powerless and the marginalized grow increasingly despondent or else are clubbed into oblivion by the crackling swiftness of police batons.

Although violence and suffering continue to pollute the atmosphere of everyday life in the United States in alarming proportion to previous decades, the dream of democracy and the struggle to bring it about has taken on a new intensity, as recent events in Eastern Europe attest. In its unannounced retreat in the United States over the past decade, democracy has managed to recreate power through the spectacularization of its afterimage, that is, through image effect and management and the creation of national myths of identity primarily through the techniques of the mass media.

The prevailing referents around which the notion of public citizenry is currently constructed has been steered into the ominous direction of the social logic of production and consumption. Buyers are beginning to culturally merge with their commodities while human agency is becoming absorbed into the social ethics of the marketplace. Social impulses for equality, liberty, and social justice have been flattened out by the mass media until they have become cataleptically rigid while postmodern images threaten to steal what was once known as the 'soul'.

It is no secret that state of US education has been vaporized by marketplace logic and reached a critical impasse. Gripped by a resurgent conservatism, US schools are facing a retreat from democracy and equality. With a growing consternation, the US public faces a wide range of national debates over the decline of academic standards, the steady demise of the academy, the splintering of teachers'; unions, and the erosion of morale within the teaching profession itself. Within this climate, we are witnessing an unprecedented challenge to the survival of the traditional liberal arts, as our corporate leaders continue to speak the language of technological reification, challenging schools to rank work habits over critical thinking.

Under the banner of “excellence,” technological expertise has become the rallying theme for a new mass cultural text, a theme recapitulated in the media, in the business journals, and in the speeches of our large financial institutions, and in our schools.

THE CHALLENGE OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Society’s prospectivity has shifted modes. What society looks toward is no longer a return to the promised land but a general disaster that is already upon us, woven into the fabric of day-to-day life. The content of the disaster is unimportant.

--- Brian Massumi, 1993. The Politics of Everyday Fear

Today’s students have inherited an age in which the discourse of liberty and democracy has been systematically subordinated to the status of an extinct language and where the notion of active citizenry has been all but displaced from public debate.

One consequence of living in a pluralistic society is the existence of a variety of conflicting views of what it means to be educated, for what purpose, for what kind of society, and towards what future. These views, in part, determine the nature of the actions we, as educators, take in the realm of schooling and instruction. this course is designed to explore both the views and actions taken by teachers in the light of current debates around the meaning and purpose of schooling.

Every educational policy we initiate, implement, or ignore reflects underlying assumptions regarding concepts of humanity, truth, value, school, and society. The extent to which we can understand educational theories, policy developments, and instructional practices corresponds to the ways in which we are able to identify and critically interrogate these underlying basic assumptions.

This course adopts the position that schools are among the most important social and political institutions of (post) modern society. While it is undeniably true that all schools differ in their approaches and their philosophies, and that all teachers share different cultural histories and theoretical perspectives, it remains an insuperable fact that schools exert a powerful collective influence that helps both shape and give substance to the fabric and meaning of contemporary social life. However, “to be schooled” means more than just inheriting received wisdom from a more knowledgeable individual or more informed source. Quite the contrary. Schooling constitutes a highly complex sociological, historical, psychological, and political endeavor.

Teaching, for instance, involves more than just decisions about program content and instructional methodology; it is a practical field which encapsulates the deliberative resolutions of ethical and political arguments. These, in turn, lead to social, political, and moral decisions that have important consequences for the fate of our culture and society in general. Acting as cultural “gatekeeper,” schools can be said to provide the “moral charter” for our society.

Critical problems in our society contribute to the growing inability of our schools to provide students with decision-making opportunities. Today’s curricula, caught in a fetishistic concern with “excellence” and “accountability”, dictates what students should learn, thereby removing from their grasp the capability of making decisions about their own destiny and the destiny of society as a whole.

This course will attempt to interrogate the underlying assumptions that inform the current conservative, liberal and radical debates over schooling. An important issue we will explore concerns how experience is named, legitimated, and accomplished and who is responsible for it. Such a concern will deal with the topic of human agency, the institutions and structures which “house” our lived social relations, and the discourses and language which, in part, “produce” who we are. All of these issues will e

explored through a concrete analysis of school as major political sites of culture struggle.

CRITICAL LITERACY

Literacy is power, power to make a difference, power to be a person, power to be real. Literacy is the kind of strategic knowledge that puts one in command of the details of an art, craft, organization, means of communication, or form of behavior. But in the social media this power to command communication is readily abused, and the audience can be trained to take the abuse for granted. The course seeks to expose the stereotypical but subtle ways in which many dominant educational discourses have depicted the most important of all relations -- relations between people--leaving an ever more violent legacy of attitudes and values that many people come unconsciously to accept as natural or normal or even to be desired. Taking an axiom that all behavior is communication, intended or understood or not, the course exposes the unstated codes of communication and ideologies that constrain our sense of how we view school/society relations and our own teaching practices without our conscious awareness or consent.

Suggested Questions to raise about Class Readings

In order to provide a substantive analysis of the class readings, I am providing a set of questions that I would like each student to consider. I strongly suggest that you sketch out for each assignment some notes that indicate your answer to the following questions. The point, of course, is that we need to ground our discussions in a more critical and substantive analysis of the readings themselves. The outline below simply provides a method of inquiry that will facilitate a more critical reading of texts under analysis.

1. What are the basic assumptions that inform the reading?
 - A. What are the major organizing ideas?
 - B. What are the subordinate ideas?
2. What serious questions does the reading raise regarding the nature and purpose of schooling?
3. What serious omissions are left out of the article or reading? How do these distort or undermine the author's position?
4. What ideology or world view governs the author's view?
5. In what ways does this article reinforce, extend, challenge, or oppose your own views on schooling? Be specific.

This seminar course also introduces students to themes and concepts of cultural studies, an area of study where we examine culture as something that is actively produced and deliberated by different people in different socio-political and geo-political contexts. Culture is viewed as a recursive process that is constructed out of the power relations, institutional, cultural and social formations, relations of production, etc., as well as out of the debates and negotiations of the wide range of people who make up a society. Because culture is seen as the result of relations between people (and not merely a fixed, abstract thing), then cultural studies is also intrinsically concerned with the analysis of power relations between people. Who is in more of a position of power and who has less power to define or control culture? The field of cultural studies presents a number of methods of analysis of studying culture, and students will be introduced to those methods in this course, in particular the use of textual analyses of original narratives in U.S. education and culture. Through explorations of written and visual texts, students will study the construction of and the meaning of social texts and culture, and will explore the ways in which educational goals and practices are influenced by those texts and discourses. Students will learn that education and schooling as we know

it today has been and continues to be actively constructed, and is not, in and of itself, a neutral "fact" or unequivocal process.

The cultural studies emphasis of the course is closely linked to the humanities approach, because in both areas of study we examine the cultural meaning of personal and public narratives and arts. This seminar begins by inviting students to analyze and reflect upon the way in which people have created ideals, images, and constructs of education as part of United States culture. As in any humanities class, for example, English literature or art history, students will be asked to understand how meaning is created within the text. Like any reading of a William Burroughs novel or a Frida Kahlo painting, educational texts are cultural constructs that reflect a combination of cultural beliefs, images, common practices, aversions, hopes, and dreams.

Glossary of Some Freirean Terms

With the writings of Paulo Freire, a number of neologisms and old words with new meanings have been introduced into the discourse of educators. In particular, terms are derived from Marxist literature with new interpretations. The following lists some of the more common terms currently in use, together with their definitions.

Alienation: The term is derived from Marx and refers to the domination of people by owner elites, material constraints, political structures, and thought itself. Ultimately, alienation is the separation of humankind from its labor. It interferes with the production of authentic culture (see Culture). It is affected by any process which limits a person's power to know the world, and thus dehumanizes the world itself (see Humanization).

"Banking" Education: In the "banking" method of education passive learners receive deposits of pre-selected, ready-made knowledge. The

learner's mind is seen as an empty vault into which the riches of approved knowledge are placed. This approach is also referred to as "digestive" and as "narrational" education.

Codification: A codification is a representation of the learner's day-to-day situations. It can be a photograph, a drawing, or even a word. As a representation, the photograph or word is an abstraction which permits dialogue leading to an analysis of the concrete reality represented. Codifications mediate between reality and its theoretical context, as well as between educators and learners who together seek to unveil the meanings of their existence.

Empowerment: Empowerment is a consequence of liberatory learning. Power is not given, but created within the emerging praxis (see Praxis) in which colearners are engaged. The theoretical basis for this discovery is provided by critical consciousness; its expression is collective action on behalf of mutually agreed upon goals. Empowerment is distinct from building skills and competencies, these being commonly associated with conventional schooling. Education for empowerment further differs from schooling both in its emphasis on groups (rather than individuals) and in its focus on cultural transformation (rather than social adaptation).

Generative Themes/Words: Generative themes are codifications of complex experiences which are charged with political significance and are likely to generate considerable discussion and analysis. They are derived from a study of the specific history and circumstances of the learners. In a literacy program, generative themes can be codified into generative words — that is, tri-syllabic words that can be broken down into syllabic parts and used to "generate" other words. Generative words have been most useful in relation to languages which are phonetically based (e.g., Spanish, Portuguese).

Humanization: The central task in any movement toward liberation is to become more fully human through the creation of humanly-enhancing culture — in a word, "humanization." This historical task is countered by

the negative forces of dehumanization which, through oppressive manipulation and control, compromise human values for personal gain power. The task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and, in the process, liberate their oppressors. Revolutions are humanized to the extent that the new regime confronts its tendency to replicate the oppression of the old (see Transformation of the World). Humanism is not the same as humanization in so far as humanism is a philosophical approach that stresses understanding without addressing the social changes that need to occur before this can happen.

Liberatory Education: Education which is liberatory encourages learners to challenge and change the world, not merely uncritically adapt themselves to it. The content and purpose of liberatory education is the collective responsibility of learners, teachers, and the community alike who, through dialogue, seek political, as well as economic and personal empowerment (see Empowerment). Programs of liberatory education support and compliment larger social struggles for liberation.

Mystification: Mystification is the process by which the alienation and oppressive features of culture (see Culture) are disguised and hidden. False, superficial, and naive interpretations of culture prevent the emergence of critical consciousness (see Critical Consciousness). Educational systems are key instruments in the dissemination of mystifications, e.g., unemployment is “mystified” as personal failure rather than as a failure of the economy, thus making it difficult for the unemployed to critically understand their situation.

Participatory Research or Action Research: Participatory research or action research is an approach to social change — a process used by and for people who are exploited and oppressed. The approach challenges the way knowledge is produced with conventional social science methods and disseminated by dominant educational institutions. Through alternate methods, it puts the production of knowledge back into the hands of the people where it can infuse their struggles for social equality, and for the

elimination of dependency and its symptoms: poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, etc.

Praxis: Praxis is a complex activity by which individuals create culture and society, and become critically conscious human beings (see Culture and Critical Consciousness). Praxis comprises a cycle of action-reflection-action which is central to liberatory education. Characteristics of praxis include self-determination (as opposed to homogeneity), and rationality (as opposed to chance).

Problematization: Problematization is the antithesis of “problem-solving.” In problem-solving, an expert takes distance from reality and reduces it to dimensions which are amenable to treatment as though they were mere difficulties to be solved. To “problematize” is to engage a group in the task of codifying reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and oppressive social forces. Problem-posing is a logically prior task which allows all previous conceptualizations of a problem to be treated as questionable. Problematization recognizes that “solutions” are often difficult because the wrong problems are being addressed.

Transformation of the World: To transform the world is to humanize it (see Humanization). All transformations do not result in liberation. Transforming action could dehumanize the work with an oppressor’s curious and inventive presence (e.g., the development of the V-2 rocket in World War II). Only history reveals the problematic nature of being human and the consequences of having chosen one path over the other. The transformation of the world is humankind’s entry into history. As people act upon the world effectively, transforming it by work, consciousness is in turn historically and culturally conditioned. Conscientization (see Conscientization) is the result of action which transforms the world and leads to humanization.

Conscientization: Conscientization is an ongoing process by which a learner moves toward critical consciousness (see Critical Consciousness).

This process is the heart of liberatory education. It differs from “consciousness raising” in that the latter frequently involves “banking” education — the transmission of pre-selected knowledge. Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness — in particular, awareness of oppression, of being an “object” in a world where only “subjects” have power. The process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming a “subject” with other oppressed subjects — that is, becoming part of the process of changing the world.

Collegiality: Collegiality is a form of social organization based on shared and equal participation of all its members. It contrasts with a hierarchical, pyramidal structure, and is represented by a series of concentric circles. Authority resides in the center-most circle, not over the others, but equidistant from each, so that authority can listen and reflect the consensus of the whole (see Consensual Governance). A collegial model has been frequently associated with liberatory education programs.

Consensual Governance: Decision-making by consensus requires the discussion of issues until all are in agreement — this in contrast to decision-making by voting in which rule by the majority is imposed on those who dissent. Decision-making by consensus is time consuming and difficult. At times, consensus represents the willingness of a minority “not to oppose” a decision, but the ultimate benefit of this model is that no one is excluded by a decision. This model is characteristic of participatory democracies as occasionally exemplified in U.S. history by the town hall meeting (but not as it is artificially constructed in Clinton’s electronic town hall meetings).

Critical Consciousness: This is a level of consciousness characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems, through testing one’s own findings with openness to revision, attempting to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and preconceived notions when analyzing them, receptivity to the new without rejection of the old because it is old. In

striving toward critical consciousness, the individual rejects passivity, practicing dialogue rather than polemics, and using permeable, interrogative, restless, and dialogical forms of life. Critical consciousness is brought about not through an individual or intellectual effort, but through collective struggle and praxis (see Praxis).

Culture: Culture is used in its broadest, anthropological sense as including all that is humanly fabricated, endowed, designed, articulated, conceived, or directed. Culture includes products which are humanly produced, both material (buildings, artifacts, factories, slum housing) and immaterial (ideology, value systems, mores), as well as materially derived products such as social class and the socio/political order. The key aim of liberatory education is to regain dominion over the creation and use of culture.

Culture Circle (Circulo de Cultura): The circulo de cultura is a discussion group in which educators and learners use codifications (see Codification) to engage in dialogue about the reasons for their existential situation. The peer group provides the theoretical content for reflection and for transforming interpretations of reality from mere opinion to a more critical knowledge.

“Culture of Silence”: The “culture of silence” is a characteristic which Freire attributes to oppressed people in colonized countries’, with significant parallels in highly developed countries. Alienated and oppressed people are not heard by the dominant members of their society. The dominant members prescribe the words to be spoken by oppressed through control of the schools and other institutions, thereby effectively silencing the people. This imposed silence does not signify an absence of response, but rather a response which lacks a critical quality. Oppressed people internalize negative images of themselves (images created and imposed by the oppressor) and feel incapable of self-governance. Dialogue and self-government are impossible under such conditions.

Decodification (see Codification): Decodification dissolves a codification into its constituent elements and is the operation by which learners begin to perceive relationships between elements of the codification and other experiences in their day-to-day life and among the elements themselves. Thus, decodification is analysis which takes place through dialogue, revealing the previously unperceived meanings of the reality represented by that codification. Decodification is the principal work of a *circulo de cultura* (see Culture Circle).

Dialectic: Dialectic is a term referring to a dynamic tension within any given system and the process by which change occurs on the basis of that tension and resulting conflict. Based on the writings of Hegel, a very concept implies its negation; that is, in conceiving anything (thesis), we must be able to imagine its opposite (antithesis). Change occurs as this tension leads to a new conception of reality (synthesis). It should be noted that Marx, in contrast to some liberatory educators, postulated that such tensions and contradictions were embedded in concrete culture (thus, dialectic materialism) and not merely found in contradictions between the existential world and our thoughts about the world.

Dialogical Method: The dialogical approach to learning is characterized by co-operation and acceptance of interchangeability and mutuality in the role of teacher and learner, demanding an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and trust. In this method, all teach and all learn. This contrasts with an anti-dialogical approach which emphasizes the teacher's side of the learning relationship and frequently results in one-way communiqués perpetuating domination and oppression. Without dialogue, there is no critical communication, and without critical communication, there can be no liberatory education.

Assignments

I. A seminar presentation on a topic related to the themes brought up in the readings. 50% Group presentations are encouraged, depending on the size of the class. If the class is relatively small, then presentations with a partner is encouraged. Solo presentations are permitted but working with a partner or in a group is encouraged.

III. Participation (50%)

Students are expected to participate in class discussions and to read all assigned materials. All students will get full credit for these activities by participating actively in class. Students must hand in summary (1-2 pages) of each reading assignment that summarizes the general themes and major ideas and concepts. This must be typed. These will not be graded but must be completed in order to get participation credit.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

January 12 Introduction to Class

January 19 **Culture and Truth**

Entire class discussion

Submit two-page paper

January 26 **Revolutionary Multiculturalism**

Group one leads seminar discussion

Submit two-page paper

February 2 **After Race**

Group two leads seminar discussion

Submit two-page paper

February 9 **What White Looks Like**

Group three leads seminar discussion

Submit two-page paper

February 16 **Red Pedagogy**

Group four leads seminar discussion

Submit two-page paper

February 23 **Packet of Readings**

Entire class

March 2 **Class Presentations**

March 9 **Class Presentations**

March 16 **Class Presentations**