



# **Critical Theory in Education: Power, Politics and Liberation EDU 284**

[Core course for students in Urban Schooling]

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Room: Moore Hall 3030

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To speak a true word is to transform the world.  
--Paulo Freire

Capital is dead labor which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks.  
--Karl Marx

*He (Paulo) was concerned with the number of persons who let themselves be deceived by neo-liberal slogans and so become submissive and apathetic when confronted with their former dreams. Paulo used a metaphor for this situation: "They have gone to the other side of the river!"*

--Ana Maria (Nita) Araújo Freire

My father, the head of the family, was a rural teacher in the days of [Lazaro] Cardenas when, according to him, they cut off teachers' ears for being communists.

--Subcomandante Marcos

A culture of domination demands of all

its citizens self-negation. The more marginalized, the more intense the demand.

■ bell hooks

### **Required Texts**

Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur, **Teaching Against Globalization and the New Imperialism: A Critical Pedagogy**. Rowman and Littlefield

Peter McLaren, **Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution**. Rowman and Littlefield.

Henry Giroux, **Theory and Resistance in Education**. Bergin and Garvey

Paula Allman, **Revolutionary Social Transformation** (Critical Studies in Education and Culture Series) Bergin and Garvey

**Red Pedagogy** by Sandy Grande, Rowman and Littlefield

### **Suggested Reading**

<http://eserver.org/clogic/4-1/mclaren%26rikowski.html>

## Radical Pedagogy: A Perspective

Critical or radical pedagogy is an approach to understanding the school/society relationship from the perspective of the social relations of production within capitalist societies. It is also a practical approach to teaching, learning, and research that emphasizes teaching through critical dialogue and dialectical analysis of everyday experience. In short, it is about teaching through praxis. Its approach is democratic, and its aim is to bring about social and economic equality and justice for all ethnic groups. It upholds the principles of and struggles for race, class, and gender equality. Practitioners include feminist educators, labor rights advocates, queer theorists, and Marxist humanists, among others. There are generally two streams. One stream is left-liberal and attempts to make capitalist society more 'compassionate' and more democratic so that it better serves the interests of the poor and economically disenfranchised. The second stream is generally grounded in a critique of capitalist society (often through an engagement with the writings of Marx) and attempts to work towards a socialist society through social critique and non-violent dissent. Both streams eschew doctrinaire brainwashing and are committed to dialogue and democratic debate. Both have been part of the educational curriculum in colleges of education for the past two decades.

These days it is far from fashionable to be a critical educator. To identify your politics as critical is to invite derision and ridicule from many quarters, including some on the left. It is to open one's work to all species of criticism, from crude hectoring to sophisticated Philippics. Charges range from being a naive leftist, to being stuck in a time warp, to being hooked on an antediluvian patriarch, to giving into cheap sentimentality or romantic utopianism. Critical theorists are accused of assuming an untenable political position that enables them to wear the mantle of the revolutionary without having to get their hands dirty in the day-to-day struggles of rank-and-file teachers -- especially those who occupy the front lines in the schools of our major urban centers. Critical analysis is

also frequently derided as elitist in its supposed impenetrable esotericism, and if you happen to teach at a university your work can easily be dismissed as ivory tower activism -- even by other education scholars who also work in universities. Critics often make the assumption that you are guilty of being terminally removed from the lives of teachers and students until proven otherwise. Some of the criticism is productive and warranted but much of it is a desperate attempt to dismiss serious challenges to capitalism -- to displace work that attempts to puncture the aura of inevitability surrounding global capitalism. While some of it is substantive - including a welcomed critique of the enciphered language of some academics and a challenge to radical educators to come up with concrete pedagogical proposals -- much of it is small-minded and petty.

Part of the problem faced by the educational left today is that even among progressive educators there exists an ominous resignation produced by the seeming inevitability of capital. The belief that there is no alternative to capitalism has pullulated across the global political landscape since before the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, attaching itself like a fungus to regional and national dreams alike. The winds of the Cold War had spread its spores to the farthest reaches of the global and after laying dormant for a decade, are making their appearance as a fully-developed worldview. Such a worldview celebrates capital as the key to the survival of democracy. Plowed and harrowed by international cartels of transnational corporations, freemarketeers, and global carpetbaggers poised to take advantage of Third World nations in serious financial debt to the West, the seeds of capitalism have yielded a record-breaking harvest. Watered by the tears of the poor and cultivated by working-class labor, the dreams that sprout from the unmolested soil of capital are those engineered by the ruling class. Their dream factories are corporate board rooms and production studios of media networks that together work to keep the capitalist dream alive, to prevent the masses from realizing that capitalism and exploitation are functional equivalents, and to impede educators from recognising that the globalisation of capital is just another name for what Lenin (1951) termed imperialism.

Those disappointed that the apocalypse was not ushered in at the millennium's end are making up for it in their razor-edged celebration of the war on terror. History has been split down the middle as if it had been sliced by a Taliban cane soaked in water. On the one side, modernity houses the transnational ruling class, whose dreams remain unbounded, rewinding time. On the other side, the transnational working-class takes refuge in modernity's refuse heap of time unravelled and dreams dehydrated. Understanding how this mighty division has been prepared by capital is the skeleton key that unlocks the bone yard of reason where truth can be found amidst the charred ruins of civilizations past and those yet to come.

Today's international political economy is the toast of the global ruling class, and the bourgeoisie see it as their biggest opportunity in decades to join their ranks. Freemarketeers have been given the New World Order's imprimatur to loot and exploit the planet's resources and to invest in global markets without restriction with impunity. The menacing concomitant of capital's destructive juggernaut is the obliteration of any hope for civilisation, let alone democracy. The working-class are taught to feel grateful for the maquiladoras that are now sprouting up in countries designated to provide the cheap labor and dumping grounds for pollution for the western democracies. They are taught that socialism and communism are congenitally evil and can only lead to a totalitarian dictatorship. In short, capitalism and the legitimacy of private monopoly ownership has been naturalised as common sense.

Here I follow a number of the central assertions of William Robinson (2001), namely, that in recent decades the capitalist production process itself has become increasingly transnationalized. We have moved from a world economy to a new epoch known as the global economy. Whereas formerly the world economy was composed of the development of national economies and national circuits of accumulation that were linked to each other through commodity trade and capital flows in an integrated international market, while nation states mediated the boundaries between differently articulated modes of production, today national production systems are reorganized and functionally integrated into global

circuits, creating a single and increasingly undifferentiated field for world capitalism. We are talking here about the transnationalization of the production of goods and services (globalization) and not just the extension of trade and financial flows across national borders (internationalization). The new global financial system disperses profits worldwide as the world becomes unified into a single mode of production and single global system bring out about the organic integration of different countries and regions into a global economy. The consequences of the restructuring of the world productive apparatus are staggering. I agree with Robinson that technological changes are the result of class struggle—in this case, the restraints on accumulation imposed by popular classes worldwide. Global class formation is occurring, with supra-national integration of national classes accompanying the transnational integration of national productive structures. This has accelerated the division of the world into a global bourgeoisie (the hegemonic global class fraction) and a global proletariat. That is, dominant groups fuse into a class or class fraction within transnational space. There is an emergent capitalist historic bloc sustained by a transnational capitalist class and represented by a transnational bourgeoisie. The United States is playing a leadership role on behalf of the emerging transnational elite; that is, the U.S. is taking the lead in developing policies and strategies on behalf of the global capitalist agenda of the transnational elite. It follows from this that revolutionary social struggle must become transnationalised as power from below in order to counter transnationalised capitalist power from above.

In order to understand this process better, we need to de-reify the nation-state, move away from Weberian state structuralism and nation-state centrism that are associated with world systems analysis. Only then can we fully appreciate how transnational capital is becoming the hegemonic fraction of capital worldwide and how capitalist class fractions from different countries are fusing into a new transnational capitalist class (Robinson, 2001).

What we are seeing today in the marketplace is really a continuation of the core ideology of Reaganism, what Manning Marable describes as free markets, unregulated corporations, an aggressive militarization abroad, and the suppression of civil liberties and civil rights at home. In a

sense the United States is now closer to the Reagan ideal of the national security state “where the legitimate functions of government were narrowly restricted to matters of national defense, public safety, and providing tax subsidies to the wealthy” (2001, p. 4). It is the flourishing of Reagan’s ‘military Keynesianism,’ – “the deficit spending of hundreds of billions of dollar on military hardware and speculative weapons schemes such as ‘Star Wars’” (2001, p. 4).

It is also clear that today world capitalism is trying to re-establish itself in transnationalized formations, since its current forms are virtually unsustainable. In other words, the transnational capitalist elites are seizing opportunities to use military force to protect their markets and create new ones. In fact, a more dangerous threat than individual acts of terror today are the multifarious contradictions internal to the system of world capitalism. Throughout its history, U.S. capitalism has tried to survive in times of crisis by eliminating production and jobs, forcing those in work to accept worse conditions of labor, and seizing opportunities that might arise in which the public would support military action to protect what the United States defines as its vital interests. One of the major mechanisms used by the ideological state apparatus to prevent a legitimation crisis over the necessity of global capitalism is the school. Students are taught to believe that if capitalism falters, democracy is doomed. But, as Marx (1977, 1977) argues, capital is an historically produced social relation that can be challenged (most forcefully by those exploited by it). A renewed engagement with and challenge to capital by means of critical theory fibrillates our social imagination which largely has been flatlined since the ascendancy of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and their successful assault on Keynesian welfare state capitalism. The advance of contemporary critical educational scholarship (Rikowski, 2001a, 2001b; Hill, 2001; Cole, 1998; Hill and Cole, 2001; Hill, McLaren, Cole, and Rikowski, in press; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000), critical theory (Giroux, 1981, 1983; Kincheloe, 1998), and a rematerialized critical pedagogy (McLaren, 2000; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001a, 2001b; Fischman & McLaren, 2000) in the field of education—although still modest glimmerings—is, in our view, sufficient enough to pose a

challenge not only to neoliberal free market imperatives but also to post-Marxist solutions that most often advocate the creation of social movements grounded in identity politics or, as evident in recent anti-Marxist pedagogical polemics, a pedagogy grounded in uncertainty (Lather, 2001).

While we agree that capitalism has, since its inception, always functioned as a world economy, we also want to stress what we see as a powerful new movement in contemporary capitalist production and global relations of power. This movement provides the groundwork for a more centralized and unitary regulation of both the world market and global power relations that tend towards “a single supranational figure of political power” and that introduce “a new inscription of authority and a new design of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and resolve conflicts” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 9). But we stress here that these movements are today only powerful tendencies - not a paradigm shift. Inter-imperialist rivalry is still strong, and the global landscape is still replete with a multiplicity of contesting capitals.

Meszaros (2001) has argued that capitalism’s functional division of labor is horizontal and is potentially liberating because it partakes of a socially viable universality -- the harmonisation of the universal development of the productive forces with the all around abilities and potentialities of freely associated individuals. However, it is the vertical dimension of capitalism and its hierarchical division of labor that constitutes capital’s ‘reproductive horizon’ and ‘command structure’ ensuring that living labor is subsumed by dead labor and that capital’s productive developments remain containable by the imperative of surplus labor accumulation. This results in the structural/hierarchical subordination of labor to capital. In other words, this is creates a permanent structural crisis within capitalism in contrast to what some believe are only periodic, conjunctural crises.

Critical educators maintain that neoliberal ideology as it applies to schooling is often given ballast by poststructuralist/postmodernist/deconstructive approaches to educational reform because many of these approaches refuse to challenge the rule of

capital and the social relations of production at the basis of the capitalist state. Neoliberalism (“capitalism with the gloves off” or “socialism for the rich”) refers to a corporate domination of society that supports state enforcement of the unregulated market, engages in the oppression of nonmarket forces and antimarket policies, guts free public services, eliminates social subsidies, offers limitless concessions to transnational corporations, enthrones a neomercantilist public policy agenda, establishes the market as the patron of educational reform, and permits private interests to control most of social life in the pursuit of profits for the few (i.e., through lowering taxes on the wealthy, scrapping environmental regulations, and dismantling public education and social welfare programs). It is undeniably one of the most dangerous politics that we face today.

Neoliberal free market economics—the purpose of which is to avoid stasis and keep businesses in healthy flux—functions as a type of binding arbitration, legitimizing a host of questionable practices and outcomes: deregulation, unrestricted access to consumer markets, downsizing, outsourcing, flexible arrangements of labor, intensification of competition among transnational corporations, increasing centralization of economic and political power, and finally, widening class polarization.

As Dave Hill and Mike Cole (2001) have noted, neoliberalism advocates a number of pro-capitalist positions: that the state privatise ownership of the means of production, including private sector involvement in welfare, social, educational and other state services (such as the prison industry); sell labor-power for the purposes of creating a ‘flexible’ and poorly regulated labor market; advance a corporate managerialist model for state services; allow the needs of the economy to dictate the principal aims of school education; suppress the teaching of oppositional and critical thought that would challenge the rule of capital; support a curriculum and pedagogy that produces compliant, pro-capitalist workers; and make sure that schooling and education ensure the ideological and economic reproduction that benefits the ruling class. Of course, the business agenda for schools can be seen in growing public-private partnerships, the burgeoning business sponsorships for schools,

business 'mentoring' and corporatization of the curriculum (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001a, 2001b), and calls for national standards, regular national tests, voucher systems, accountability schemes, financial incentives for high performance schools, and 'quality control' of teaching. Schools are encouraged to provide better 'value for money' and must seek to learn from the entrepreneurial world of business or risk going into receivership. In short, neoliberal educational policy operates from the premise that education is primarily a sub-sector of the economy.

One critical approach to understanding the relationship between capitalism and schooling and the struggle for socialism is premised upon Marx's value theory of labor as developed by British critical educationalist, Glenn Rikowski, and others (see Cole, Hill, McLaren, and Rikowski, 2001).

Following Marx, Rikowski notes that labor is the source of all value in capitalist society. Capital relies for its very existence on the generation of surplus value -- i.e., value over-and-above necessary labor. Surplus value is over-and-above that as represented by the value of labor-power that guarantees social production of the worker. In other words, when a worker works beyond that necessary to ensure his or her survival, then that worker is generating surplus-value for the capitalist. Surplus value rests upon our labor-power or our capacity to labor (our skills, knowledges, physical abilities, work and social skills). Labor-power -- our capacity to labor -- takes the form of 'human capital' in capitalist society. It has reality only within the individual agent. Thus, labor-power is a distinctly human force. The worker is the active subject of production. He or she is necessary for the creation of surplus-value. He or she provides through living labor the skills, innovation and cooperation upon which capital relies to enhance surplus value and to ensure its reproduction. Thus, by its very nature, labor-power cannot exist apart from the laborer.

Labor power is what Rikowski (2000, 2001a, 2001b) describes as the primordial form of social energy within capital's social universe. Labor-power is a special kind of commodity whose use value possesses the possibility of being transformed into a source of value. It constitutes value in a unique manner as the special living commodity that

possesses the capacity to generate more value -- i.e., surplus value -- than is required to maintain its social existence as labor power. In other words, surplus value is possible because labor-power expends more labor-time than is necessary for its maintenance. It rests upon the socially necessary labor time required to produce any use value under conditions normal for a given society. This presupposes labor-power as the socially average. The value of labor-power is represented by the wage. The key point here is that while the labor-power which the worker expends beyond the labor necessary for her maintenance creates no value for her, she does create value for the capitalist: surplus value. Education and training are what Rikowski refers to as processes of labor-power production. They are, in Rikowski's view, a sub-species of relative surplus value production (the raising of worker productivity so that necessary labor is reduced) that leads to a relative increase in surplus labor time and hence surplus value. Human capital development is necessary for capitalist societies to reproduce themselves and to create more surplus value. The core of capitalism can thus be undressed by exploring the contradictory nature of the use value and exchange value of labor-power. To reiterate: Capital does not move on its own accord but rather the mental and physical capabilities of workers enable these movements through their expression in labor. Labor-power is the substance of value or the 'cell form' of value. The act of laboring enables labor power (the movements or motion of capital) to be transformed into surplus value. Labor-power ensures the maintenance of the social universe of capital but also constitutes capital's weakest link. Social agents have to transform labor-power into labor and for surplus value to occur, workers must be forced and coaxed and coerced to produce more value than covers their subsistence that defines socially necessary labor. Ironically, labor-power has, within capitalist society, generated its own master: capital.

Labor-power enhancement creates more value and surplus value when workers are educated so that they can work harder, faster, and more efficiently. Teachers can disrupt the capitalist class relation by teaching about social justice. In so far as schooling is premised upon generating the living commodity of labor-power, upon which the entire social universe of capital depends, it can become a foundation for human

resistance. In other words, labor-power can be incorporated only so far. Workers, as the sources of labor-power, can engage in acts of refusing alienating work and delinking labor from capital's value form. As Dyer-Witford argues: "Capital, a relation of general commodification predicated on the wage relation, needs labor. But labor does not need capital. Labor can dispense with the wage, and with capitalism, and find different ways to organize its own creative energies: it is potentially autonomous" (1999, p. 68, italics original).

The labor-capital relation is not a symmetrical one. As Istvan Meszaros notes, "That means in the most important respect that while capital's dependency on labor is absolute -- in that capital is absolutely nothing without labor, which it must permanently exploit -- labor's dependency on capital is relative, historically created and historically surmountable" (2001, pp. 76-77, italics original). This means that an alternative socialist metabolic order outside the social universe of capital can -- and must -- be struggled for.

In the face of such a contemporary intensification of global capitalist relations and permanent structural crisis (rather than a shift in the nature of capital itself), we need to develop a critical pedagogy capable of engaging everyday life as lived in its midst. We need, in other words, to face capital down. This means acknowledging global capital's structurally determined inability to share power with the oppressed, its implication in racist, sexist, and homophobic relations, its functional relationship to xenophobic nationalism, and its tendency towards empire. It means acknowledging the educational left's dependency on the very object of its negation: capital. It means struggling to develop a lateral, polycentric concept of anti-capitalist alliances-in-diversity to slow down capitalism's metabolic movement -- with the eventual aim of shutting it down completely. It means looking for an educational philosophy that is designed to resist the 'capitalization' of subjectivity, a pedagogy that we have called revolutionary critical pedagogy.

Some critical educators believe that the best way to transcend the brutal and barbaric limits to human liberation set by capital are through practical movements centered around class struggle. But today the clarion cry of class struggle is spurned by the bourgeois left as politically

fanciful and reads to many as an advertisement for a B-movie. The liberal left is less interested in class struggle than in making capitalism more 'compassionate' to the needs of the poor.

Unhesitatingly embraced by liberals is, of course, a concern to bring about social justice. This is certainly to be applauded. However, too often such a struggle is antiseptically cleaved from the project of transforming capitalist social relations. When somebody tries to make the case for class struggle among liberals who fervently believe that capitalism is preferable to socialism or - god forbid - communism, people react as if a bad odor has just entered the room. I am not arguing that people should not have concerns about socialism or communism. After all, much horror has occurred under regimes that called themselves communist. We are arguing that capitalism is not inevitable and that the struggle for a democratic socialist alternative is not finished. Perhaps today this struggle is more urgent than at any other time in human history. Socialism is no longer a homogeneous struggle but, as Dunayevskaya (2002) elaborates, must involve coalition-building and international working class collaboration of struggle against global capitalism. Such a politics is one of difference and inclusion, but a politics whose center of gravity is the struggle for democratic alternatives to capital.

We need to keep in mind, that in so far as education and training socially produce labor-power, this process can be resisted. As Dyer-Witheford notes: "In academia, as elsewhere, labor power is never completely controllable. To the degree that capital uses the university to harness general intellect, insisting its work force engage in lifelong learning as the price of employability, it runs the risk that people will teach and learn something other than what it intends" (1999, p. 236). Critical educators push this "something other" to the extreme in their pedagogical praxis centered around a social justice, anti-capitalist agenda. The key to resistance, in our view, is to develop a critical pedagogy that will enable the working class to discover how the use-value of their labor-power is being exploited by capital but also how working class initiative and power can destroy this type of determination and force a recomposition of class relations by directly confronting capital in all of its hydra-headed dimensions. Efforts can be made to break down capital's control of the

creation of new labor-power and to resist the endless subordination of life to work in the social factory of everyday life (Cleaver, 2000; see also Rikowski, 2001). Students and education workers can ask themselves: What is the maximum damage they can do to the rule of capital, to the dominance of capital's value form? Ultimately, the question we have to ask is: Do we, as radical educators, help capital find its way out of crisis, or do we help students find their way out of capital? The success of the former challenge will only buy further time for the capitalists to adapt both its victims and its critics, the success of the later will determine the future of civilization, or whether or not we will have one.

## Why a Course on Radical Pedagogy?

In the last seven years, a number of writers have produced an impressive output on Marxist educational theory and radical pedagogy. The beginning of the new writing in critical educational theory can be traced to Richard Brosio's A Radical Democratic Critique of Capitalist Education (Peter Lang, 1994) and Kevin Harris's Teachers: Constructing the Future (The Falmer Press, 1994). Paula Allman's two books, Revolutionary Social Transformation Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities and Critical Education (1999) and Critical Education Against Global Capital: Karl Marx and Revolutionary Critical Education (2001, April) (both Bergin & Garvey) have established her as one of the world's leading Marxist educational theorists and radical educators. Mike Cole and Dave Hill have argued for the centrality of social class within Left writing on education and education politics, whilst providing trenchant critiques of postmodernism in educational theory. Meanwhile, the writings of Grant Banfield, Ramin Farahmandpur and Helen Raduntz herald a second wave of Marxist educational theorists. In his article 'Schooling and the Spirit of Enterprise: Producing the Power to Labour' (Education and Social Justice, 2(3), 2000), Banfield shows how Marxist educational theory can explain and illuminate the phenomenon of 'enterprise education'. Farahmandpur has written a number of articles on critical educational theory, the critique of

postmodernism in educational theory and critical pedagogy. Finally, Raduntz has produced a number of conference papers on teachers' labor, with special reference to un/productive labor.

## Rationale

Why is there a renewed emphasis on critical educational theory and radical pedagogy? Why are these important in capitalism today? These questions generate a number of answers, but for us the following theoretical, political and historical arguments are particularly significant.

First, theoretically, education and training in capitalism today are becoming increasingly significant as they come to form systems of social production of the one commodity that in the basis of the whole capitalist system: labor power. Labor power is the 'fuel for the living fire' (labor) that creates value and surplus value, and therefore capital. Education and training are involved in generating this 'fuel' – the skills, competencies, work attitudes and personality traits that are the foundation of labor power. Increasingly, education and training can be viewed as key institutions forming systems for the social production of labor powers. Examination of education and training policies in leading capitalist countries attests to this. Finally, education and training are increasingly implicated in the relatively recent strategy for raising the rate of relative surplus value: increasing the quality of human labor power.

Secondly, the political significance of education and training today is becoming clearer. If education and training are viewed as forming special productive systems for labor powers, then these institution attain strategic significance in future capitalist struggles. Furthermore, the position of teachers and lecturers becomes crucial: they are like "guardians of the fuel dump" that generates the "living flame" (labor). Finally, radical and critical pedagogies can then be viewed as both subversive forces and as bases for rethinking the nature and social production of labor power. They also have the potential for human resistance to the reduction of education and training to labor power production, and for generating alternatives that

challenge social injustices and fire imaginations for first anti-capitalist strategies and then alternatives to capitalist education (and society).

Finally, the historical significance of a renewed focus on radical pedagogy consists in the fact that since the mid-1990s Marxist educational theory has undergone a renaissance. Its previous high point was in the mid-late 1970s, with the work of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America (1976), and Paul Willis's Learning to Labor: how working class kids get working class jobs (1977). Critical and radical pedagogy – flowing from the work of Paulo Freire – had degenerated into uncritical liberal education detached from revolutionary social transformation by the end of the 1980s (with a few honorable exceptions). In the early 1990s, postmodern educational theory became the fashionable home for dissident 'Left' educators and researchers. By the mid-1990s Marxist writings on education and training appeared on a scale not known for many years. More importantly, however, these writings were moving in a number of directions and were increasingly no longer tied to the 'old' Marxist educational theory flowing from Bowles and Gintis and Willis. Finally, radical pedagogy had reasserted itself by the mid-1990s through showing the links between Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci and Karl Marx. Thus, radical education was made truly radical once more.

## 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. colonialism and imperialism
3. power and knowledge
4. dialectics and critical pedagogy
5. critical 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.

## **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**

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.

## **Cultural Studies – A Transdisciplinary Perspective**

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 Khalo 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 taken from Tom Heaney**

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 one-hour group seminar presentation on one of the books on the course, and follow-up class discussion. (50 %)

II. 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.

**January 10** Introduction to the class

**January 17** Martin Luther King Day Holiday

**January 24** 1. Entire class will discuss **packet of readings**

2. Group One will present on **Theory and Resistance**

Two page summary of readings for **Theory and Resistance**

**January 31** Group two will present on **Revolutionary Social Transformation**

Hand in two-page summary

**February 7** Group Three will present on **Teaching Against Globalization and the New Imperialism**

Hand in two-page summary

**February 14** Group four will present on **Red Pedagogy**

Hand in two-page summary

**February 21** Presidents Day Holiday, class cancelled

**February 28** Group five will present on **Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution**

Hand in two-page summary

**March 7** Speaking in Nebraska, arrange alternative class time

**March 14** wrap up class