

LORENZO MILANI: A MAJOR ITALIAN CONTRIBUTOR TO
CRITICAL EDUCATION...ON THE SIDE OF THE MOST
DISADVANTAGED

Peter Mayo

ABSTRACT

This paper dwells on the critical pedagogical approach of the Italian educator, Don Lorenzo Milani. It highlights his efforts at creating a learning setting in which his students, all forced out of the Italian public schooling system, can gain a political reading of the world around them. It is an education for critical citizenship in its broadest sense. It is an education fostering caring about others and everything. It has a collective dimension and views knowledge and learning as not a jealously guarded possession but something to be shared with others in the spirit of 'I care'.

Key Words: *Critical Education, Social Justice, Collective, Writing Back, Care, Sociology, Politics.*

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INTRODUCTION

Lorenzo Milani, who was born in Florence on 27 May 1923ⁱ, has all the credentials to be regarded as a key source of inspiration for a critical education and a critical pedagogy. He is very ¹ much one of Europe's critical pedagogues *par excellence*. In his native Italy, his name and that of Paulo Freire are used in the same breath. His following extends beyond Italy to include Spain where an entire movement of educators is inspired by his pedagogical and sociological work, not to mention his theological ideas.ⁱⁱ One of the books he helped direct made its impact in several languages including English and Turkish. It is authored by the students whose education he directed and, for my money, it is one of the best books ever written on the politics of education with respect to social class. It should stand alongside *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as one of the classics of critical pedagogy. Of course there is ample material on his pedagogical thinking in Milani's *Esperienze Pastorali* (Pastoral Experiences, not translated into English), an insightful Italian classic of great sociological relevance.

Critical pedagogy refers to that movement which is very much inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and others, but which has had its origins in North America. One need only visit the site of the Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy at McGill University to verify this as we come across such names as those of Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, Michael Apple, Deborah Britzman, bell hooks, Paula Allman, Donaldo Macedo, Peter McLaren, Ira Shor, Antonia Darder, Shirley Steinberg, and the late Roger I Simon and Joe Kincheloe.ⁱⁱⁱ They draw inspiration from some important historical figures, including John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, Lev Vygotsky, and W.E.B. Du Bois. One should also add Don Lorenzo Milani to this list.

ITALY'S GREAT CONTRIBUTION

In this regard, Milani joins other important figures from Italy who provide insights for a critical pedagogical approach to knowledge, learning and action. These include Danilo Dolci, who wedded community learning and social action, through community mobilization, reverse strikes and hunger strikes^{iv} and Aldo Capitini, the anti-fascist peace educator and activist who organized various educational and mobilizing activities within the context of a peace education movement and his post-war centres for social orientation (COS). Capitini was a visitor to Milani's school at Barbiana^v as was Mario Lodi, a prominent educator, influenced by Celestine Freinet, who helped develop the idea of collective writing which the School of Barbiana took up^{vi}. The other Italian critical educator I would include from Italy is Ada Gobetti Marchesini. After having been a scholar of Literature, having carried out work on the English poet of the Augustan age, Alexander Pope, and having worked with her late husband, Piero Gobetti, Gramsci's great friend and collaborator, she became a partisan fighting Nazi-fascism. Having survived this ordeal, she later dedicated the rest of her life, among other things, to education, espousing an emancipatory education. One can also include Maria Montessori here, if only on the grounds that the Mussolini Regime closed her schools, having initially sung her praises. Her pedagogical methods were to prove antithetical to the kind of personality traits that a fascist education was meant to nurture. As one can see, Italy provides a tradition of critical thinking about education, which extends well beyond Antonio Gramsci. Lorenzo Milani is among the most prominent among its exponents of an emancipatory education, or if you will, a critical education/pedagogy.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND COLLECTIVE LEARNING

Milani's approach to education for social justice accords importance to a number of issues, notably social class issues, race-related issues especially with his critique of North-South relations, the collective dimension of learning and action (emphasis is placed on reading and writing the word and the world collectively), student-teachers and teacher-students (a remarkable form of peer tutoring), reading and responding critically to the media (newspapers), the existential basis of one's learning (from "the occasional" to the "profound" motive)^{vii} and the fusion of academic and technical knowledge. The list is by no means exhaustive and derives from the one important

work with which he is associated, the *Lettera a una Professoressa* (Letter to a Teacher), the book translated into Turkish, English, Spanish and other languages referred to earlier. I will henceforth refer to it as the *Lettera*. Its authorship is attributed not to Lorenzo Milani but to the students under his care (Scuola di Barbiana – the School of Barbiana).

HISTORY AGAINST THE GRAIN

There is also an anti-war pedagogy that emerges from his defence of the right to conscientious objection. This entails a process of reading/teaching history against the grain. This feature of Milani's pedagogical approach^{viii}, which is to be found in his letters to the judges and to the military chaplains, in defence of the right to conscientious objection to the military draft, would be very apt for critical educators engaged in exploring signposts for a pedagogical politics after Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib^{ix} and for a decolonizing education. It would be quite appropriate and inspiring to educators trying hard to teach against the pervasive culture of militarization that has emerged from the USA and is being felt in many parts of the world. Milani's social and pedagogical voices are very much relevant in this day and age. The reading of Italian history by Milani and his students provide the grist for a pedagogical politics relevant to this age of casino-capitalism (Milani's denunciation of hyper-consumption practices in the booming Italian economy of his time can be read as some kind of foreboding with regard to the recent 'debtocracy' and the Wall Street debacle). Their writings provide us with examples of what has been called a "pedagogy against empire."^x "Empire" is here being given a more contemporary meaning which we associate with the work of Toni Negri, another prominent Italian enjoying recognition outside his own country, and his American colleague, Michael Hardt.^{xi}

A SUBALTERN READING OF THE GOSPELS

Being quite eclectic like Freire and sharing with the Brazilian educator the influence of the Holy Gospels, Lorenzo Milani differs with respect to Marxism, although he recognised some affinity with regard to the struggle against Capitalist oppression, as he explains in a letter to a Communist from Prato, Pipetta. Milani tells Pipetta that he will join forces with him in the struggle for social justice but would part company

once this is achieved. And yet Gramsci's writings, an important influence on critical pedagogy, were of interest to Milani. The Sardinian Marxist's *Lettere dal Carcere* (Letters from Prison) were important reading material at the School of Barbiana. One does not, however, come across traces of Marxism or references to Marx in the writings of the Tuscan priest. The Gospels were the most important source of inspiration for Milani. This notwithstanding, his classes at San Donato, the place where he served prior to Barbiana, were deliberately devoid of religious symbols – a secular, non-denominational school.^{xii} Milani was not keen on providing religious instruction, and one must keep in mind that a potentially divisive general election was about to take place in Italy, the split being between the Church-backed Christian-Democratic Party (*la DC*) and the Left, especially the Italian Communist Party (*la PC or PCI*). Milani felt conversion occurred not as a result of instruction, but through the grace of God, a position which landed him in hot water with the Ecclesiastical authorities at the time; he was very critical of the way religion was taught.

He was more concerned with helping raise the critical educational level of the peasant and working classes, hence his setting up a non-denominational school in one of the two localities in which he was involved. At the same time, he was concerned with the plight of the downtrodden. According to his reading of the Gospels, these are the people the Church needs to reach out to and serve. This explains his option for the oppressed and his commitment to living a life that was not far removed from the reality of these people. He was 'dalla parte dell' ultimo' (on the side of the last, the most disadvantaged), the subheading in the title of Neera Fallaci's excellent biography of Don Lorenzo Milani.^{xiii} His was no doubt a "pedagogy of the oppressed." Much before Vatican II, Milani embraced a view of the church akin to that, referred to by Cornel West, Paulo Freire and others, as the "prophetic church". This stands in contrast to the "Constantinean Church" – the "Church of Empire". His pedagogical and social insights can therefore be as inspiring to a critical education as that which derives from Liberation Theology – a point of convergence with Paulo Freire.

AFFINITIES WITH BOURDIEU

His writings, in *Esperienze Pastorali* (Pastoral Experiences)^{xiv}, and the *Lettera* by the eight boys he taught at the school he conducted at Barbiana, all drop outs of the public school system^{xv}, anticipate or echo the arguments of many influential scholars. They

anticipate or complement the ideas of French, and other European as well as USA sociologists and philosophers, with regard to the themes of the bourgeois school and its role in social reproduction. A number of these were of neo-Marxist orientation. Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Jean Anyon, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron come to mind. In this regard, one should underline the convergence of the ideas expressed in the *Lettera* and the ideas concerning the school and bourgeois “cultural capital” expressed by leading French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who was not Marxist. It seems that Milani, a keen reader of French literature, had been exposed to the critique of bourgeois culture and power that occurred in France and that certainly influenced Bourdieu.

CONTRADICTIONS AND CLASS SUICIDE

Like all human beings, Milani had his contradictions, as one can observe from the interviews reproduced by his helpers, students and colleagues. He was, after all, a product of the Tuscan upper class and must have struggled hard to “jump out of his skin” and live a life of sobriety and humble dwelling. He might have even used old fashioned and therefore contemporary unorthodox pedagogical ploys in the course of his day to day teaching – a small kick (*una pedata*) here and there was not amiss in his view. One must keep in mind the time when his writings emerged. However there is much in the work of Milani and his students to provide the basis for a process of schooling that serves as an antidote to the prevailing contemporary system, a system which accords pride of place to testing, standardization, league tables, charter schools, vouchers – the kind of education that is predicated on excessive competitive individualism with the separation between students supposedly occurring on the basis of merit when it conceals the pernicious process of social selection taking place. This process, as educational sociologists explain, is the means whereby materially rewarding power is retained by those who already wield it at the expense of the majority.

The minority-majority divide broadens considerably in this age of speculative financial capitalism, as the movement of the 99% has been indicating through its

manifestations world-wide, for instance Gezi Park in Istanbul, Turkey, 2013, where it was confronted by fascist, violent police tactics (Gezi Park, 2013). When the *Lettera* was published in 1967, it provided an important source of inspiration for the movement for change known as the '68 movement. It was heralded by the leading and iconic Italian intellectual, Pier Paolo Pasolini, as one of the few books that had aroused his enthusiasm at the time. The Friulian writer and film director states that the text constituted a “wind of vitality...I have never felt so enthusiastic about something, being obliged to tell others: read it!”^{xvi}

BARBIANA AND THE 68 STUDENT MOVEMENT IN ITALY

Mario Capanna, formerly of *Democrazia Proletaria* (Proletarian Democracy) was a leader in the '68 student movement during his student days at Milan's La Cattolica (Catholic University of the Sacro Cuore, Milan). In 2007, the year that marked the *Lettera*'s 40th anniversary, he wrote of the huge impact that this book had on the student movements in the late sixties. It served as an important manifesto then in the struggle for reform of the Italian educational system. Pasolini states that it is a critique not only of the schooling system but of Italian society in general.^{xvii} Capanna feels that its impact confirmed how some of the more dynamic and social justice oriented aspects of the Gospels had as much influence on the thinking of the period as key basic Marxist concepts. This provided a strong combination of ideas in the struggle for school and social reform.^{xviii} It is interesting to observe that a text written by those who were thrown out of the public school system was to be chosen as a manifesto by a movement consisting primarily of those who had made it through this system into the universities.

The text underlines the social class basis of school failure and does so with much clarity as it contrasts the fortunes and everyday worlds of Pierino and Gianni, the two representative stock figures of success and failure in the public school system. Its vignettes from peasant/working class and middle class lives serve to render the arguments made most compelling. These arguments are backed by some meticulously gathered statistics. This book anticipated some of the finest sociological accounts of the relationship between social class and educational achievement, especially those that dominated Sociology of Education in the 70s and 80s. No wonder the Open University in the UK adopted the *Lettera* as a key text for its course unit, Schooling and Society.^{xix}

EXPERIMENTS CANNOT BE TRANSPLANTED: THEY MUST BE REINVENTED

The *Lettera* goes beyond criticism. For, in projecting an alternative vision for schooling, it draws on the experiences that took place at Barbiana, which, as Freire would argue, almost echoing Milani, cannot be transplanted but must be reinvented. In Don Milani's view, the experience at Barbiana started at Barbiana and ended at Barbiana. This is not to say that critical educators cannot glean ideas from the Barbiana experience, as presented in *Letter to a Teacher*, to contribute to a more humane, more social justice oriented education predicated on rigour, love, collective work and strong imagination, and which eschews a process of programming for failure. On the contrary, the letter serves this purpose. The text however represents no blue print. It must be reinvented and cannot be transferred to other contexts in cargo-cult style.

I CARE ABOUT EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE

Without minimizing the importance of the other letters for which Milani is famous, the *Lettera a una professoressa* (Letter to a Teacher) is the text, connected with him, most referred to by critical educators from Italy, Spain and other places, not least Turkey where this book was published in Turkish translation in 1977. Many recognize the book's stature as a text that exposes many of the basic features of a socially differentiating education within a Western "democracy" and which provides insights for a truly transformative and possibly revolutionary pedagogy. This pedagogy would be geared towards the kind of outcomes one would expect any citizen to achieve (the acquisition of "powerful knowledge" that any bourgeois parent would expect for her or his child) but it extends beyond this. The Barbiana pedagogy can contribute to the creation of a caring society, a society predicated on a culture of social justice. "I care" was the motto in English adopted by the school and served as the political battle cry for Walter Veltroni's Democratic Party in 2007.

SERVICE FOR OTHERS

In this regard, it provides much more than the kind of education generally made available to members of the ruling classes. This pedagogical approach is intended to

enable its adherents to place their knowledge, including knowledge and insights derived through critical engagement with texts and episodes, at the service of others, if I can use the Jesuit motto. The students learn collectively and teach each other. Older students taught younger ones, given that professionally trained teachers were unavailable to this school. Being a teacher as well as a learner gave the formerly flunked students a tremendous boost of confidence in their abilities and enabled them to learn things better by teaching them to others. The class would not move to the next stage unless everyone had mastered the present one. The students who learned the task or concept had to enhance their learning by explaining the matter to those who had not grasped it. This represents the kind of revolutionary and collective pedagogy that provides the hitherto downtrodden with the insights, knowledge, attitudes and confidence to become sovereign citizens capable of exercising their “right to govern.”

NOTES

ⁱ This article discusses some of the themes developed in a book, on Lorenzo Milani and the school of Barbiana, I co -wrote with two Italian scholars: Federico Batini, Peter Mayo, Alessio Surian (2014). It builds on a previous article I published in *Truthout*. July 13, 2013 <https://truthout.org/articles/lorenzo-milani-and-the-quest-for-a-social-justice-education/>

ⁱⁱ One of the leading international scholars on Don Milani’s work, especially his theological thinking, is the Salamanca-based José Luiz Corso.

ⁱⁱⁱ See the Paulo and Nita Freire International project for Critical pedagogy website: <https://freire.education.mcgill.ca/content/important-figures-emergence-critical-pedagogy> Accessed 2nd July 2008.

^{iv} Castiglione (2004)

^v Associazione Amici di Aldo Capitini (n.d.)

^{vi} See Batini, et.al, op.cit., final chapter.

^{vii} See Martinelli (2007). The occasional motive refers to the initial point of interest that is something that captures the students’ imagination. It could be an event, narrative or object that excites the students’ interest. One moves from there to a more ‘profound’ take on the ‘subject’ that leads into the related disciplines. Martinelli

shows how the discovery of a few bones in an adjacent building, which had just been damaged, generated discussions that eventually led into subjects such as anatomy and physiology. As Paulo Freire would say, the basis of learning is the learners' existential situation though one has to move beyond that into higher order thinking. See Freire (1994).

^{viii} See the letters, in English translation, in Burtchaell, (1988 The main text by Don Lorenzo Milani here is Milani (1991).

^{ix} See Giroux, H. A (2005), 2010).

^x McLaren and Jaramillo (2007).

^{xi} Hardt and Negri (2001).

^{xii} See Simeone (1996).

^{xiii} Fallaci, N (1993).

^{xiv} This book was originally banned from the bookshelves of Catholic bookstores at the behest of the Bishop of Venice, Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII who would eventually introduce Vatican Council II. It was banned because of its unorthodox approach to religion.

^{xv} *Lettera a una Professoressa* (Letter to a Teacher) is a collective piece of work authored by the eight students of Barbiana under Don Milani's direction. In my view, the finest translation of this work in English is provided in Borg, et.al (2009).

^{xvi} My translation from the original in Italian. <https://www.chille.it/progetti-in-corso/progetto-don-milani-lettera-a-una-professoressa/> Accessed 5th January 2013.

^{xvii} See the above endnote.

^{xviii} Capanna (2007).

^{xix} Information obtained from one of the course tutors Professor Roger Dale. See his Preface to Batini, Mayo and Surian, op.cit.

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The future of critical pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the historic evolvement of critical pedagogy and discuss about its future.

Key words: *critical pedagogy, oppression, exploitation, and liberation*

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WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY?

I have been invited to comment on the future of critical pedagogy.

What is the future of critical pedagogy? Has its tacit and enduring framework of liberation of the oppressed from forces and relations of exploitation been slowly and painstakingly whittled away by the unalloyed inertia of a long and protracted struggle that has lasted numerous decades. Or by the seemingly inexhaustible forces of the right?

Has critical pedagogy been reduced to a shadow of its former self which once proclaimed an earth-shaking message so inhospitable to the laws of motion of capital that it was just as easy to imagine it was carried on a beam of light from the Pleiades star cluster than from a tiny schoolhouse in Pernambuco, Brazil, filled with sugarcane harvesters intent on reading both the word and the world? Is critical pedagogy at this present moment but a fleeting residue of its former association with Paulo Freire, whose path-finding intervention into the dross and drudgery of the banking model of teaching brought hope and promise to those thirsting for liberation and helped teachers find their backbones in confronting the breathtakingly superficial pageantry of commodity culture and the swindle of neoliberalism that had formed its sacred center in capitalist relations of production, in the commodification of our subjectivity, in the transformation of relations between people into relations between things?

Have critical educators been reduced to circuit preachers bullwhipped by their congregations who have stubbornly refused any message that stipulates that they sacrifice the comforts of this world? Has the critical educator, personified by Freire, become the impotent interlocutor of times past, who has now gone to seed in distant pastures? Has Freire become the educational talisman for students to cite, so that they can earn their credentials as criticalists?

Is the potent brew of critical consciousness afforded by a pedagogy of the oppressed now just a cup of thin gruel passed from student to student in what remain of critical

pedagogy seminars in the age of Trump?

Those are far too cynical questions, in my opinion, yet they deserve a response.

If Freire's work has been decaffeinated over the years such that it no longer proves a threat to the ruling class any more than the work of Freire's educational precursors, then why, moments before his inauguration in early 2019, did Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro tweet, "One of the goals to get Brazil out of the worst positions in international education rankings is to combat the Marxist rubbish that has spread in educational institutions." And why, on the campaign trail, did Bolsonaro say that he wanted to "enter the Education Ministry with a flamethrower to remove Paulo Freire" (Bolsonaro to Erase Freire and Feminism from Textbooks, 2019)? Clearly Freire is a figure whose work needs to be reckoned with. If anything, his work is more relevant today than at any other time in its history.

If we look at the Chicago teachers who have recently inspired a national teacher uprising, then surely the critical tradition is holding sway. Whether they identify as Freirean educators or not, these rank-and-file teachers clearly have embraced Freire's spirit in challenging the corporate-driven takeover of public education. Disgruntled and fed up Chicago teachers have made striking respectable again. And they have made teachers excellent role models to follow once again. And what about the cadres who turn out books about or inspired by critical pedagogy? Are they just keeping up with educational fashion? The issues facing humanity are too serious for critical pedagogy to continue as a fashion statement. Clearly, it is the case that critical pedagogy has found a home in America Latina. In fact, writings produced by critical educators are often translated and used as a bulwark against fascism throughout countries spread across the world.

While it may seem to some that critical pedagogy does not have a direct link to policy decisions traceable to local, regional or national arenas of education, it has impacted the field of education organically, by serving systematically and habitually as a moral compass for the way we treat each other in the classroom and by contributing to the

epistemological, ontological and axiological stances we take in the production of knowledge and how we situate our actions in the larger environmental ecosystems that nourish us. And very often the impact is not necessarily felt in our own geopolitical backyards but in policies and practices developed by educators in other countries.

Critical pedagogy uncovers or otherwise identifies the enduring historical forces in educational discourses, practices, and values. These discourses, practices and values have been transformed over time and their common sense outcome in many instances has been historically relativized to encourage us to see what isn't there. Critical educators polemically reposition their critiques of education in capitalist society according to the contextually specific challenges that are unfolding at significant historical junctures and in doing so engage in dialectical reversals of received common sense such that the strange becomes familiar and the familiar strange.

The challenge is to fathom not only why individuals remain ensepulchered within their received ideological formations—sometimes called the prison house of language—despite being presented with unwelcomed truths but also why they participate in the very activities which generate those dangerous truths while maintaining the appearance of being unbiased and open minded.

Those of us who use the language of critical pedagogy in our work have been accused by the punishingly self righteous doyens on the right of being manipulated by proponents of “cultural Marxism.” Here, the alt right maintains that the books of the Frankfurt School and some postmodernist theorists have allegedly served as ideological “anchor babies” smuggled into university libraries and planted on the shelves by communist sympathizers in order to carry out the unfinished work of the Soviet Union’s assault on American freedoms. In other words, critical educators are accused of being knowing participants in the destruction of the United States after the Soviet Union disappeared into the quicksand of history. According to this logic,

critical educators are functioning as witting puppets carrying out the orders of their Hidden Master (George Soros? The ghost of Hugo Chavez?) who is unleashing forces of destruction on the free world from some secret hideaway, perhaps located in the Vatican or in the catacombs of Paris.

Someone might intemperately ask at this point: Should an educational philosophy turned pedagogical movement be employed by teachers to challenge unassailably the growth of fascism here in the US and around the world, and shouldn't the bully boy populism of Donald Trump be dealt with at the ballot box rather than by cadres of teachers working from an ethics of social justice? I would simply answer this question with the following provision: If you feel compelled to ask this question, then perhaps teaching is not the right calling for you.

Freire's conceptual categories created by naming the world in order to transform it are always heuristic, and while they cannot capture the totality of the world they are useful in identifying certain important aspects of the world that can be transformed. Freire's work, grounded in a thoroughly Marxist, or dialectical materialist, theory of knowledge is also influenced by his Christian faith. Over time the exhausted epistemics of critical pedagogy have been supplemented by a conceptual polyamory that has tried at times to pull Freire's work more towards the left (revolutionary critical pedagogy) or towards the center (progressive liberal pedagogy). The work being produced in the field of liberation theology (McLaren & Jandric, in press) puts a singular demand on those who have religious faith, the centerpiece of which is a demand for freedom and social justice. The knowledge co-created among students and among teachers and students working together in critical encounters with freedom is designated for use in developing social justice programs designed to bring structural change in an oppressive society. But what does political praxis in the service of permanent human liberation entail?

It means recognizing that the structure of reality is never permanent and although it is often reified in order to appear to be permanent, that can never really be the case

because the structure of reality is never finished. Changing the structure of reality means acknowledging the alterity which permeates the world and understanding that knowledge never reflects the world but always refracts it and we need to take responsibility for this refraction, this reduction of the strangeness of the world to the familiar. In challenging the social relations that structure reality, we necessarily change the very formation of our own selves in the process, and this dialectical exchange flies directly in the face of what many feel about popular religiousness—that it foments helplessness in the face of the “perversity” and “antisolidarity nature” of capitalism and its “absolute insensitivity to the ethical dimension of existence” (Freire, 1997, p. 88). Freire writes:

The issue around liberation and its practice is not fighting against the religiousness of the popular classes, which is a right of theirs and an expression of their culture, but rather overcoming, with it, the vision of a God at the service of the strong for a God on the side of those with whom justice, truth, and love should be. What marked popular religiousness—resignation and annihilation—would be substituted with forms of resistance to outrage, to perversity. This way, submission-faith toward a destiny that would reflect God’s will makes way for a spurring faith of loving rebelliousness. In this process, there is an understanding of the body—for those who have evolved in their faith—as the dwelling of sin turns into an intelligence of the body as the temple of God. (1997. p. 103)

Freire is cautious about those who use their faith in situating themselves above the interests of those who lack it. He writes:

I cannot see how those who so live their faith could negate those who do not live it, and vice versa. If our Utopia is the constant changing of the world and the overcoming of injustice, I cannot refuse the contribution of progressives who have no faith, nor can I be rejected for having it. What must not be accepted in those who proclaim their faith is that they use it at the service of the popular classes’ uncriticalness. This is how I have always understood God—a presence in history that does not preclude me from making history,

but rather pushes me toward world transformation, which makes it possible to restore the humanity of those who exploit and of the weak. (1997, pp. 103–104)

For Freire, there is an urgency to confront the “pornography of our lives” by denouncing injustice which simultaneously awakens in ourselves and in others, the need and taste for hope. Freire is worth quoting at length on this issue:

Once more, in Brazilian history, it is urgent for purity to manifest itself against two-faced moralism, and for translucent seriousness to shine through against the audacity of shamelessness. In order to preserve hope, it is necessary to identify also as examples of deterioration the disrespect for popular classes, the indecent salaries paid to teachers in basic education, the lack of respect for public property, the excesses of government, unemployment, destitution, and hunger. These truly constitute the pornography of our lives. And so does discrimination, be it against blacks, women, homosexuals, the indigenous, the fat, the old. It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite. On this level, the struggle for hope means the denunciation, in no uncertain terms, of all abuses, schemes, and omissions. As we denounce them, we awaken in others and ourselves the need, and also the taste, for hope. (1997, p. 106)

What, then, is the “pornography of our lives” that we, as critical educators, need to confront on a daily basis? For me, living in the US, it is the struggle against fascism. Throughout history, fascism has often been the default response of those capitalist politicians who fear the economic universe in which they rule is facing an interminable crisis. Or when their sponsorship of the evangelical community—one that normally keeps their base ecstatically compliant and speaking in tongues by promises of a Mar-a-Lago Club afterlife—provokes enough citizens to raise ethical questions surrounding the legitimacy of the prosperity gospel. Dancing with the Stars is one thing, but how about Golfing with the Saints in Neverland, where the golf caddies look like Tinkerbell trussed up in Stormy Daniels dominatrix-style apparel.

When politics and religion begins to go this far south, which it has in the U.S., then it's time to have a military parade and a photo of yourself taken cuddling an American flag. Which Trump has done.

Those whom we categorize as filthy rich, who loathe the parasitical poor whom they complain are grubbingly panhandling outside big-box retail stores and CVS pharmacies, frightening the children of the affluent with their blackened teeth and muddy opioid eyes, are especially ripe for fascism because they lack empathy for others' suffering and have no understanding—and no wish to understand—the role that the contradictions of austerity capitalism play in the creation not of trickle down affluence but rather of structured hierarchies of power and privilege.

What could be more pornographic than the Jesus industry being taken over by big-dollar evangelicalism? Or suffering a president whose corrupt business ethics have permeated the entire logic of his presidency? What could be more pornographic than listening to William Consovoy, an attorney for President Donald Trump, in a hearing before the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan, argue that President Donald Trump is immune from prosecution if he literally shoots someone on Fifth Avenue? We live in a pornographic universe where captains of the nation's industry still profess admiration for Ayn Rand, who modeled her capitalist will-to power hero on a real life serial killer, where Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has said states can decide whether school districts can use federal funds to arm teachers, where the Trump administration's environmental reviews stubbornly acknowledge the extent of today's environmental devastation but minimize the connection between that damage and human-caused emissions, wording policies so as to protect fossil fuel interests, where neo-Nazi and white supremacist organizations are proliferating throughout the country (the far right accounted for 73% of extremist murders in the U.S. between 2009 and 2018, according to information taken from the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism, compared with 23% by Islamic extremists—the result, in part, of a lack of appropriate domestic terror laws that would criminalize being a member of domestic terrorist organizations such as Atomwaffen or Feuerkrieg Division), and

where the prosperity gospel of Christian evangelicals led by Franklin Graham, Paula White and Jerry Falwell Jr. have aligned themselves politically with the hate-filled anti-immigrant policies of Donald Trump. When, under such circumstances, we ask ourselves if critical pedagogy has become so dehydrated that it can no longer function as a serious counterpoint to the rise of fascism in the U.S. and worldwide we have to side with Freire, who writes that there can be no critical pedagogy without hope.

Whatever the perspective through which we appreciate authentic educational practice—gnoseologic, aesthetic, ethical, political—its process implies hope. Unhopeful educators contradict their practice. They are men and women without address, and without a destination. They are lost in history. In an effort to maintain hope alive, since it is indispensable for happiness in school life, educators should always analyze the comings and goings of social reality. These are the movements that make a higher reason for hope possible. (1997, p. 107)

And where we find history being made by us, rather than for us, there is hope.

Critical pedagogy will remain a vital force in shaping the future of our collective commons when teachers assume the role of public intellectuals, of social activists, of political protagonists who are able to work with the insight that what happens inside the classroom cannot be disconnected from what is happening in the local community, the school district, and the wider precincts of democracy, including state and federal levels of governance—all the way to transnational movements for change. In this manner we can include as active, protagonistic agents those 43 teachers in training from Raul Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College, that overlooks the village of Ayotzinapa in the poverty-stricken southern state of Guerrero, Mexico, who were forcibly abducted and then disappeared in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico, and who have been missing since the night of September 26, 2014. As a critical educator, I admire and support the post-revolutionary educational movement known as the Rural Normal Schools, through which schoolteachers are introduced to critical pedagogy and trained in political organizing in some of Mexico's most impoverished communities. In the

1950s and 1960s, Lucio Cabanas, who founded the Party of the Poor in 1967, studied at Raul Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College. The teacher and guerrilla fighter, Genaro Vazquez, was also a graduate from Ayotzinapa. Misael Nunez Acosta was a graduate of the Rural Normal School in Teneria and in 1979 he founded the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Education teachers union and was killed two years later.

Graduates of the rural schools are trained to educate poor “campesinos” or peasant farmers through a tradition of socialist education. Attacks on students are far from a rare occurrence in Mexico. We cannot forget the hundreds of brave students who were beaten by police and massacred on Oct. 2, 1968, in Tlatelolco square in Mexico City. Or the struggle for land of the Manoba peoples in the Philippines. Or Brazil's landless peasants movement, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, or the Abahlali base Mjondolo, or shack-dwellers' movement in South Africa. Or Idle No More, or Black Lives Matter. And there are more, so many more movements.

What is the future of critical pedagogy? The answer can be seen on the streets, on the picket lines, among young and old alike working to save communities assaulted by corruption and neglect and striving amidst great odds to create sanctuary cities for immigrants under assault by the Trump administration's group of fanatical and ruthless aides-de-camp and adjutants, and his Freikorps group of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. And lest we forget, the future of critical pedagogy can also be found in cramped university offices jammed with metal desks and cheap Office Depot swivel chairs, where lecturers, sometimes working as adjuncts and forced to survive on food stamps, write their articles and books and heat up the conversations in seminar rooms, which in turn get reinvented, reappropriated and repurposed by teacher educators, and then teachers, in classrooms across the country and this helps to fuel the process of conscientizacão (conscientization) among students. They are the educators who teach about the 1921 Tulsa Massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma, when Tulsa's “Black Wall Street” in the Greenwood District, home to black millionaires, was burned down and some estimates put the slaughter of black people—men, woman and children—that day at 300. They teach about the

intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexuality without reducing difference to identity. And in so doing they will continue to make history. Young people today are more readily able to distinguish the dangerous cost of choosing a humanizing capitalism over a socialist alternative, and are willing to participate in the mobilization of the working-class rather than to remain content with participating in a reciprocal and balanced relationship between business, labor and the state, with creating better policies rather than an oppositional politics. The future is open for the creation of national working-class parties and critical pedagogy needs to be at the ground level of this revolutionary struggle if it is to remain vital and relevant for the future of humanity. They teach about the Greensboro Massacre, which occurred after the Klu Klux Klan made common cause with American Nazi Party in North Carolina. On November 3, 1979, the Nazis and Klansmen confronted a group of communist protesters at a rally, brought out pistols, rifles and shotguns from the back trunk of a car, and shot to death five members of the Workers Viewpoint Organization and injured ten others. They teach about movements in the global south, such as the struggle to create popular baccalaureate schools in Argentina. The struggle to create popular baccalaureates—such as the Workers University at IMPA (Industrias Metalurgicas y Plasticas Argentina) and the Maderera Cordoba, which are housed in factories recovered by the workers (fabricas recuperadas)—is no easy task, especially in the current era of neoliberal urbanization. Such a challenge is of vital importance in the ongoing fight for a radical democratic and socialist alternative to the enduring crime of capitalist exploitation that has divided the world between the transnational capitalist class and those who depend upon wage slavery to survive. The creation of popular baccalaureates in Argentina must be seen in the context of unleashing the emancipatory potential of the larger struggle for workers' rights. This struggle cannot and must not make invisible the major contradictions that define today's austerity capitalism—the systematic transfer of wealth from labor to capital which has had a devastating effect on housing, food, health care and education in poor, marginalized communities.

In addition, this struggle must necessarily involve a diverse alliance of political and cultural actors that include the workers from the recovered factories, students, teachers, professors, artists, lawyers, government legislators and unionists—all who

agree to a politics of “unity in difference” in supporting and strengthening the workers’ cooperatives, in creating expropriation laws in favor of workers, in reforming the Bankruptcy Law, in assisting workers in their acquisition of state subsidies to purchase necessary factory equipment and in supporting new innovations in modes of production. Popular baccalaureates that have been born out of the struggle to recover the factories, especially those driven by revolutionary critical pedagogy, make explicit their resistance to capitalist exploitation and foster a strong link between learning and praxis. It is a emancipatory praxis that employs theater, music, cultural activities, community-building, and critical literacy—as well as an emphasis on science and mathematics taught under an ethical stipulation that all learning be dedicated to improving the lives of the population in a world threatened by planetary extinction.

This work could not be accomplished without the valiant efforts of groups of teachers, workers, community members and other supporters in forging an alliance that gives both the youth and their families the opportunity to exercise their creative capacities in becoming critical citizens who can dream beyond the limits imposed on them by the neoliberal state.

CONCLUSION

So far critical pedagogy has shown itself to be durable and enduring. It will survive and continue to develop in the coming years, as the struggle for a democratic socialism becomes more fierce and fraught with danger. In this, one of the darkest hours of our national life, critical educators take no pleasure in censuring the most desperate and loathsome designs of neoliberal administrations, designs fueled by the political bloodlust of a bourgeoisie in crisis, designs that can only be described as a tryst with the devil. What defeats we have experienced recently are not irremediable, are not inevitable. Critical educators have come to recognize that only by sheltering the persecuted, and only by creating the conditions of possibility for new and emancipatory forms of praxis in all spaces of human sociability can we obtain as a people a new birth of freedom.

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What Could Critical Mathematics Education Mean For Different Groups of Students?

Ole Skovsmose¹

ABSTRACT

In this article I consider what critical mathematics education could mean for different groups of students. Much discussion and research has addressed students at social risk. My point, however, is that critical mathematics education concerns other groups as well: for example, students in comfortable positions, blind students, elderly students, “other” students, university students, as well as engineering students. By considering such different groups of students, I will show that “reading and writing the world with mathematics” opens towards a range of different interpretations, which brings critical mathematics education into an open conceptual landscape.

KEY WORDS: *critical mathematics education, students at social risk, students in comfortable positions, reading and writing the world with mathematics.*

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INTRODUCTION

Ideas of critical mathematics education have been expressed through general notions like empowerment, social justice, and autonomy. These ideas can be condensed into the expression “reading and writing the world with mathematics”. Following Paulo Freire (1972), “reading” refers to critical interpretations of the world and “writing” to some kind of political engagement. “Reading and writing the world with mathematics” can also characterize mathematics education for social justice. In fact, I do not distinguish between critical mathematics education and mathematics education for social justice. I believe we are dealing with two largely overlapping educational approaches [1]. In this article, however, I will mostly discuss critical mathematics education.

General conceptions, including those that characterize critical mathematics education, get some of their meaning through the meta-narratives of modernity. One of these narratives tells of progress: that we are witnessing a process of historical development towards freedom and social justice. This narrative can be used to justify certain political actions, namely those that aim to overcome oppression and injustices. With respect to education, the assumption has been that particular approaches are justified when they are associated with such aims. In this way, critical mathematics education may come to be conceptualized within the modernist outlook.

Jean-François Lyotard has emphasized that the movement towards postmodernity includes a change in attitude towards meta-narratives. While in modernity meta-narratives were used to legitimize actions, the postmodern condition is characterized by a decomposition of such meta-narratives (see Lyotard, 1984, p. 18). I do not follow postmodernism in its many ramifications, but I am interested in Lyotard’s use of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of language games. Thus the decomposition of meta-narratives draws on Wittgenstein’s rejection of the existence of any unified conception of language and his recognition of a variety of language games.

This decomposition also applies to the notions that characterize critical mathematics education. Thus we should not expect the existence of any well-defined meaning of, say, “reading and writing the world with mathematics”. When leaving the outlook of modernity, one comes to operate in an open landscape of diverse, even contradictory, interpretations of any such notions.

With these remarks in mind, I consider what critical mathematics education could mean for different groups of students. Much discussion and research has addressed students who are at social risk—students in poor living-conditions missing basic resources, students in unstable situations due to violence and conflicts, or students subjected to pre-conceptions perhaps linked to immigration or deportation. My point, however, is that critical mathematics education concerns other groups as well: for example, students in comfortable positions, blind students, elderly students, “Other” students, university students, as well as engineering students. By considering such different groups of students, I will show that “reading and writing the world with mathematics” opens into a range of different interpretations, which bring critical mathematics education into an open conceptual landscape.

STUDENTS AT SOCIAL RISK

As a first step, consider what critical mathematics education could mean for students at social risk. Such risks can be caused by poverty, violence, or preconceptions. We can think of students living in modern hyper-ghettos or in favelas. We can think of students living next to a war zone.

Eric Gutstein’s work illustrates what working with students at social risk could mean. He emphasizes the importance of reading and writing the world with mathematics, and he refers to a range of topics that can be addressed, such as: elections, immigration, deportation, the spread of HIV-AIDS, criminalization of young people of color, racism, and sexism (see Gutstein, 2012). In each case, mathematical investigations can help to reveal particular features of oppression, exploitation, and injustice. The overall idea of working with such examples is condensed by Tonya Gau Bartell in the following way: “[M]athematics can be effectively used to teach and learn about issues of social injustice, assisting students to develop a critical consciousness that supports them in deepening their knowledge (and understandings) of the sociopolitical contexts of their lives” (Bartell, 2012, p. 114).

In Brazil, Denival Biotto Filho (2015) has worked with children living in a kind of orphanage, as their parents may have been involved in crime, drug abuse, prostitution, or have simply disappeared. These are children at social risk. Biotto Filho engaged these children in project work, one of which had to do with football. The children, both girls and boys, chose this topic with much dedication. In Brazil, there are many dreams associated with football, and several times Marta Vieira da Silva, widely known in Brazil, has been nominated by FIFA as the best female football player in the world. The football project included a range of issues, including one about the working conditions of professional players. It was revealed that more than half of the professional football players in Brazil earn less than the legal minimum salary. We know about the glamorous life of some professional players, but the reality for the majority is completely different. This is an example of reading the world that became established through the football project.

The results of this project were presented by the children to a mixed group, including some of Biotto Filho's colleagues, teachers, and people from the university. The presentation took people by the heart. The children were very well prepared. They welcomed everybody and introduced the project; they presented topics from the project; and they answered questions. They mastered the whole situation, which came as a surprise to several who attended. The project was conducted by a group of children from whom nobody really expects anything. However, it not only brought about a competence in reading with mathematics; it was also empowering in a direct, personal way. The children got an experience of "Yes, we can do it!"

From the perspective of critical mathematics education such experiences are important. Thus empowerment need not be interpreted solely in socio-political terms; it could also be interpreted in terms of personal experiences—as having, for instance, to do with self-esteem.

STUDENTS IN COMFORTABLE POSITIONS

The literature of mathematics education for social justice has mainly focused on students at social risk. The idea has been to ally with these students and to bring them into a position from which they can address issues of social injustice.

However, one can consider a very different group of students, which I refer to as students in “comfortable positions”. I have in mind students whose parents are, if not rich, then at least economically well off: students who belong to the well-protected layers of society. They go to private schools, if this will ensure better access to further studies. They enjoy all the advantages that education might offer.

What could reading and writing the world mean for such students? Let me refer to an example. João Luiz Muzinatti is working with students in comfortable positions. His idea is to address how mathematics-based arguments can help to point out preconceptions broadly assumed among middleclass students in Brazil, for instance concerning how much the state spends on people with low or no income. He tries to provide a reading of the world by means of mathematics that challenges general socio-political assumptions that makeup part of a traditional middle-class outlook.

With reference to the Brazilian context, Muzinatti addresses an example of such assumptions related to the Bolsa Familia. This system of family support was introduced during the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva(2003 - 2010) and extended during the presidency of Dilma Rousseff (2011-). This example of social welfare has faced much middle-class critique, such as “we are paying an awful lot of money to people that, as a consequence, do not want to work”. By means of mathematics, Muzinatti addresses the content of such general claims. It can be clarified how much money is, in fact, involved in this program; how many families receive this support; how much of total tax paid in Brazil goes to Bolsa Familia; and how much the individual taxpayer contributes to Bolsa Familia. There are many calculations students can complete in order to provide a deeper reading of Bolsa Familia.

With a small reformulation of Bartell’s (2012) summary, we get the following: mathematics can be effectively used to teach and learn about issues of social injustice, assisting students, including also students in comfortable positions, to develop a critical consciousness that supports them in deepening their knowledge and understandings of the socio-political contexts of their lives.

It is crucial that we consider the development of critical consciousness with respect to any group of students. However, the contexts for doing so can be very

different. Students in comfortable positions may not be subjected to social risks; they may even benefit from social injustices and economic inequalities. Still, to them reading and writing the world with mathematics might establish radical new perspectives, and this is a concern of critical mathematics education.

BLIND STUDENTS

Renato Marcone (2015) recently completed a study of mathematics education for blind students in Brazil. I was his supervisor, and I remember clearly the start of his project. As a point of departure, we wanted to identify previously conducted studies in mathematics education with respect to blind students. We searched around the world, but found very little. We also observed that in contributions explicitly referring to mathematics education for social justice, we could not identify any study regarding blind students. We were surprised, since it seemed obvious to us that we were dealing with an issue concerning social justice. Apparently research conducted in Brazil is providing an opening for this research area [2].

What could reading and writing the world with mathematics mean for blind students? Naturally one can interpret this expression in just the same way as for students at risk or for students in comfortable positions: as referring to socio-political readings and writings. However, in the most literal sense, reading and writing the world with mathematics is a challenge for blind students. For example, difficulties arise from the relationship between Braille and mathematical symbols and concerning the visualization of mathematical concepts and operations.

As part of his study, Marcone coined the notion of *deficiencialism* [3]. It refers to the construction of deficiency by normality. One inspiration for this notion comes from *orientalism*, as elaborated by Edward Said (1979). *Orientalism* refers to the conception of the East by the West and for the West. *Orientalism* was formed over centuries; it accompanied the brutal processes of colonization and got its principal expression through the worldviews that accompanied the formation of the British Empire. The crucial claim of *orientalism* is that people from the East are inferior compared to people from the West. In particular, people from the East lack the capacity for self-government. As a consequence, it became a noble thing that the British empire assumed the responsibility for governing these people, who were much

better off being ruled by the British, rather than being left alone to their own poor destiny.

Deficiencialism nominates some groups as suffering from a disability and provides conceptions of what this group is able to do and not do. In the case of blindness, it appears all too obvious: there are a lot of things a blind person cannot do: driving a car, becoming a dentist, and mastering mathematics. Let us, however, observe that the implications of visual impairments are ever changing, not least due to technology. A classic example is the construction of glasses, but today we find a huge amount of other technological devices that modify the implications of visual impairments. Ronald Vargas Brenes (2 0 1 2) talks about the social construction of blindness to emphasize that we are not dealing with a simple biological fact, but with a social construction that can always be reconstructed.

With respect to blind people, one particular feature of deficiencialism concerns mathematics. It has been broadly assumed that mathematics, and certainly more advanced studies in mathematics, is not for blind students. However, this deficiencialism can be challenged and deconstructed. What a blind person can come to master with respect to mathematics depends on the available technology and the form of interaction that constitutes the learning process.

Deficiencialism forms a web of preconceptions that may construct devastating boundaries. However, conceptions of what a certain group of people can and cannot do, can never be taken as a given. We must be ready to reconsider assumed boundaries with respect to reading and writing the world with mathematics. Boundaries are contingent affairs, and challenging deficiencialism in all its possible expressions is crucial to critical mathematics education.

ELDERLY STUDENTS

Not only have blind students been ignored by the literature on mathematics education for social justice, so have elderly students. The first study I know of that addresses this group of students was conducted by Luciano Feliciano de Lima (2015).

The group of students that Lima worked with included retired people that, after a life of hard work, had got some spare time. It included housewives who had taken care of their husbands, but were now alone. It included former bank assistants and shopkeepers. It was a mixed group. Lima's project was not organized through any

formal educational program and the students joined out of personal interest. If we compare Lima's group with the groups that Freire engaged in his literacy program, there are some differences. Lima's students were not illiterate in any general interpretation of this word, nor illiterate with respect to basic mathematical techniques. Besides, Lima's project did not highlight any political agenda in its public profile.

Lima's students became engaged in different topics. One concerned geometric figures. Notions like symmetry, congruence, and reflection were explored, and experiments with mirrors were conducted. More complex mathematical properties were also addressed, such as, for instance, Euler's Polyhedron Theorem. The theorem was checked with reference to different polyhedrons, and the conclusion was reached that it might reflect a more general property. Thus the formula $V + F - E = 2$, where V refers to the number of vertexes, F to the number of faces, and E to the number of edges of a polyhedron was considered a possible theorem. Limitations of this theorem, considering the very conception of regular polyhedrons, were, however, not addressed.

Other experiments were conducted with respect to the Möbius band. It appeared unpredictable what would happen when one cut with a pair of scissors along the middle of an Möbius band. And what would happen if, in a similar way, one divided the band in three parts? Activities based on reading newspapers were also conducted. The daily newspaper is loaded with numbers and figures; and to many, one way of coping with all such information is simply to ignore it. There is in fact much information in a newspaper that most people do not read, and cannot read. In Lima's project, interpreting numbers and figures provided access to arrange of economic and political issues.

The group of elderly students had a range of new experiences. They experienced a form of reasoning they had not imagined to be within their reach, for instance with respect to the Möbius band. Coming to master more elementary parts of mathematics, such as the conception of different geometric shapes, also became an important personal satisfaction. Many of Lima's students are grandparents, and becoming familiar with mathematical notions might open new possibilities for

communicating with their grandchildren, and helping them with their mathematics homework.

Let us listen to some of the elderly students' comments (all names are pseudonyms):

I cannot come to think of anything I did not like. All interested me. Because I learned, I learned in my brain. (Roberto, quoted from Lima, 2015, p. 92)

It opened our minds, me and my wife. It opened our reasoning. We began working with the mind. Got it? We really wanted to understand and to try to do. When I cannot solve something [...] it gave me a kick herein the head. You know? It's a difficult feeling to explain. (Davi, quoted from Lima, 2015, p. 93)

Then, among the activities [...] I like Tangram, Bingo, Moebius band. [...] This improves the quality of people's life. (Sueli, quoted from Lima, 2015, p. 95)

Here we hear their experiences of coming to master new forms of reasoning. We hear local stories about engaging with mathematics. The elderly students read new dimensions of news about political and economic issues, as they no longer felt the need to skip texts involving numbers. They also experienced being able to master new family situations, such as reading and writing homework together with their grandchildren. Thus, with reference to this group of students, we have to acknowledge that the defining notions of critical mathematics education may operate in an open landscape of different interpretations.

OTHER STUDENTS

In orientalism, we meet conceptions of the East by the We stand for the West. We have conceptions of the Other by the We and for the We. Such conceptions includes a ranking of superiority and inferiority between the We and the Other.

In a profound way, anti-colonialism challenges such conceptions. A presentation of anti-colonialism is found in the works of Franz Fanon (2004, 2008). The title of his book *Black Faces White Masks* points out the pathological relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, between the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressed seem being forced to overcome their stipulated inferiority by imitating their oppressors. Such imitations operate as a general pattern in a

colonized world. But even if colonialism belongs to the past, many of its oppressing structures are still in full operation. Thus today we find conceptions by the We of the Other that assumes layers of oppression.

Ethnomathematics challenges such conceptions by exploring cultural diversities in mathematics. Thus Ubiratan D'Ambrosio (2006) points out that any form of mathematics is culturally embedded, and that one can talk about the mathematics of any culture. However, even though ethnomathematics profoundly challenges stereotypes regarding the We and the Other, there are still many issues concerning “our mathematics” and “their mathematics” that need to be addressed. Different forms of reading and writing the world may be contradictory.

Although Marcone's conception of deficiencialism was developed with particular reference to blind students, it can be interpreted more broadly. It can be interpreted as a conception provided by the We about the limitations of the Other. It explains why some groups of students will perform poorly in school. Deficiencialism can express itself through many discourses, such as, for instance: “children with a certain background are not able to perform well in school due to their lack of cultural capital”.

Students at social risk may experience deficiencialism. Nobody expects much from them, as with Biotto Filho's students. Deficiencialism represents a negation of the capacities of coming to read and write the world with mathematics. Not only may students at social risk be captured by such deficiencialism, so might any minority group. To challenge deficiencialism is crucial to critical mathematics education. We have to be careful not to rush to any conclusions about what Other students can and cannot do, and about what might serve them best [4]. In particular, we should not rush into specific interpretations of how Other students must read and write the world.

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MATHEMATICS

Let us now consider university students in mathematics. What has critical mathematics education to do with them? Over centuries, mathematics has developed in close connection with interpretations of nature and religion. In *The World*, ready for publication in 1633 but only published posthumously in 1664, René Descartes presented a general world perspective. He outlined some basic laws according to

which nature operates. The first law states: “[E]ach particular part of matter always continues in the same state unless collision with others forces it to change its state” (Descartes, 1998, p. 25). The two other laws are of the same nature, and together they reflect a mechanical interpretation of nature. According to Descartes, we are governed by laws that God imposed on nature.

Furthermore, Descartes pointed out that these are the only laws that God imposed. In *Principia* (1687), Isaac Newton formulated three basic laws that resonate with Descartes’ formulations. Newton agreed with Descartes: the basic laws of nature are established by God. They constitute a defining part of God’s creation. Newton’s laws have a mathematical form, meaning that we, human beings, can grasp God’s creation by means of mathematics. Mathematics represents the rationality of God. In mathematics, we meet a divine form of knowledge that can be trusted and celebrated. This trust and celebration defines part of the modernist meta-narratives that present mathematics as the paradigmatic case of human knowledge.

These narratives establish the modernist conception of mathematics, which is broadly assumed, even today. This conception includes two elements: (1) mathematics provides a powerful reading of the world; it provides the principal descriptive tools in natural science and in disciplines such as, for instance, economics; (2) mathematics provides a principal way of writing the world, as mathematics is an integral part of technological enterprises.

This modernist conception of mathematics stipulates and simultaneously celebrates the unique powers of mathematics-based readings and writings. To a large extent, this celebration defines the format of university studies in mathematics. Thus, these studies are, typically, completely focused on content matter issues. We do not usually find space for reflection on the socio-political roles of mathematics; instead, the principal educational task is defined in terms of students’ mastery of mathematics.

From the perspective of critical mathematics education, it is crucial, however, that university studies in mathematics leave the protective cover provided by the modernist conception of mathematics. In fact, an explicit negation of (1) and (2) opens up a critical perspective on mathematics: (1) readings of the world by means of mathematics can be highly questionable; they can provide simplifications and distortions; they can be unreliable; and they can represent particular interests; (2)

writings of the world by means of mathematics can be questionable, and mathematics-based technological actions can have any kind of qualities: they can be risky; they can be unsustainable; and they can represent particular priorities.

To critical mathematics education it is important, as an integral part of university studies in mathematics, to address critically the way mathematics provides readings and writings of the world. Such studies cannot just concentrate on mathematical subject-matter, but also needs to address the possible socio-political roles of mathematics. It is important to address the possibility of different and also of contradictory ways of reading and writing the world with mathematics.

ENGINEERING STUDENTS

Mathematics operates as an integral part of technological constructions and devices. One can think of techniques for automating production procedures; for surveillance; for implementing new techniques in medical treatment; for constructing drones that can deliver small parcels to customers; for making any kind of more advanced weapon work efficiently; for ensuring personalized electronic advertising as facilitated by web crawlers; for managing page-rankings with respect to internet searches; for managing economic risk-taking; for identifying strategies in the stock market; etc.

The world that is addressed in an engineering project is subjected to a mathematical reading. It is conceptualized in terms of numbers, figures and diagrams. Thus the departure for any engineering project is a mathematical representation of some parcels of the world. The very engineering design takes the form of a mathematical writing of the world. The blueprint for any such design has a mathematical format.

According to the modernist perspective on mathematics, the application of mathematics ensures that such engineering blueprints have some intrinsically good qualities. From a critical perspective, however, mathematics-based technological actions can have any kind of qualities. They can be effective, risky, cost efficient, benevolent, horrifying, cynical, well-intended, etc. They can create profit for some, new workplaces for others, and cause unemployment for many. Any mathematics-based action is a contingent affair in need of reflection.

In most cases, the development of such reflections is not part of the educational program of technical disciplines. This observation brings me to characterize what I refer to as one-dimensional expertise. In a typical university curriculum for technical disciplines, like engineering, we find the desired professionalism decomposed into a range of modules. Mastering such modules provides professional know-how in doing things. It is much more seldom to find study-activities that contribute to a professionalism of reflecting on what is done and could be done. I find, however, that a principal challenge for any university program with respect to technical disciplines is to develop a double professionalism: a professionalism in doing, and a professionalism about doing [5]. This means a professionalism in reading and writing the world with mathematics, as well as a professionalism in reflecting on such readings and writings.

To develop a double professionalism becomes crucial when the meta-narratives of modernity are decomposed and no longer provide an overall celebration of mathematics-based technology as being a reliable motor of progress. As a consequence, students of any technical discipline can become a focus of critical mathematics education.

A VARIETY OF READINGS AND WRITINGS

To critical mathematics education it is crucial that students at social risk come to act as readers and writers of the world. But critical mathematics education must address other groups of students, such as, for instance, students in comfortable positions. It is important to challenge presumptions and preconceptions, and in this way to provide revisions of some readings and writings of the world.

Critical mathematics education must address any group of students, including blind students, elderly students, and “Other” students. Critical mathematics education must address university students in mathematics and engineering students in general. These students come to master powerful readings and writings of the world that might be in urgent need of critique.

To critical mathematics education it is important to address critically any form of reading and writing with mathematics. This not only concerns academic mathematics and engineering mathematics. It concerns any form of mathematics. It concerns any version of ethnomathematics. It also concerns the readings and writings

which are part of Gut-stein's projects, and which are considered paradigmatic to critical mathematics education. Such readings and writings may also represent limitations, simplifications, and presumptions. Thus auto-critique is an integral part of any critical mathematics education. There are no modernist meta-narratives to provide critical education with any incontestable foundation; nor are there any readings or writings of the world with undeniable qualities. Critical mathematics education needs to operate in an open landscape of diverse, even contradictory, interpretations also of its defining notions.

Notes

[1] See, for instance, Sriraman (2008); Skovsmose (2011, 2014b); Skovsmose and Greer (2012); and Wager and Stinson (2012).

[2] Sociedade Brasileira de Educação Matemática, SBEM (Brazilian Society for Mathematics Education) has established a working group with the title *Diferença, Inclusão e Educação Matemática* (Difference, Inclusion and Mathematics Education). This group coordinates research not only with respect to blind students, but with respect to any group of students with disabilities. The group is coordinated by Lulu Healy and Miriam Godoy Penteado. See <http://sbempaulista.org.br/gt-no-13-diferenca-inclusao-e-educacao-matematica/>

[3] The Portuguese word *deficiência* means disability. However the notion of *deficiencialism* I have translated directly as *deficiencialism* and not as *disableism*, being aware that the English notion *deficiency* includes a range of negative connotations that *disability* does not include.

[4] These observations can be further explored through the notion of *fore-grounds*—see Skovsmose (2014a).

[5] In Skovsmose (2009) I refer to this double professionalism as a *critical professionalism*

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Marxism, Critical Utopia, and Science Fiction

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and

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Abstract

In this paper we use the Marxist approach to cultural production to discuss key concepts of the science fiction genre, namely, “critical utopia” and “cognitive estrangement,” which reveal new ways of analyzing human society and provide new sources for the development of social consciousness and political awareness. We specially reference Marxist-feminist science fiction writers, whose avant-garde work abstained from gender separatism, revising many conventional ideas about human subjectivity and human embodiment. Finally, we show why Marxism claims to be the theoretical method in most science fiction criticism.

Keywords: *science fiction; cultural theory; Marxism; feminism; critical utopia; cognitive estrangement*

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Introduction

After the 1960s, cultural life has been increasingly marked by criticisms of the status quo from imaginary standpoints. Science fiction became one of the privileged instruments of this current of thought.

In this paper we study the conceptual framework of the science fiction genre, in which the imagined conditions and capabilities encourage new ways of thinking about human society and provide new sources for resisting oppression, while, at the same time, develop social consciousness and political awareness.

We will show how the concept of “critical utopia” derives from certain ideas important in the tradition of Marxism that analyzed culture as an aspect of class-domination in order to construct a disciplined resisting consciousness, and how utopia and cognitive estrangement have been reconceived to signify an emancipatory mode of thought that keeps alive the hope for social justice and equality.

This is achieved by examining two main concerns of Marxist cultural theory: the appearance and development of specific forms of production and ideology critique, i.e., how a particular cultural work expresses or resists the ideological mechanisms of the bourgeois state.

Marxist cultural theory and practice

The Marxist approach to cultural production is characterized by certain key concepts that theorize the historically specific material articulations of production and consumption. The term “mode of production” refers to a specific organization of the system of production which in turn generates specific forms of social relations out of which specific forms of cultural production arise. Of the four modes of production identified by Marx, capitalism is the one connected to the discussion of science fiction because of the unprecedented development of science and technology from the early seventeenth century to the present time.

Capitalism is characterized by the ways in which the surplus value of labor is appropriated as profit by the owners of the means of production.

From the standpoint of Marxist cultural theory, three concepts are especially noteworthy:

(a) Alienation results from the fact that workers cannot afford and therefore cannot enjoy the very goods and services they produce, nor do they own the resources needed for production. The workers lose control of the goods they produce.

(b) Reification describes the practice of equating human relationships with relations among commodities. This concept is better understood if one refers to commodification (i.e., the social valorization of consumption), which is especially characterized by the commodity fetishism. The latter refers to the ideological mystification of imagining that things have a life of their own rather being the products of human labor.

(c) The irresolvable material antagonisms existing between capitalists and the workers result in class struggle, which is replicated (or reflected) in the content and the forms of cultural practices, as exemplified by such categories as “popular culture” and “high art.”

Marxist cultural theory employs two basic methodological practices:

(a) Historicization which insists that only by the analysis of practices at specific historical periods in cultures can one fully understand their meaning and significance. In the context of this methodology, Marxist cultural theory challenges the prevailing bourgeois idealist theory of interpretation which separates “true art” from “popular culture” and characterizes the former as bearing transcendent, universal value.

(b) Critical thinking reflects upon its own premises, insists upon supporting evidence, and recognizes the complexities of ideology generated by the particular social relations inherent in the specific mode of production.

With these basic theoretical and methodological considerations in mind, we can see how Marxist theorists apply them to the analysis of cultural production in general, and the analysis of science fiction in particular.

Georg Lukacs’s *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), while not specifically Marxist, is the first important theoretical work of the early twentieth century devoted to the analysis of cultural production. Lukacs established the basis for linking particular forms of fiction, such as realism, to specific historical eras, and

demonstrated the possibilities for theoretical analysis of culture. Subsequent studies by others refined the connections of historical period to form and demonstrated how culture production replicates or challenges ideology.

The Frankfurt School members Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer identified, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), what they termed as “culture industry,” i.e., forms of mass-cultural production which simultaneously generated profits for capitalists while infusing political and social passivity.

Countering this position, Raymond Williams, especially in his *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (1960), established the basis for what became later known as “cultural materialism” by arguing for the resistive and liberatory possibilities of mass culture. In the latter period it was Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) which offered new strategies for historicizing cultural production in relation to the stages of capitalism over the past two centuries.

Undoubtedly, Fredric Jameson is considered to be the most influential Marxist literary (and specifically science fiction) critic since the early 1970s. According to Jameson, science fiction, as cultural form, could be political also, which is to say critical and even subversive (Jameson, 2005, pp. xii-xv). Jameson’s essays on such authors as Philip K. Dick, Ursula K. Le Guin, McIntyre, Kim Stanley Robinson, and William Gibson, focusing on topics such as utopian theory, globalization, postmodernism, class struggle, and generic historicity, are collected in his monumental work *Archaeologies of the Future; The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005). This collection continues Jameson’s longstanding and perhaps most important theoretical contribution, that of “cognitive mapping” as a strategy for historicizing and understanding the otherwise unrepresentable operations and effects of multinational capitalism (Skordoulis, 2018b). Understood as a countermeasure to the incapacitating operations of ideology, “cognitive mapping” is the process of conceptualizing an intellectual form which can embrace “the totality of social relations on a global scale” (Jameson, 2005, p. 283).

Jameson regularly asserts that science fiction in general is precisely a privileged representational apparatus, and in particular that Gibson’s *Pattern Recognition* (2003) “sends back more reliable information about the contemporary

than an exhausted realism” and thus maps “the new geopolitical Imaginary” (Jameson, 2005, pp. 384–385).

As this brief survey indicates, Marxist theorization of cultural production achieved an impressive sophistication. Marxist theory, far from declining in the post-Soviet era, has become ever more pertinent, being the best-suited conceptual model for analyzing the rapid developments of the capitalist world order and the imminent consequences that threaten humanity’s future.

Marxist criticism and science fiction

Despite the diversity among the advocates of this cultural movement, they shared a powerful desire to free the world of poverty, racism, sexual repression, and economic exploitation, all of which had been theorized as necessary aspects of capitalism. The cultural life was increasingly marked by criticisms of the status quo from imaginary standpoints, where the problems of the present were resolved, and science fiction became one of the privileged instruments of this current of thought.

The main development of science fiction theory took place in 1973 when Darco Suvin and R.D. Mullen founded *Science Fiction Studies*, which was to become the primary venue for neo-Marxist criticism of science fiction. The journal became the home for a group of Marxists who agreed on certain premises about “utopia.” Although it would be misleading to speak of a *Science Fiction Studies* “school,” most Marxist theorists of science fiction elaborated the concept of “critical utopia” (as it was named by T. Moylan) as the central core concept of the science fiction imagination, in which the imagined conditions and capabilities encourage new ways of thinking about human society, or provide new sources of strength for resisting oppression, while, at the same time, bringing about social consciousness and political awareness (Moylan, 1982).

The term “critical utopia” derives from certain ideas important in the tradition of critical Marxism³ that analyzed culture as an aspect of class domination in order to construct a disciplined resisting consciousness. These thinkers reconceived utopia to signify an emancipatory mode of thought that keeps alive the hope for social justice and equality.

³ “Critical Marxism” has been developed by thinkers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Sartre, Lefebvre, Marcuse; it represents a substantial current of “Western Marxism” and has often been equated with Hegelian Marxism as its theory was more dialectical than materialist (Skordoulis, 2018a).

Utopia has always been a political issue, but just as the literary value of the form is subject to permanent doubt, its political status is ambiguous. The relationship between utopia and the political, as well as questions about the practical-political value of utopian thinking and the political identification between socialism and utopia, continue to be unresolved topics today. The fundamental dynamic of any utopian politics will always lie at realizing a social system radically different from this one.

In their effort to define science fiction and to distinguish it from the “fantasy” literary genre,⁴ Marxist critics of science fiction associate the genre with social critique. Darko Suvin introduced a number of concepts that remain central in science fiction criticism: “cognitive estrangement,” “novum,” and science fiction’s genetic link with utopia. Suvin, in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), derived the concept of cognitive estrangement from Russian Formalism’s notion of *ostranenie* and Bertolt Brecht’s closely related (but Marx-inflected) notion of the estrangement effect. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* is a structuralist attempt to distinguish the genre of science fiction writing from other forms of fiction. As Fredric Jameson points out in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), this is a rather exclusive definition, which emphasizes the rational scientific dimension of science fiction and rigorously excludes the kinds of flights of fancy associated with fantasy fiction. For Suvin, the key to cognitive estrangement is the presence in a story or novel of what he calls a “novum,” that is, a device or machine that is absolutely new and whose presence compels us to imagine a different way of conceiving our world (*The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*).

The estranging novelties that characterize the science fiction genre correspond precisely to the concept of novum as conceived by Ernst Bloch, which is a *radical* novelty able to reconstitute the entire surrounding world and thus to create a new world (Freedman, 2000, p. 69; Suvin, 1975, 1978). C. Freedman goes further, introducing the idea that science fiction texts can be made valid by thinking not in terms of real cognition but as “cognition effect”—a rhetorical construction that evokes the sense of true cognition. As he states, “cognition effect, the crucial term for

⁴ This effort was first expressed in the symposium “Change, SF, and Marxism: Open or Closed Universes?” (*Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 1:2, 1973; vol. 1:3, 1974), and later in the symposium “Marxism and Fantasy, Research in Critical Marxist Theory” (*Historical Materialism*, vol. 10:4, 2002; *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 20:3, 2006).

generic discrimination is not any epistemological judgment external to the text ... but rather ... the attitude of the text itself to the kind of estrangement being performed” (Freedman, 2000, p. 18).

The “estrangement” of traditional science fiction is based on extrapolation, and its *impossible* is therefore more exactly *not-yet-possible* (Freedman, 2000, pp. 64–69). This is not an abstract aesthetic debate. The form of the impossible in science fiction is compatible with Marxist dialectics. As Gramsci points out, “Possibility is not reality: but it is in itself a reality. Whether a man can or cannot do a thing has its importance in evaluating what is done in reality” (Mieville, 2006).

But “what is actually possible” is only partly predetermined. After all, human beings produce their own life in the same way as they make their own history. The active dimension of our anthropological specificity therefore creates a margin, a transitional zone, between what is materially, socially, and historically possible and what is materially, socially, and historically impossible. This mediation encompasses all those changes in nature and society which are already materially possible, but whose actual realization depends on a definite, specific human praxis, which does not arise automatically or simultaneously out of that material possibility.

So, the cognitive rationality of science fiction allows utopia to emerge as genuinely critical and transformative. In this way, the dynamic of science fiction can on one level be identified with the hope principle itself (Freedman, 2002; Mandel, 2002).

A different path was taken by Fredric Jameson, who approached science fiction in terms of the problematic of “generic discontinuities” (Jameson, 1973, 1975) and concentrated on the concept of “negative totality,” which, in his usage, came to stand as the dialectical opposite of utopia. In his most influential essay in science fiction theory, “Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?” (1982), Jameson argued that science fictions are fantastic displacements of the present’s ideological contradictions into the future.

Marxist feminist science fiction

Marxist feminists, since the end of nineteenth century, have been involved in the reorganization of social and community life and the abolition of gender differences along with class inequalities. Their theoretical contribution in enriching

Marxist theory cannot be ignored, and enjoys a prominent position in the main body of Marxism (Katsiampoura, 2015).

By the end of the twentieth century, the materialist critiques of socialist feminists have posed new challenges to cultural theory and in particular to the reading practices of science fiction. Particularly in the 1970s, feminist utopian fiction focused strongly upon the role played by gender in the process of creating a better society and abstained from the notion of gender separatism. A notable exception to the latter trend are such works as Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), which became landmarks in the revival of utopian imagination (Moylan, 1986, pp. 57–61).

All these novels propose societies in which men and women coexist, with of course drastic changes in the economies of power and gender, and express the authors' vision of the perfect society (LeGuin, 1975). As Joanna Russ observed, "These utopias are not embodiments of universal human values, but are reactive, that is, they supply in fiction what their authors believe society ... and/or women lack in the here-and-now. The positive values stressed in the stories can reveal to us what, in the authors' eyes, is wrong with our own society" (Russ, 1980).

The tendency to posit "culture" and "nature" as opposed processes is apparent in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, in which the awareness of human integration into a broader ecological system displayed a more complex vision of utopia than the one seen in *The Dispossessed*. All of these novels opposed discordances such as loneliness and togetherness, fragmentation and connection, and a number of others, all rooted in the dichotomy between Self and Other (Lensing, 2006).

The cyber-theorists Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles, who are concerned with how developments in contemporary science and technology and advances in reproductive and communications technologies are shaping our lives, read science fiction texts as "thought experiments" specifically relevant for the ways in which they explore the influence of science and technology on the lives of human individuals.

In 1985, Donna Haraway published her influential *Manifesto for Cyborgs*, a powerful socialist-feminist examination of techno-culture as an unavoidable influence on contemporary life in the West. Haraway's world picture is explicitly derived from science fiction, from which she inherited the notion of cyborg as a positive agent of

historical transformation. Since then, the “figure” of the cyborg has become a privileged theoretical representation in Marxist-feminist cultural studies of science and technology.

For Haraway, feminist science fiction writers are “theorists for cyborgs,” and science fiction itself is a particularly valuable arena within which to consider how science and technology are revising many conventional ideas about human subjectivity and human embodiment (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003a; Hollinger, 2003). In Haraway’s terms, “The cyborgs populating feminist science fiction make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual identity, or body” (Haraway, 1991, p. 148).

Science fiction articulates and explores the theoretical propositions and arguments of Marxist feminists through its narratives in the ongoing dialectical relationship between abstraction and concretization. The resulting stories incorporate these arguments into the lives and actions of imagined human subjects in imaginary worlds, subjecting them to detailed fictional examination (Hollinger, 2003, p. 129).

In LeGuin’s terms, such stories are “thought experiments whose purpose is not to predict the future ... but to describe reality, the present world” (LeGuin, 1976). Like other critical discourses, these novels work to create a critical distance between observer and observed, to defamiliarize certain taken-for-granted aspects of ordinary human reality, “denaturalizing” situation of historical inequity and oppression that otherwise may appear inevitable to us, if indeed we notice them at all (Hollinger, 2003, p. 131).

And therefore...

Science fiction and utopian fiction have been concerned with imagining progressive alternatives to the status quo, often implying critiques of contemporary conditions or possible future outcomes of current social trends. Science fiction imagines change in terms of the whole human species, and these changes are often the results of scientific discoveries and inventions that are applied by human beings to their own social evolution. These are also the concerns of Marxist utopia and social imagination (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003a, 2003b; Freedman, 2006).

Marxist theory has played an important role in science fiction criticism. For at least several decades, there has been a lively and substantial body of Marxist science fiction criticism, adopted by feminism, race-criticism, and cultural studies. The major

critics and authors in the genre have been avowed adherents of Marxism. Science fiction and the closely related genre of utopian fiction have affinities with socialist thought in general and Marxist thought in particular. Indeed, Marxism has a considerable claim to being the theoretical method in most science fiction criticism of enduring value.

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TEACHERS' SUBJECTIVIZATION AT SCHOOL

Kemal İnal¹

ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal why and how teachers become “subjectified” in resistance to the system’s objectifying policies. Semi-structured questionnaires were given to teachers working in a public school in Ankara, Turkey. The resulting data were interpreted within the framework of three approaches: critical pedagogy, the relational approach, and social constructivism. The main finding is that teachers exhibit strong subjectivities and subjectivization practices while constructing their professional fields in relational and intersubjective dimensions with administrators, students, and parents.

Keywords: *Power, subject, teacher, dialogical teaching, contradiction, transformation*

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, I will introduce my book on teachers.² To begin, I explain why I did this study. In Turkey as well as all over the world, there are very few practical applications based on the transformation in education in relation to what Henry Giroux called the “language of possibility.” Some Turkish academics, from a Marxist structuralist perspective, have addressed the problematic related to the professional practices of teachers in the context of the reproduction function of the capitalist educational system. According to these studies, teachers do nothing but reproduce the system imposed by the politically powerful. Teachers here are seen as captives of the structures of the system. By contrast, in my own work, I have criticized these structural-functional and reproductive approaches, arguing that teachers have some transformative opportunities, possibilities, and power even within the system. I addressed this in the context of how teachers construct their teaching both professionally and sociopolitically, how they resolve contradictions, and how they create opportunities for transformation. Therefore, the main question of my research was to reveal the mechanisms teachers use in order to “*subjectify*” themselves professionally.

Research Method and Theoretical Basis

Method.

My research is a qualitative study based on a broad review of theoretical approaches and field work. The field work was conducted in a public school located in a poor conservative neighborhood in Ankara (Turkey) in 2015. I gave semi-structured questionnaires consisting of 146 questions to 21 elementary school teachers from different branches. In addition to the questionnaires, I used other data sources (e.g., observations of teachers in classrooms, parent meetings, school watch, national

² Kemal İnal, Öğretmen ve İktidar. Öğretmenliğin İnşasında Özneleşme, Çelişki ve Dönüşüm, Ankara: Töz Yayınları, 2019, 647 sayfa. (Teacher and Power. Subjectivation, Contradiction and Transformation in the Construction of Teaching, Ankara: Töz Publishing House, 2019, 647 p.)

ceremony, teachers' room, corridors, and garden) to help interpret the answers given to the questionnaire. I conducted interviews with school administrators and collected detailed information about the school. In general, I tried to produce a "school ethnography"—cultural pedagogical knowledge that includes observations on administrators, teachers, students, parents, and administrative staff. I tried to politically interpret the pedagogical culture that teachers produced while constructing their profession at school. I aimed to devise logical frameworks by dividing the answers given to the questionnaire into subcategories. An effort was made to use data that does not support as much as data that does support my thesis.

Theoretical background.

I first argued that the subject is a historical reality by considering the construction of the modern subject in Western thought through the eyes of various schools of thought. I drew especially on Marxist and non-Marxist approaches that argue that subjects are not fixed but can transform their environment. For example, I interpreted the teaching styles of teachers based on Paulo Freire's concept of "dialogical pedagogy." In addition, I used the concepts of "history from below" (Michel de Certeau) and "subpolitics" (James C. Scott) to help understand how teachers constructed their profession in a relational way and thereby become "subjectified" at school. Based on the nonreductionist approaches of critical pedagogues such as Freire, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, and Peter McLaren, I tried to identify how various forms of discrimination (class, gender, race, etc.) manifested themselves in school in a cultural language. By addressing the criticism of metaphysical and idealistic subjects as well as some approaches such as "process without subject" (structuralist) and "conformist actor" (functionalist), I tried to tackle how the subject was actively constructed between individual relationships and social institutions. In this context, I suggested that the teacher is not a passive object of the system.

My work is a synthesis of three approaches: critical pedagogy, social constructivism, and a relational approach. I argued that teachers used more critical methods to liberate their poor and conservative students. Therefore, contrary to determinist, structuralist, or functionalist approaches, the teachers form social relationships not as a one-way street but in a Freirean, dialogical sense while, at the same time, constructing their

professional fields practically. This means that educational practices can be formed democratically, despite the structural strengths of the powers-that-be. While teachers oppose the objectification imposed by the system, they both reproduce their professional fields in the context of democratic and libertarian values, and carry out this construction process on the basis of cooperation and solidarity with their students. Therefore, I propose that education is the area where the opposition politics, theses, and approaches are constructed in a pedagogical language, as much as the power itself reproduces itself.

Discussion

Despite all power's pressure, direction, and standardization, teachers resist the system consciously or unconsciously, politically or apolitically, spontaneously or in organized forms, by using different tools in various settings; while resisting, they construct a process of "subjectivization" in order to solve their contradictory problems. Therefore, the school cannot be accepted as an area without opposition where power absolutely establishes its own power. Opposition to power—expressed mostly in pedagogical language, logic, and values—continues its existence in a wide variety of forms, motives, and patterns. On the other hand, from time to time teachers may be political subjects rather than pedagogical agents. This may be the case for organized as well as unorganized teachers. Subjectivization processes, whether political or apolitical, often contain many different anti-power practices in the professional context: objecting to administrators on various educational issues, opposing wrong decisions, ignoring some rules, interpreting reforms according to their own knowledge, protecting themselves, opening other areas for themselves, transforming curriculum information by reinterpreting it, and so on.

Based on my findings, I interpreted the construction of the teaching profession as a subjectivization practice that transforms teachers from professional agents to more or less political subjects. Subjectivization is a moment of change or even transformation and a realization of praxis in various rates, forms, and orientations. Subjectivization is teachers' response to objectification.

Therefore, constructing the teaching profession by teachers cannot be reduced to schematic or automatic behavior in a continuous system. Teachers' subjectivization practices can be as strong and effective as the structure of the system itself. The relationship between the system and teachers is not a dichotomy. Based on necessary sides of any dialectical process, this relationship, which expresses the contradictory reality of the phenomenon, emphasizes subjectivization more than objectification.

I examined various factual views, orientations and forms of teacher subjectivity in constructing the teaching profession at school. I argued that the teaching profession is constructed by teachers in interaction with other actors—administrators, students, parents—in an intermediate zone between adjustment and resistance. Accordingly, the act of constructing the profession takes place in an area where a structural adjustment and the subjectivization of teachers intersect. The educational institution is also shaped in an area where the official needs of the system are met and the actions of the subjects towards liberation can come into conflict with the system. Therefore, schools are neither a field of absolute adjustment to the powerful system nor a constant area of conflict. But even in the adjustment process, teachers resist objectification by using democratic educational mechanisms such as dialogical teaching.

Although teachers use the methods desired by the system, such as establishing absolute authority over students, they use these not to objectify but to “subjectify” students. In the Freirean sense, dialogical teaching is an educational strategy that connects to the development of students' critical consciousness. This is both an awareness process and a form of resistance. It has a characteristic that gives the system its original character, stubbornly and resolutely striving upward like ivy. Therefore, this process also includes subjectifying possibilities against the objectifying powers of structuring such as a centralist education system, uniform materials, hierarchical command-control chain, etc. So this process toward liberation is set up relationally, not dichotomously. In other words, when conflicts and contradictions arise between teachers and students, teachers and administrators, and teachers and parents, an attempt is made to solve them by turning to a democratically oriented relationship. I specifically dealt with conflicts and contradictions between the

teacher, who is considered an actor of modern culture, and the poor parent, who is seen as a representative of traditional/conservative culture.

In Turkey, both pedagogical and political problems in the school are culturalized. Culturalization showed that the pedagogical realities in the school were not constructed by a single subject, but instead are intersubjective. Teachers try to resolve problems by entering into intersubjective and democratic relationships with administrators, students, parents, and other teachers. Teachers realize their subjectivization not on their own, but intersubjectively, as a democratic, collective enterprise.

I observed that teachers defined many problems and developed many different approaches, models, and relationships regarding how to solve them. This shows that the teacher is not a captive passive object of the dominant system. The teachers took a dialogical stance against every monolithic imposition of the dominant system. They constructed an intersubjective relational space together with other actors. In this context, teaching is not only a teachers' product but the collective work of different subjects, including parents, students, and administrators. This work can take place spontaneously and individually, as well as in a programmed way. While the teachers were performing this process of what I call subjectivization, they produced concrete, conscious, and reality-based definitions. Such definitions served as bulwarks against the idealizations in which teaching is seen as a sacred, automated, and unconscious profession, imposed by the system. For example, teachers' criticism of low wages shows that they attached greater importance to working conditions than to professional idealizations. The teachers responded to the system's objectifications by subjecting their own working conditions to objective evaluations.

Teachers have a world of subjectivities—individual styles, personal experiences, world views, historical understanding, class consciousness, form and orientation—although they must, at the same time, comply with the structural requirements of the

system imposed on them. Thus, their subjectivities can provide fuel for subjectivization. For example, I found that most teachers apply various strategies to avoid alienating bureaucratic work. In particular, I observed that they try to avoid filling in the questionnaires sent by the Ministry of National Education and academicians from outside the school because they do not want to be used as test subjects. In these moments they are expressing a desire for emancipation. Instead of these alienating practices, teachers focus on educating students in the best way, establishing a democratic relationship with parents, and forming self-development groups with other teachers.

Naturally, subjectivization is constructed in relation to other subjects and formed in intersubjective acts. This also expresses the teacher's strategy to cope with systemic problems by increasing their social and cultural capital. In this context, teachers are aware that the teaching profession, which is relationally constructed at school, is a collective process, not an individualistic one. While collectively defining this area and constructing it, they try to take the initiative in the decisions taken to reconstruct their professional field; they attempt to resolve conflicts according to their professional interests. This equips them with the knowledge, experience, and opportunity to be subjects, not objects.

Conclusion

My study explored the potential and limits of teachers' professional practices to be agents of change. My findings show that while teachers try to construct their professional fields relationally in an intersubjective perspective within a framework of democratic values, they are also trying to develop this potential by increasing their various forms of capital and to overcome objectifying boundaries. How and to what extent the professional field is constructed democratically depends largely on the subjectivization of the teacher. The subjectivization process shows that teachers construct their profession as a subpolitics in the form of a history from below. I interpret this as a form of resistance against power.

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Critical Education, Critical Pedagogy and Marxist Education: How should we educate our teachers?

Dave Hill

ABSTRACT

This article proposes an eco-Marxist Manifesto for Teacher Education, focusing on activity within formal education systems and calls for education and cultural workers -including teacher educators- to become Marxist Activist Public Organic Intellectuals of the Working Class within micro-, meso- and macro-social and political arenas.

Key Words: *education, Marxism, teacher education, activism, critical education*

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ARENAS OF ACTION

There are various arenas in which Marxist and Critical Educators and Teacher Educators can be, are, and should be (Hill, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 a, b) - within the limits of individual capabilities and strengths:

- 1) Within the classroom/ seminar room/lecture theatre;
- 2) Within the wider school community / organization- such as the staffroom, the union branch;
- 3) Within the local community/ town/ city- for example in tenants', benefits', anti-racist, anti-austerity, environmentalist or other local community organizations and movements- and within town-wide/ city-wide political parties, social movements and trade unions;
- 4) At national levels within such movements, parties and organisations.

I point to these arenas for transformative political social and educational activism since education takes place outside formal schooling and education systems as well as within. We engage in what Henry Giroux and Mike Cole call 'public pedagogy', and what Marx, Engels, Lenin, Gramsci, McLaren *et al* call for- developing class, political consciousness. However, in this article I will focus on some aspects of education and schooling *within formal education systems* and relate these to various issues in Marxist theory.

Key Characteristics of Marxism: What is Specifically Marxist About Education / Teacher Education Proposals in this article?

Marxists work for and willingly embrace reforms, such as minimum wage legislation, national health and social care provision, workers' and trade union rights. However, we go further. We Marxists are committed to forms of analysis and action that non-Marxist social democrats, radical liberals, radical democrats, feminists, anti-racists, Queer activists and environmental activists are *not*. These forms of analysis are:

1. *Class Analysis: the Capital- Labour Relation*
2. *Capitalism must be replaced by Socialism and that change is Revolutionary*

3. *Revolutionary Transformation of Economy and Society need to be preceded by and accompanied by a Class Programme, Organisation, and Activism*

1. Class Analysis: the Capital- Labour Relation

The first distinguishing feature for Marxists is the *salience of class* as compared with other forms of structural oppression, discrimination and inequality. We stand with the reforms suggested and enacted by non-Marxist reformists, together with social movements and civil rights campaigners in opposing racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination. But Marxists go further than criticizing (and acting against) social discrimination, oppressions. We go into economic rights. And further than that, that full economic rights *cannot* be achieved under a capitalist economic system, but only under a socialist or communist system. And that only the organized working class (black-white; male-female; straight-LGBT, Dalit and all other castes) that can organize and succeed in replacing the Capitalist system.

The Communist Manifesto (**Marx and Engels, 1848/1977**) is startlingly powerful and relevant in its analysis of capitalism. Capitalism is the systemic and systematic exploitation by the capitalist class of the labour power of the working class(es), with the capitalists appropriating the surplus value created by the labour of the working class(es). This is the Capital-Labour Relation. With capitalists pocketing this surplus value as profit.

In Capitalism each of the two (major) classes of society engage in permanent struggle over increasing the proportion of surplus value (the value left when raw materials, rents, and wages/salaries have been paid) that should go into capitalists' pockets as profits, or into workers' pockets as wages, plus, as welfare benefits- into the social wage.

There is, under capitalism, a continuous 'class war', a continuous antagonistic relationship between the exploiting class and the exploited class, whatever the state of subjective appreciation/ understanding/ political and class consciousness is. In the

words of *The Communist Manifesto*, 'society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat' (Marx and Engels, 1848/1977). In today's language, on the one hand, the 0.1%, 'the rulers of the universe', in conflict with most of the rest, all of us who sell our labour power to the capitalist class and to the education, health and other state apparatuses that keep reproduce a workforce fit to labour and create profits for the super-rich.

2. Capitalism must be replaced by socialism and that change is revolutionary

Marxists believe that *reforms are not sustainable under capitalism*, even if, when they are implemented, they are welcome. Reforms, social benefits and provision, are stripped away when there are the (recurrent and systemic) crises of capital, as happened in the 1930s, 1970s, and since 2008.

Social democratic politicians and parties, such as Pablo Iglesias/ Podemos in Spain, Alexis Tsipras/ Syriza in Greece, Jeremy Corbyn/ the Labour Party in the Britain, Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortes in the USA, do not want to *replace* capitalism. they just want to manage it better, to regulate it, to reform it- to make it work better, with more 'social justice', with some- but only some- redistribution of income and wealth.

In classical Marxist analysis capitalism is never acceptable, whether regulated, reformed, social democratic, Christian Democratic, or not, because it is the exploitation (economic, therefore political, cultural, social oppression) of humans by humans. What defines classical and revolutionary Marxists is an analysis that *capitalism must be replaced*.

This is why Marxist activists work to develop class-consciousness, a sense of the working class being 'a class for itself' (a class with class consciousness) as opposed to 'a class in itself' (simply a class of people with the same relationship to the means of production, distribution and exchange) (Marx, 1847), a class with 'good sense' as

opposed to 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971). In *The Communist Manifesto* [Marx and Engels, 1848] explicitly identify the “formation of the proletariat into a class” as the key political task facing the communists.

Therefore *what is needed is a revolution* to replace, to get rid of, the capitalist economic system with its capitalist economic and social relations of production. The ballot box alone cannot bring about revolution. An elected socialist government would not be able to bring about much change which went against the interests of the capitalist class because the military, judiciary, police and corporate hierarchy are not democratic. The national and global capitalist class use state violence, and/ or the instruments of global or US capitalist economy or military to stop Socialism, or even left social democracy.

3. Revolutionary Transformation of Economy and Society need to be preceded by and accompanied by a Class Programme, Organisation, and Activism

The *third* point of difference between Marxist and non-Marxist radicals is that in order to replace capitalism, Marxists have to actually work to organize for that movement, for that action. Thus a duty as a Marxist is *activist praxis*, within the limits of one's ability and competing demands. Marxists move beyond proposal into activism and praxis- *praxis* is action guided by theory, or theory in motion. As focuses on activity within formal teacher education courses and its wider education structures. As Marx (1845/2002) and John Molyneux (2012) note, 'philosophers have only interpreted the world. The point is to change it'.

Marxists, recognise that political organization, programme development, and political intervention are necessary. Revolutions do not fall off trees, like apples. As Lenin, in 'State and Revolution' (1918/1999) wrote, socialist revolutions have to be fought for- and defended.

Educate, Agitate, Organize

Both in the education arena - including in teacher education courses- and in the wider society, we Marxists seek to serve and advance the interests of the working class- recognising the fundamental nature of class exploitation and also the multiple

oppressions based on identities and subjectivities and the gendered and 'raced; nature of social class. We, as teachers, as educators, are working class, too, those of us on permanent contracts, tenure, are a relatively well paid level, or stratum, of the working class. Those of us in precarious/ casual work on far lower levels of income: we all sell our labour power to capitalists and to the apparatuses of the capitalist state, such as schools and universities.

We Marxists have to consistently and courageously challenge the dominant hegemonic ideology of the ruling capitalist class, and what Althusser called, its Ideological State Apparatuses- its universities, departments and schools of teacher training/ teacher education, schools, media, and their allies in the institutions of religion.

But the situation we face is not just a war of ideas, an ideological war, a war of discourse. It is an economic class war, where the social and economic conditions and well-being of the working class are undermined and degenerated by the ruling class. Capitalist onslaughts result in deaths for 'superfluous' workers and sections of the non-working industrial reserve army. The poor get sick earlier and die young. In particular, in these times, of diseases and pandemics such as Covid-19. Protective Personal Equipment and space for 'social distancing' are, for hundreds of millions of the global poor, unattainable luxuries. For the rich (and, indeed, for the richer strata of the working class) they are available.

A Marxist Manifesto for Education

Elsewhere (Hill, 2010) I have set out a Manifesto for Education. Many of these proposals are supported by other reform and social justice groups. But taken together, they offer a sustained challenge to neoliberal/ neo-conservative, pre-/proto/quasi fascist capitalism.

[1] Cut class sizes

[2] Abolish league tables and abolish most externally set assessment tasks

[3] Restore local democratic control of state schools that have been handed over to private corporations, charities and individuals to run, and establish local democratic control of such schools

[4] Establish a fully Comprehensive Secondary School system (known in India as a Common School) so that each school has a broad social class mix and mix of attainment levels

[5] Remove Private Profiteering from Schools/ Education services that have been privatized. Return these services to public/ social control

[6] Integrate private schools and colleges/ universities into the state education system

[7] Remove organised religion from schools and Close Faith Schools

[8] Provide a good, and local, school for every child

[9] Provide free, nutritious, balanced school meals

[10] Provide free adult education classes, non-vocational and cultural as well as vocational

[11] Restore or establish free, state-funded residential centres and Youth Centres/ Youth clubs

[12] Free up curricula that are over-prescriptive, to move beyond 'the basics curriculum'

[13] Revise school inspectorial and surveillance systems so they are supportive and advisory rather than punitive

[14] Encourage Critical Thinking across the curriculum. Teach children not 'what to think', but 'how to think'. Teach about Marxist analysis and the class exploitative nature of capitalism

[15] Teach in schools for ecological literacy and a readiness to act for environmental justice as well as for economic and social justice.

[16] Ensure that schools are anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic and are environmentalist

[17] Provide an honest sex education curriculum in schools that teaches children not just 'when to say no', but also 'when to say yes'.

[18] Develop proper recognition of all school workers, with no compulsory job redundancies

[19] Set up school councils which include student as well as teacher and non-teacher worker voices

[20] Broaden teacher education and training on the detailed lines suggested below, so it is theorized and socially and politically contextualised, not restricted (primarily or totally) to technical 'delivery' and control skills

[21] Set up a completely Free, fully funded, publicly owned and democratic education system from pre-school right through to university, with no fees, and with financial grants for poorer students post 16 and for further and higher education

Teacher Education: an Eco-Marxist Policy

Now, congruent with these proposal for teacher education/ training, and based on **Edwards, Hill and Boxley (2018)**, I set out proposals that constitute a Marxist manifesto for teacher education for economic, environmental and social justice.

These curricular principles should form the basis of the review and development of policy, theory and practice:

- Engage in pedagogic theory in which the socio-political, economic and environmental contexts of schooling and education are explicit. This includes understanding of children, schooling, society and nature, their inter-relationships, and alternative views and methods of, for example, classroom organization, schooling, and the economic and political relationship of schooling to society and nature;
- Develop equal opportunities policies and praxis so that children do not suffer from labeling, under-expectation, stereotyping or prejudice;
- Enable student teachers to develop as critical, reflective teachers, able, for example, to decode media, ministerial (and indeed, Radical Left) distortion, bias, and propaganda. This encourages the development of teachers, able to interrelate and critique theory and practice (their own and that of others);
- Include not only technical reflection, but also Marxist critical reflection, so as to question a particular policy or theory, and to ask such critical questions as '*whose interests are served?*'; '*who wins?*' (if only by legitimating the status quo) and '*who loses?*';

- Enable student teachers to understand the social, economic and environmental inequalities and injustices present in their places of work and communities, and to challenge them.

Curriculum Content

The first three areas of Curriculum Content below are common across different ideological positions, and because of their near universality these are not developed here. The next two are also widely shared, although they assume different degrees of salience. The final ten propositions are more specifically eco-Marxist/ Radical Left.

The Initial teacher Education (ITE) Curriculum should include:

- (1) *Classroom skills and competencies.* Teachers need reflective skills and understanding of learning, teaching and classroom management.
- (2) *Subject Knowledge.*
- (3) *The development of higher level analytical and intellectual skills.* This demands that teachers are capable of acting and thinking at an abstract level as understood by, for example, Vygotsky's 'scientific' thinking.
- (4) *Support for a major role for higher education institutions in ITE and opposition to school-led routes.* Higher Education institutions focus on developing the theoretical perspectives outlined above, promoting the advance of pedagogy through a theory-practice dialectic.
- (5) *Welcoming of different routes into teaching concordant with graduate teacher status and the above principles.*
- (6) *A commitment to economic, social and environmental justice, and recognition of the interconnection between the three.* If equal opportunities policies stop at celebrating cultural diversity and establishing positive and non-stereotypical role models, and do not see themselves as a development of broader economic justice, then they can be viewed as, in essence, conservative, for failing to challenge the status quo, based as it is on (raced and gendered) social class exploitation.
- (7) *Research evidence on equality issues: on racism, sexism, social class inequality, homophobia, and discrimination/ prejudice/ regarding disability*

and special needs, and the intersection of these factors with economic and environmental inequalities.

- (8) *A class-based approach to social, economic and environmental justice in the curriculum.*
- (9) *Skills in dealing with the incidence of classist, homophobic, racist, and sexist remarks and other types of harassment at various levels, such as within the classroom and throughout the institution and society.*
- (10) *Developing within institutions open fora on social and ecological justice where students and staff in institutions can meet in a supportive environment.*
- (11) *Critiques of competing approaches, ideologies, curricula, pedagogies of schooling, teacher education and society.*
- (12) *Developing knowledge and skills to critically examine the ideological nature of teaching and the nature of teachers' work.*
- (13) *The concurrent rather than the consecutive development of critical reflection, throughout and from the beginning of the ITE course.* If the social context of schooling is left until 'post-initial training', many Newly Qualified Teachers will not have post-initial training other what are, currently, instrumentalist in-service training concerned with how to 'deliver' results.
- (14) *Substantially predetermined rather than primarily negotiated curriculum objectives/ Should a critically reflective teaching program have predefined content or be negotiated? At various times the focus has been on programme content, critical analysis and curriculum development, pedagogic relationships between teachers/ teacher educators and pupils/ students. Arguably, heavy use of learner-centred discussion militates against the development of the broad span of critical theoretical insights argued for here. For organic intellectuals, the goal is not 'to tell the people what to think' but to enable them to think clearly to provide them with the tools such as critical literacy to engage in cultural action incorporating the exercise of critical (dialectical) consciousness aimed at social transformation.*
- (15) *The application of critical evaluation to school-based practice and experience.* Theory can provide the analytic and conceptual apparatus for thinking about practice, within the formal and hidden curriculum, while practice can provide the opportunity for the testing and assimilation of theory.

Successive governments in the USA and UK for example have prioritized school-led and school-based ITE programs. The detheorization of teacher education is a major problem in the development of effective teaching, critical skills, awareness and teaching, and in the development of a revolutionary transformative critical pedagogy.

- (16) *Environmental justice pedagogy*. This entails active engagement between students, communities and the environment and addresses complex social, economic and environmental issues so that students can develop critical, historical and transformative knowledge. This is important for students and teachers living and working in economically disadvantaged urban communities – because it can reorient the curriculum to deal with specific environmental justice issues that these communities face.

The Roles of Marxist Activist Educators

The role of organic Marxist public intellectuals is crucial. I am talking of those who intellectualize social, political, cultural, economic matters from the standpoint of what Gramsci termed 'good sense', from a class - conscious perspective, such as the 'political' shop steward, or union organizer, the member of a socialist / Marxist party, the teacher, the youth worker, the journalist, the Marxist social media activist. Herein lies our pedagogical importance, of party, of our organization, of leaflets and newspapers and booklets and books and social media; here, as well as in conversation and in rhetorical speeches, we carry out the role of socialist analysis, of revolutionary pedagogy, of connecting the here and now of a workers' strike, whether it be over wages or over other issues such as safety at work during the Covid-19 pandemic, a rent strike, a pro-immigrant rally, an anti-austerity march, a picket line of a zero-hours contract employer, an occupation of a tax avoiding multinational company owned shop: here is essential Marxist pedagogy.

We Marxists are necessary. Necessary in leading and developing changes in consciousness, a change in class-consciousness, and in playing a leading role in organizing for the replacement of capitalism.

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Mathematics Education to Counter Neoliberal Hegemony¹

Bülent Avcı²

ABSTRACT

Drawing on a critical participatory action research approach, this paper investigates how critical mathematics education responds to the tension between the needs of a neoliberal system and the needs of students to fulfill their potential as citizens and as human beings. The original contribution of the research is that despite obstructive implications of market-driven changes, a practice of mathematics education to promote critical citizenship can be implemented through open-ended projects that resonate with inquiry-based collaborative learning and dialogic pedagogy.

Key words: *Critical Mathematics Education, Critical Pedagogy, Neoliberal Hegemony, Critical Citizenship, and Democracy*

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1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Over the last three decades, public education in the U.S., and in many other countries, has been undergoing a transformation. It has been largely reshaped by top-down neoliberal policies, according to which the success of schools, teachers, and students is measured by quantitative, standardized test results. In this view, education is a personal commodity, and it is suggested that schools should be run like businesses (De Lissovoy, 2015).

Neoliberal ideology makes the positivist assumption that knowledge is independent of human subjectivity; it therefore imposes on students an externally generated, standardized curriculum (Gandin & Apple, 2002; Hyslop-Margison & Naseem, 2007; Schneider, 2015). In this view, the goal of education is to transmit knowledge to students. Evidence for successful transmission is provided by test scores. Raising test scores thus becomes the primary focus; teachers are relegated to the role of transmitting an externally prepared, “teacher-proof” curriculum³ with the goal of preparing students for standardized tests. This phenomenon is experienced especially in working-class, radicalized communities in the U.S. (Darder, 2002, 2012). Students are framed as passive consumers of knowledge: there is little need for dialogue, active participation, collaboration, or inquiry oriented toward new possibilities.

This neoliberal transformation redefines the connection between democracy and education in economic terms and promotes consumer-based, individually responsible citizenship. Nevertheless, it has been presented as the only way to solve the problems in public education.

In contrast to the neoliberal view is a view that may be called *humanizing*. In this approach, public education has a democratic mission: to provide students with opportunities to develop skills, attitudes, and values to be loving, lovable, and caring individuals, as well as critical citizens (Darder, 2002, 2015; Noddings, 2003). Education that aims to meet the needs of students as human beings and young citizens should be

³ The “teacher-proof” curriculum is a fully scripted, narrow curriculum that does not allow teachers to make adjustments.

dialogic and open to possibilities; it should promote participatory and social justice-oriented citizenship in order to establish and sustain a “thick” version of democracy initiated as a bottom-up movement (Orlowski, 2012; Westheimer, 2015).

There is thus a sharp divergence between neoliberal education that meets the needs of the market and humanizing education⁴ that meets the needs of students as human beings and citizens. Humanizing education necessitates a bottom-up, critical approach to teaching in order to create channels for dialogue in classrooms.

A small but increasing number of scholars in mathematics education are focusing on the sociopolitical and socioeconomic aspects of teaching and learning (Frankenstein, 1983; Gutstein, 2006; Skovsmose, 2011). These studies are united in positing a radical critique of traditional perspectives, and are generally framed under the umbrella of “critical mathematics education” (CME). CME aims to foster critical citizenship and catalyze transformative social changes (Frankenstein, 2010; Gutstein, 2006; Skovsmose, 1994; Valero & Zevenbergen, 2004). CME is concerned with issues such as socioeconomic diversity, equity and justice, student and teacher autonomy, and the socioeconomic functions of education (Skovsmose, 1994, 2011; Skovsmose & Borba, 2004). From this vantage point, CME can be seen as a response to the neoliberal agenda in mathematics education.

The work of Skovsmose (1994, 2011) provides a coherent foundation from which to define a practice of CME. There is some classroom-based research that draws on CME in the high school context (Brantlinger, 2014; Gutstein, 2006). However, currently no classroom-based research exists in the CME literature that frames a practice of mathematics education within the high school context to challenge neoliberal imperatives. This deficit motivates the present research.

2. AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this research I enact a critical stance toward mathematics education. It is situated in my own classroom teaching as a means of investigating the ways in which high school mathematics can be taught and learned in the neoliberal era. An underlying purpose of

⁴ The term is used in this presentation in the sense of Freire (2000), who states that dialogue is an ontological necessity for humanizing education.

this approach is to promote a thick version of democracy and critical citizenship. As noted, a practice of critical pedagogy aimed at promoting participatory and social justice-oriented citizenship radically conflicts with a market-driven education, which is primarily designed to produce consumer-based, individually responsible citizens. Therefore, this approach is generally not welcomed in school settings fundamentally shaped by neoliberal ideology. As already mentioned, neoliberal educational policies impose a narrow, “teacher-proof” curriculum, thereby reducing the teaching profession to a merely clerical endeavor (Giroux, 1988).

Recent theoretical studies (De Lissovoy, 2015; Giroux, 2012; Skovsmose, 2011; Skovsmose & Greer, 2012), consistent with critical pedagogy and CME, generate two main conclusions. First, with its top-down imposed policies and implementations, contemporary market-driven educational changes curtail the potential of educational practice to promote democratic values and critical citizenship. Second, it is, nevertheless, important for students and teachers to be engaged with an educational practice that enacts humanizing education and that promotes participatory democracy. These contradictory stances cannot be reconciled without evidence produced via classroom-based research. Therefore, it is worthwhile investigating whether it is possible to implement CME in the presence of neoliberal restrictions.

As background to this project, my Master’s thesis focused on teachers and the teaching profession in relation to neoliberal educational transformation in the U.S. Results indicated that although teachers’ values and attitudes shaped their responses to neoliberal changes, top-down, market-driven changes diminish teachers’ academic freedom and professional authority. Additionally, reflecting on my own journey of conducting the research for my Master’s thesis and my own classroom experience as a high school mathematics teacher, I concluded that willingness is a necessary but not a sufficient qualification for being a critical educator. As a public school teacher, I was also engaged with the question posed by Henry Giroux (2012): Can democratic education survive in a neoliberal education system? The research questions of the current study emerged out of my strong and consistent

desire to make “small openings”⁵ in my classroom to help my students develop both communicative competencies and critical mathematical literacy to become critical citizens. The overarching research question assumes that the teacher is willing to practice CME. Therefore, emergent questions for this study are as follows:

1. While facing top-down restrictions imposed by neoliberal educational policies and pedagogies on a daily basis, is it still possible for teachers to create small openings for humanizing education through CME?
2. How can collaborative and dialogic mathematics education be facilitated to help students to become critical citizens?
3. How can CME be practiced without disrupting the process of preparing students for standards-based assessment?

These questions oriented my thinking toward the central question of my research:

What are the potentials and limitations of CME in terms of classroom teaching in the neoliberal era?

An overarching concern of this investigation was to provide evidence that CME can counter neoliberal hegemony in education.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Although there is a growing body of theoretical studies in the CME literature, there are very few classroom-based studies conducted in high school mathematics contexts that support the applicability of CME. For example, the importance of dialogic pedagogy is emphasized in the existing CME literature (Skovsmose & Alrø, 2004). However, the research suggests that authoritative (anti-dialogic) teaching is the dominant approach in most mathematics classrooms (Alexander, 2005; P. Scott, Mortimer, & Aguiar, 2006). Perhaps, as a relatively new domain of research, the CME literature has yet to offer more helpful answers to the following specific question: Can a mathematical formula, concept, or axiom be taught in a dialogic form within a neoliberal education system? Answers to this question constitute original contributions to the CME literature.

⁵ The term “small openings” is due to J.C. Scott (2008), a political theorist and former professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Similarly, although theoretical studies exist, which emphasize the importance of inquiry-based collaborative learning, the CME literature lacks examples of identified classroom-based research that provide distinctive insights into the dynamics necessary to promote participatory and social justice-based citizenship. My research aims to address this gap in the current literature. Findings will be presented that may bridge the existing gap between theory and practice in the CME literature.

The present research is empirically significant in its potential provision of classroom-based data that provides new insights into definitions of dialogue, collaboration, and inquiry as aspects of CME. Moreover, existing studies offer limited insight into pedagogical practices. Therefore, it is crucial to generate research in mathematics classrooms to establish a dialectical relationship between theory and practice (Aguilar & Zavaleta, 2012; Almeida, 2010; Hannaford, 1998; Vithal, 1999). In this context, the present research has the potential to make a significant contribution to professional development of teaching mathematics in relation to democracy and justice.

The prominent studies in the existing CME literature draw either on Freire or Habermas. Instead, to capitalize on these important scholars, the philosophical perspective of the current study is built on the ideas of *both* Freire (1997, 2000) and (Habermas, 1972, 1973, 1984). From this point of departure, an emphasis on the complementary ground of Freire (embodying a Latin American perspective) and Habermas (embodying a European perspective) collectively empowers the theory of critical education to create a counterhegemonic force against neoliberal educational policies, therefore greatly contributing to scholarly studies in CME.

4. METHODOLOGY

My research questions could be most appropriately investigated through classroom-based research. Therefore, an action research methodology was well suited for my project. Resonating with the natural flows of classroom teaching, action research methodology allows the cycle of *plan-act-observe-reflect* (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The research methodology adopted here enables students to democratically participate in classroom activities and the process of knowledge construction. The methodology can be considered

an adaptation of critical participatory action research (CPAR) as conceptualized by Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014), in which research participants are seen as active agents of change as opposed to passive objects of the process. Therefore, the methodology is conceptually consistent with both critical and participatory praxis.

This study was conducted in a mathematics classroom in a high school where I teach full time. It involved a year-long mathematics class with 28 students, aged 14 to 17. Included in this study are data collected from student journals and presentations, as well as my field notes and reflective journal.

5. END-OF-UNIT PROJECTS

Table 1

Content and Themes of End-of-Unit Projects (EUPs)

EUP	Mathematics content	Theme
1	Linear equations and functions	Standardized assessment
2	Multipart functions: analysis of domain and range	Critical mathematical literacy
3	History of mathematics	Universal values of humanity
4	Systems of inequality	Community service
5	Exponential functions	Student loan debt crisis

As shown in Table 1, end-of-unit projects (EUPs) are lessons taught over two consecutive days in 90-minute block periods, one period each day. Each EUP was intended to be an inquiry-based collaborative lesson to promote dialogic teaching and learning. During each project, data were collected from students' journals, samples of students' work, whole-class discussions, field notes, and my reflective journal. In terms of data collection and analysis, each EUP constituted a segment of data to answer a specific research question. Each EUP is considered a plan-act-observe-reflect cycle.

6. RESULTS

CME IS ATTAINABLE

The findings led to the conclusion that despite an educational environment resulting from the market-based standardization movement, CME can be implemented through the interconnected dynamics of collaborative learning, dialogic pedagogy, and inquiry-based practice. When these elements were oriented toward promoting critical citizenship and a “thick” version of democracy, students began to take on democratic values, critical mathematical literacy, and critical citizenship.

The main conclusion of the current study concerns three domains. First, the cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect gradually turned the classroom into an egalitarian community of mathematics learners. A facilitative pedagogic ambiance was created where the students experienced mathematics learning in the form of a dialogue. Second, lessons presented as end-of-unit projects (EUPs) created a communicative space for students to develop and exercise critical mathematics literacy, democratized the learning process, and initiated bottom-up responses to counter the hegemony of neoliberal ideology in education. Third, certain practical limitations of CME must be acknowledged, given the overwhelming neoliberal colonization of education in the U.S.

THE MATHEMATICS CLASSROOM AS A MICRO SOCIETY

Although some theoretical studies emphasize the importance of making the classroom a community (Kennedy, 2009; Murphy & Fleming, 2010), none of them concerns mathematics. Put differently, the CME literature is silent on classroom-based approaches. The most important original contribution of my study to CME, therefore, is that it is firmly rooted in an actual U.S. high school mathematics classroom. The present study bridges the gap between theory and practice, because a mathematics classroom was transformed into a community.

All classroom practices in CME must be oriented toward creating an egalitarian community of learners. The basic elements of CME in the classroom—dialogic pedagogy, collaborative learning, and inquiry-based lessons—are unsustainable if they are not dialectically structured to establish and maintain an egalitarian community. The following three interconnected sub-conclusions substantiate the central conclusion.

First, the present findings show that mathematical concepts can be taught through dialogic pedagogy—authoritarian teaching is not the only way. The CME literature distinguishes between dialogical and nondialogical teaching of mathematics. I posed the following question: Can CME completely avoid nondialogical (authoritarian) teaching? Mortimer and Scott (2003) claim that the authoritarian approach is inevitable when mathematics and science teachers introduce a new topic. On the contrary, the findings here indicate that dialogic teaching is effective for teaching mechanical aspects of mathematics. Introducing a topic through dialogue is not attainable in a traditional classroom driven by vertical student-teacher relations, however: It requires instead an egalitarian community.

Second, this study confirmed that students' learning improved to the extent that they were able to learn from and with each other to materialize their full potential (Vygotsky, 1978); there was no need for more competent students in small group work. This process of egalitarian peer collaboration also helped me as the classroom teacher to become a facilitator (Wells, 1999). These findings have an important implication for the notion of zone of proximal development (ZPD): In order to apply ZPD as part of CME practice, the classroom must be an egalitarian community of learners. In the absence of a facilitative classroom environment and egalitarian peer interactions, the ZPD process could instead produce power relations among peers, thus reproducing transmission-style education.

Third, this study revealed that the “ideal speech situation” outlined by Habermas (1990, 2005) can be attainable only if the classroom is an egalitarian community of learners. After four cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, our classroom had visibly become an egalitarian community. Creating conditions for the ideal speech situation was a time-consuming process and required a radical change in power dynamics. However, we were rewarded with qualitative changes in peer interactions and student-teacher relationships. Findings also demonstrated that empathy is an effective and significant element in creating grounds for the ideal speech situation. As articulated by Freire (2000), empathy in the classroom cannot be generated only by exchanging ideas and arguments in the absence of love and hope.

CITIZENSHIP AND MATHEMATICS EDUCATION

As there is no previous classroom-based research on CME linking mathematics education to democracy and critical citizenship, this study provides the first response to the question, What are the potentials and limitations of CME in terms of classroom teaching in the neoliberal era? The answer can be framed in four domains.

First, inquiry-driven collaborative learning and dialogic pedagogy democratized life in the classroom. In EUPs, the students experienced mathematics learning as a democratization of classroom life. We experienced a “thick” as opposed to a “thin” (neoliberal) version of democracy (Orlowski, 2012; Westheimer, 2015). In agreement with Freire (1998), I found that teaching critical citizenship necessitates democratizing life in the classroom. As the classroom became a democratic space, we had solid ground on which to relate mathematics to larger social, economic, and political issues.

Second, the study revealed the significance of making small openings in the classroom colonized by neoliberal (and neoconservative) educational implementations. The openings created by EUPs allowed me to incorporate critical mathematical literacy and critical thinking into the standardized curriculum. The students discussed some premises of neoliberal ideology and questioned irrational and unjust implications of market-driven educational policies. Through whole-class discussions, the students developed a collective, bottom-up response to neoliberal hegemony. In their view, education is a human right and a social investment, not an individual commodity and personal investment. As they embraced inquiry-based collaborative and dialogic learning, they rejected the competitive, authoritarian, and rote aspects of neoliberal pedagogy.

Third, the process of developing bottom-up responses entailed critical thinking as part of critical literacy. Engaging in the structural analysis of society and imagining a better one, the students objected to corporations’ involvement in education and made proposals to make society at both micro and macro levels more just, equal, and sustainable. In this sense, the students were engaged in critical thinking that draws on communicative rationality and that recognizes the ethical and political dimensions of critical thinking. This version of critical thinking differs radically from the neoliberal version that draws on technical rationality to solve business problems. EUPs fostered critical mathematical literacy, through which the students developed ability to question authorities and keep

them accountable. Therefore, this study promoted a thick version of democracy and a participatory, social justice-oriented citizenship.

Fourth, the students clearly opposed neoliberal policies and implementations. When communicative space was made in the classroom, students raised their voices against the neoliberal world view. Students' journals indicated that they did not consent to neoliberal ideology as a dominant discourse. As Habermas (1975) articulates in a broader sense, the system colonizes the life-world and prevents free public debate, which makes legitimacy of the system questionable. The legitimacy issue applies to educational policies as well. The results here show that a start can be made by creating small openings in the classroom, where students can develop bottom-up responses to counter neoliberal colonization.

LEARNING MATERIALS IN CME

There is a gap between theory and practice of CME in terms of developing word problems and projects to counter neoliberal pedagogy. The findings from the current study begin to bridge the gap. In relation to the elements of CME, five aspects of potential projects and word problems can be identified.

First, a distinctive element of dialogic pedagogy in CME is alternative learning materials; notably, *open-ended* problems and projects. In other words, projects must be in harmony with the principles of dialogic learning. Problems must be a forum where students can relate their learning to a larger society in order to negotiate social, political, cultural, and economic issues that affect their lives. I concluded that CME projects must not be limited to the exercise paradigm or solving modeling problems.

Second, word problems and projects in CME must be multilayered, so that students working in small groups can negotiate implications of the problem and build on each other's contributions.

Third, problems must be inquiry-driven for the students to learn mathematical skills and knowledge that are transferable to different domains of study. Word problems must help the students improve their conceptual understanding, procedural knowledge, and numerical fluency in order to pass standardized tests and be successful in the conventional sense.

Fourth—and the most important element of problems oriented toward CME—problems must be built on clear ethical and political grounds to be able to counter neoliberal hegemony. It is worthwhile here to revisit the forth project, EUP 4. We contextualized the community volunteer service issue to counter neoliberal hegemony in education. I noticed the significance of the political and ethical ground on which I designed the project to distinguish the notion of helping others—“false generosity” as posited by Freire (2000), in a thin version of democracy—from “solidarity” in a thick version. The same distinction can be applied to the notion of critical thinking: To promote critical mathematics literacy, word problems and projects should help students distinguish between critical thinking based on technical rationality and one based on communicative rationality.

Fifth, the findings serve as a reminder that critical mathematics teachers need to be aware of risks to their job security and be proactive about them. The learning targets in the U.S. standardized curriculum are part of the management and control process in public schools. A mathematics teacher, therefore, must find ways of linking word problems and projects to these standards. Otherwise, they could face disciplinary consequences. In my case, each EUP, with one exception, was connected to a specific learning target outlined by the school district. However, I could not link EUP 3 to any learning target, as the standards do not mention the history of mathematics. The principal’s classroom visit at that time put a question mark on my evaluation. This caused only a minor problem for me, but it could have turned into a much more serious issue.

The conclusion is that for the sustainable practice of CME, word problems and projects must be linked to learning targets in the standardized curriculum. This is a new contribution of my study to the existing CME literature. However, I do not claim that my conclusion is the final answer. There is a need for more classroom-based research from different parts of the country—and from other countries—to provide political and pedagogical insight into integrating word problems and projects into the standardized curriculum without punitive consequences.

MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

This study has shown that a mathematics teacher who wants to practice CME should allow for some potential consequences. CME is not welcomed in schools colonized by

neoliberal pedagogy. Although a teacher may succeed in creating an egalitarian community of learners in the classroom, life in other classes is mostly organized by market-driven educational discourses. This situation could demoralize students and teachers alike. Therefore, a practice of CME must openly negotiate these kinds of situations with students through whole-class discussions.

My research shows that it is possible to practice a humanizing education that sides with students as human beings and citizens against the imperatives of the neoliberal system; however, such a practice is accompanied by certain political challenges. It is sustainable only if the classroom is treated as a democratic community. Because market-driven objectives currently colonize classroom life, it is imperative to create small openings in which students can develop critical mathematical literacy, reclaim their voices, and thereby subvert neoliberal hegemony.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS AND FINAL WORD

My study provides a solid framework for CME in relation to market-driven educational changes. However, I do not claim that this is a complete frame. I conducted research in one class in one high school. Although neoliberal educational policies have been widely implemented across the U.S., educational changes may have impacted states—even school districts within states—to different degrees. Therefore, further research in other settings should be undertaken to develop a more comprehensive picture of the scope and limitations of CME.

I am aware that the transformative changes in our classroom may not mean so much at the macro level. Nevertheless, this study created small openings in a high school classroom and initiated an egalitarian community of mathematics learners. By doing so, it showed that a classroom *could* be transformed into a community and thus neoliberal pedagogy could be countered. With the creation of many more small openings, these promising results could be expanded to show that a dialogic teaching of mathematics and a more democratic education is possible, even within educational conditions that are contradictory to the larger emancipatory vision of critical mathematics education.

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Neoliberal Hegemony and the Task for Critical Education

Alpesh Maisuria¹

Abstract

The starting point for this article is an explication of the essence of Marxism, which is argued as the most efficacious theoretical framework for understanding the current historical conjuncture. I then provide a description of the development of capitalism into its current neoliberal form and its core features. Doing this work is important because while scholars regularly refer to capitalism/neoliberalism, they rarely explicate its fundamentals. Having this specification of neoliberalism will provide a referent for the more sophisticated analysis in the article, which elaborates on the concepts of mystification and feasibility. The discussion revolves around the general question: what mechanisms generate the tendency for most people to acquiesce (or even assent) to neoliberalism, despite the recognition that neoliberalism seems to be creating an environment where flourishing is not possible for the many? To address this question, I suggest the critical importance of the concept of *mystification*, particularly of inequality and inequity; and also, the concept of *feasibility*, which relates to the need for neoliberalism to generate a mass and general consciousness of an impossibility of alternative to itself. Counterposing this, I draw the article to a close by presenting a discussion about the need for critical educators to work for generating a consciousness of the feasibility of an alternative to neoliberalism to emerge.

Key words: Neoliberalism, Marxism, Marx, Social Class, Revolution

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What is Marxism?

Ideas of class struggle along with class formation and class-consciousness can be observed at the core of Marx's writings. Despite the time lapse, these ideas have the power and currency to provide an effective critique of the modern world.

It is unfortunate that Marxism, as a project of critique and emancipation, is fraught partly because of the multiplicity of interpretations of Marx's writings, including three common *misinterpretations*:

- i) the *exclusivity* of social class for analysis;
- ii) that social class is *equally* as importantly other identity, such as a 'race', gender, and so forth,
- iii) or that class was the *point of departure* for Marx in his critical treatment of the development of capitalism. All of these interpretations seem to be at odds with what Marx actually wrote. In relation to i and ii, one needs to look not much further than the critique and articulation of *Rasses* (referring to ethno-racial identities) by Marx and Engels, which are subsumed by capital and class interests for capitalism to triumph as a historical project.

In relation to iii, Marx, *actually* began with a primary concern with the mode of production and the emergence and nature of commodities, *not social class*. Put simply, mode of production is the focus on which group of people in society produces commodities; and importantly for social justice, what happens to the value that is generated through *exchanging* these commodities. It is important to say that these relations of production are not optional, nobody can voluntarily decide to step outside of these relations of production.

Today the dominant mode of production is the neoliberal version of capitalism, and it has encapsulated the entire world through its ubiquitous domineering economic and socio-cultural system. This is about the globalization of the capitalist money system, this means that it is almost impossible to not use a capitalist bank to be paid a salary,

or succumb to a mortgage, or work for an organization that is linked to capitalist sustenance; put simply capitalism entraps, and to overcome it necessitates, at least a basic, understanding of it, for which Marxism provides effective tools.

Over 150 years ago, Marx had predicted the environment where the economics of capitalism would dominate and define all social and cultural life:

In the social production of their life, men *enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will*, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to *which correspond definite forms of social consciousness* (Marx, 1859 [my emphasis]).

The basic point that Marx was making was that the dominant condition of everyday life is created by the mode of production. Importantly, this nature of existence shapes the way that people think and act, in other words human nature would be made to embody capitalism. For instance, human selfishness and greed in a world of plenty would be *learnt*, not biological. Marx was pointing out that capitalism would become more ever more entrenched as part of social, cultural and political spheres of human life. Marx's prediction has materialised, and the modern capitalist system stridently promotes a fetish of commodities, this is development of an insatiable appetite of consumerism - wanting bigger, shinier stuff, and luxury, at any environmental and/or social expense.

Furthermore, in the current neoliberal phase of global capitalism (discussed below and also see Maisuria, 2014), commodities are more than just goods such as tangible products, it can also include services, such as education and more recently knowledge itself (Marmol et al, 2015).

Focus on production

In the publication *Capital*, Marx explained that society organized by the capitalist mode of production has the basic feature of two antagonist classes: i) the ruling (capitalist/bourgeois) class, this is the class that *owns* the means of production; ii) and the laboring (working/proletariat) class, those who use their capacity to work to produce commodities for the ruling class (Rikowski, 2001). Crucially the work that is done by the laboring class produces commodities for the capitalist class. The laboring class get paid for their labor and this is used for survival, today this means paying for food, bills, and debt. The commodity produced by the labor of the worker is then exchanged by the capitalist class for more money than the cost of production. Marx put it this way:

Surplus value - profit - is the value produced by worker expenditure of labour-power on the means of production. It is the value determined, ultimately by capitalist class practices in their totality, to be above and beyond ("surplus") the value that the owner must pay in wages to the labourer to ensure she is able to reproduce her labour-power (Marx, 1867).

Marx predicted that the nature of capitalism was that exploitation was inherent, hence he said it was the goal of the ruling class "To extract the greatest possible amount of surplus-value, and consequently to exploit labour-power to the greatest possible extent," this Marx argues, is "the directing motive, the end and aim of capitalist production" (Marx, 1867). Marx was correct in this analysis since the situation today is that money can be converted into more money through investment, expansion, and lowering costs of production – it means that the capitalist system will always benefit the wealthy over and above workers, and the resultant inequality will be exponentially starkly pronounced over time.

Marx foresaw the development of a society under capitalism in which the ruling class would gradually become enormously wealthy through the work of the laboring class. In this historical evolution, the profits of those who own the means of production (see any rich list for names – every year this will include Warren Buffett, Carlos Slim and Bill Gates) will exponentially become greater, while workers' wages will remain

stable, decrease or only marginally increase. The increasingly exploitative relationship between the two classes was described as a continual source of struggle by Marx in the following terms: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (Marx and Engels, 1848). It is important to note that this exploitation is irrespective of identity and personal characteristic of the workers, put another way, capitalism does not care for ethno-racial, sex/gender, and cultural preferences of the individual. At different moments different groups of people will face differing levels of exploitation (a convenient way to create social antagonism within the laboring class taking the focus away from *systemic* exploitation). In this context, production of capital is at the forefront of Marx’s thinking with social class being articulated within the nexus of labor exploitation, commodity exchange and profit.

A two-class model in contemporary society

Critics of Marxism point out that in modern society there are *not* only two classes, and that most people probably self-identify as middle class thus echoing former British Prime Minister Tony Blair who suggested that “We’re all middle class now”. While this statement may be true about self-identification, Marxists would point out that the idea of a working class in neoliberal capitalism is broad and crucially includes the middle class. In this conception of two classes, the so-classed middle class are simply a stratum of the laboring class who have more material/financial resources and wellbeing – but crucially, this middle class still need to *work*, hence they are part of the working class, albeit with the possibility to buy more, and more expensive commodities (normally through debt). In this way most academics and even many bankers can be considered to be working class because they need to work in order to sustain themselves (and pay debt) in the capitalism system where the majority of people sell their labor to the ruling capitalist class. It is this context that the recent Occupy Movement’s slogan - the 1% Vs 99% - becomes a descriptor of reality not only a catchy slogan.

In fact, “1%” is not quite accurate, ownership of the means of production, private property and wealth is concentrated in more like the 0.01%. To put into context, there is astronomical differentiation - the gap between the 1% and the 0.01% is greater than

the gap between the 1% and the 99%, in other words wealth increments are exponential. Inequality is measured in various metrics, including wealth distribution and poverty levels, but rarely do they account for concentration in the *ownership* of production, which is a far more accurate way to understand the generative mechanism of inequality and unfairness.

When Marx was developing his theory of capital, exchange and markets – he was writing in a time of new individual landowners (emerging post-feudalism). In current neoliberal times, markets have been monopolized by global transnational corporations. This means that the two-class model is reconfigured in two ways: i) From individual landowning class (capitalist) to transnational companies and ii) From manual labouring class, to a working class that including skilled and service sector employees. While companies are in competition with each other, they are actually linked in a web of interconnected companies. In a unique piece of scholarship, Systems Theory scholars at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich analyzed a database listing 37 million share ownerships linking them (Vitali, Glattfelder, Battiston, 2011). This mapping exercise has been the first of its kind and there is need for more research given that they reported that just 147 transnational companies own all commodity production. The 2008 economic crises that triggered a *global* capitalist recession makes more sense when markets are conceived of as a domino effect. Incredibly according to Forbes, reported that these 147 transnational companies are themselves controlled by “economic super-entity” core of comprising of just 4 that own the entire system of commodity production (Forbes, 2011). It tells its own story of mystification (discussed below) that most people would never have heard of the following companies: Northwestern Mutual, which owns Russell Investments, the index arm of which runs the benchmark Russell 1,000 and Russell 3,000; CME Group, which owns 90% of Dow Jones Indexes; Barclay’s which took over Lehman Brothers and its Lehman Aggregate Bond Index, the dominant world bond fund index, McGraw-Hill, which owns Standard & Poors, who deal with financial market indicators and investment. These are the companies that own world production – they are the material symbols of modern capitalism – neoliberalism, which is about driving profit margins by ever increasing expansion.

It is only with this understanding of the basics of Marxism and the emphasis on commodity production, the idea and attention to class struggle, articulated with class consciousness; inequality is fully understandable and profound. In neoliberal global capitalism it is clear that a tiny minority are the winners of opportunity, wealth and a good-life, and many more are exploited and alienated despite claims of, and a prevailing belief in, meritocracy and social mobility among the masses. It is important to recognize that these claims of the existence of meritocracy and mobility are important to pacify resistance and generate acquiescence to a grossly unfair and unequal system, and they are mechanisms in which people cannot even conceive of a feasible alternative system to be possible. Within this dominant hegemony the need for class consciousness to be continuously developed is crucial, thus to mobilise class action struggling for a different kind of world, beyond neoliberalism, where the many can flourish. But there remains the ambiguity about what neoliberalism exactly is.

Neoliberalism

Professor Mike Cole and I have summarized neoliberalism (see Maisuria and Cole, 2017). Taking the cue from Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek who follow Adam Smith's economic modeling, economists in the USA known as the Chicago Boys developed a fundamentalist free market ideology that was first experimented with on 11 September 1973 in Chile. A US-backed military coup resulted in the death of democratically elected socialist Salvador Allende, which was a suspected murder. His replacement was the military General Augusto Pinochet, who would impose a brutal dictatorship in the interests of capital. Within a five-year period (1970–1975), the Chilean economy shifted from State-controlled major industries to a system that centered on market forces, self-interest, and laissez faire regulatory governance (Maisuria, 2014). As Barton explains, the military junta was crucial in this process, with harsh repression and the banning of trade unions, making labor power very flexible with respect to wages and discipline (Barton, 1999, p. 66, cited in Lawton, 2012). As such, Chile became a haven for multi/trans-national companies eager to exploit the country for capital accumulation. Subsequently, wealth disparities between rich and poor increased dramatically. Clark (2012) remarks, the neoliberal experiment

in Chile began the future imposition of right-wing military dictatorships, and financial support to impose neoliberal reforms became unofficial US foreign policy.

The neoliberal ideology was given ballast and began globalizing when Margaret Thatcher was elected in the UK in 1979. Neoliberalism would become global when Ronald Reagan was elected a few years after in the US. Both Thatcher and Reagan set about stridently introducing neoliberal reforms, such as the complete withdrawal of capital controls instigated by UK Conservative Chancellor Geoffrey Howe, and the deregulation of the US financial markets – euphemistically termed the Big Bang of Regulation. By 1989, the ideology of neoliberalism was globally enshrined as the economic orthodoxy. From the beginning, the global financial Washington-based institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and also the US Department of the Treasury, signed up to a 10-point economic plan. This plan was about trade liberalization, privatization, financial sector deregulation, and tax cuts for the wealthiest (Clark, 2012). As Clark concludes, ‘this agreement between non-elected and shady organizations is misleadingly referred to as “The Washington Consensus”’ (Clark, 2012). The signing of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 1994 gave global neoliberalism a major boost by removing restrictions and internal government regulations in the area of service delivery that were considered ‘barriers to trade’ (GATS, 1994). The word *neoliberal* itself, however, seemingly did not enter the common vocabulary until November 1999 with the symbolic protest against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle. This meant that Thatcher and Reagan were not known by the electorate as neoliberals, nor were they associated with the free-market experiment in Chile that became termed neoliberalism, had this been the case history may have been different and it remains the case that Thatcher and Reagan are largely disassociated with this history.

Because neoliberalism has had an organic rather than prescribed evolution across the globe, it is important to identify some defining features. Adapting Martinez and Garcia (2000), there are three inter-related core mechanisms that necessitate the neoliberalization processes. Firstly, the predominance of the rule of the market in

policy making. This incurs liberating private enterprise from most bonds imposed by the government and other State institutions. Greater openness to international trade and investment, as in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Essential reducing of wages and facilitating greater exploitative industrial relation for capital by disallowing unionisation or significantly curtailing their power. Deregulating is important for marketisation, for example few price controls to enable freedom of movement for capital, goods, and services. The claim is that an unregulated market is the best way to increase economic growth, which will ultimately benefit everyone, this is akin to Reagan's supply-side and 'trickle-down' economics. However, we have witnessed that over 40 years that wealth trickling downwards is minimal, compared with the wealth being syphoned up, especially when capital and increasing profits are wanted by the ruling class.

Secondly, marketization necessitates commodification and privatization. This entails cutting public expenditure on public services and welfare. Education and health care provision are first to be euphemistically 'reformed', 'streamlined', and in need to be more 'efficient'. This means that potentially financially profitable public services and common goods are commodified, to be sold to the private sector. In the world of business, this is called asset stripping and recent examples include, State banks, and key industries: railroads, toll highways, electricity, schools, hospitals and even water supply. Often this is through quasi-privatization in the form public-private contracts, such as those in Sweden with Free Schools and England with the Academy Schools Program. The effect has been poorer and/or inaccessible services because of the introduction of fees and also concentrating wealth and power even more in private sector. The irony of free markets, which are supposed to be about competition and choice, is that they have created monopolies, such as the rail transportation in England where fares are high and ever increasing while services are declining. Thus free markets have actually reduced the competition and choice that they were designed to facilitate. Notably, neoliberals claim that commodification introduces choice, and it creates power for the consumer, for instance leveraging parental power/choice in education, but the reality is that those with financial capital are the winner because they can afford a wider selection of choices. The result is social class reproduction.

Thirdly, for its survival and expansion, there is a socio-cultural narrative that is needed to be created by neoliberals. This narrative is to promote self-interest, individualization, and personal investment for personal gain. To sustain expanding neoliberalism, the masses need to buy into its rhetoric. Neoliberalism nefariously focuses on winning the masses hearts and minds. The relative (though not hermetically sealed) success of dichotomies such as (hard) workers vs (lazy) shirkers/scroungers since 1979 after Thatcher's election continues. This narrative has resulted in a devaluing of the concepts of building social society, unity, compassion, and solidarity. The replacement is individual-responsibility, entrepreneurialism, dog-eat-dog, cut-throat competition. In this situation, the worker becomes alienated believing a lack of flourishing to be their own fault, and believing this, ultimately the agent of their own oppression.

The current neoliberal phase of global capitalism is expansive (see Maisuria, 2014), commodities can be taken to mean more than just goods such as products, it can also include services too, such as education and more recently knowledge itself (Marmol et al, 2015). An example of the latter is McGraw-Hill, who until recently was one of largest companies in the world trading in publishing, more recently they have tapped into selling knowledge itself, which they call 'learning science'. McGraw-Hill as a learning sciences company is an edu-business that makes a series of questionable claims on its website, here are four examples. First, that it is a Learning Sciences Company – to “help people learn”, but it does not specify what is learnt? Second, it claims to “bring that content or deliver that content”, but what is the content? Third, they claim “we’re focussed on outcomes”, but whose outcomes are these and for what purpose? Fourth, McGraw-Hill “measure those results”, but measure results against what and to achieve what? These questions are important because the influence of capitalist rationality is ubiquitous and it's reach extends in to public services and social entitlements, transforming the commons into commodities. Ultimately, the global capitalist ruling class are the beneficiaries and their stake in wealth and power increases, but this consequence is mystified – meaning made ambiguous.

Mystification of neoliberal capitalist mode of production

The British comedian and activist, Russell Brand with his firebrand use of satirical comedy in his film *The Emperor's New Clothes*, exposes astronomical level of income inequality between workers and the capitalist class. For instance, in the film he shows that, such was the level of income inequality in 2015, it would take 300 years for an average cleaner, cleaning the office of a capitalist, to earn the same as that capitalist. These are powerful demystifying facts to disseminate explication of inequality and exploitation, invoking questions about ethics, morals, and civility itself in the epoch of neoliberal capitalism. However and crucially, what Brand does not do is address the key question about generative mechanisms: with so much inequality how does the status quo remain and continue to gain acquiesce (meaning consent that is also critical) and even assent (enthusiastic consent) from the masses of the exploited class? This neat trick is what sustains, maintains, and aids expanding the neoliberal capitalist mode of production.

To address this question, the concept of *mystification* becomes powerfully useful. It can be used to descriptively understand a condition in which there is prevailing perceptions that masks and obscures a deep reality of the way that capitalism operates on exploitation. Put simply, the laboring class do not, are encouraged not to, connect neoliberal global capitalism with inequality and unfairness. This conditioning happens in several overlapping ways and forms.

The masses are conditioned to believe it is too much of a difficult subject to discuss political-economy and ideology and to leave it to the experts – it just so happens that the experts are the beneficiaries of an uncritical public. Or people are told their politics is about pragmatism and difficult choices, politicians often assert that their policies are about what works and what's 'right' not ideological dogmas. As the director Adam Curtis shows in his film *Bitter Lake*, the ruling class across neoliberal nations have adopted the same strategy to govern with the aim to confuse the masses – mystification. This allows the program of deepening neoliberalism through expanding markets and privatization, despite these being the mechanisms that gave the catalyst for austerity, inequality and inequity that the ruling class claim to oppose.

Mystification of capitalism and neoliberalism is not the work of serendipity, it is a purposeful strategy deployed by the capitalist class to promote, manufacture and disseminate a particular culture and popular common sense to condition mass consciousness. In essence, this is to emerge in a dominant belief that inequality is result of some people being deserving rich, which is the basis of meritocracy (strivers) and equally there is a deserving poor (skivers) – who have not tried hard enough, been: ambitious, aspiring and motivated. This is about promoting a focus that diverts attention away from the capitalist *system* that works for the interests of the few at the expense of the many, and to the encouraging a culture of demonization of each other, which spawn *individualism and self-interest*. The popular representation of the super-rich people (the 1%) is that they deserve their wealth and to critique it is a distasteful politics of envy or even worse a lack of ambition. These wealthy and powerful individuals are the products of the system that they have created manipulated to have their riches, and for the sake of progress and civilisation critical educators must propose the question: how neoliberalism can be fair and moral when these people have so much while there are so many in the world who can scarcely afford food and water (see Choonara and Robinson, 2008).

The mystification discussed above partly emerges as a condition that circumscribes class consciousness because neoliberals do not want, and indeed see it as a threat, to discuss and critically educate about neoliberalism. Furthermore because of the absence of education that include critique of neoliberalism, mystification is also serviced by the occurrence of *miracles*. These miracles are instances of when individuals ‘make it’ against the odds of success, and these are promoted as being suggestive of their being an absence of a glass ceiling/sticky floor for the worse-off in society. There is a concerted attempt to create a mass belief in the existence of meritocracy and social mobility. The success of this narrative generates justification of staggering inequality (see any annual Oxfam Inequality report), i.e. those people who are poor are deemed to have not tried hard enough and taken opportunities to succeed and therefore *deserve* their lot – neoliberalism has nothing to do with it. With the consciousness of a *deserving poor*, also comes the idea of a deserving stratum of

people who have worked hard to become prosperous, privileged, and powerful. This consciousness is cultivated by the capitalist ruling elite on a regular basis, and the media central plays a part in normalizing it. A good example is a recent article in the UK newspaper London Evening Standard with the headline: *Migrant's son swaps the East End for Eton after winning scholarship*. The central argument in the article was that anybody could *make-it* with hard work, and this working class boy, the son of immigrants, can join the likes of the future King of England at Britain's most elite school (Eton). A notable segment of the article discussed the boy's view of his father and his struggle to make work pay: "My dad has a lot of injuries, shattered knee and slipped disc, but has instilled morals and ethics that you have to work. ... He is always at work trying to make life better for his family. He is my hero" (Barnes, 2017). Crucially, the article shifts the emphasis on *individual* endeavor (the immigrant boy) and away from the capitalist *system* that is unequal and unfair, and reproduces this injustice through the very fact that a private school exists at all charging charges circa £40k (Euro 45k) tuition fees annually, for five years. Moreover, implicitly, the article dismisses the fact that there are potentially hundreds of pupils in London's poor East End who will never have the opportunity to study at Eton. The one boy who did progress was an anomaly, and his fortune was largely an accident of time and moment. The common sense being promoted, to solidify the dominant hegemony of meritocracy, is that if one boy can make it to Eton then everybody can – this is mystification.

Working against mystification and promoting a belief in the feasibility of alternatives to the neoliberal class-based status quo is probably the greatest task for critical educators and activists for social justice. In Western and economically developed countries, the struggle is hard because neoliberal capitalism is deeply established in the ideological, political, social and cultural realms that are enmeshed in creating the conditions in which a mass *common sense* is manufactured. This *common sense* that has prevailed, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, emerges through some identifiable mechanisms. These are oscillating in degrees of intra-dependency between:

- i) Neoliberalism best serves the economy through talented individuals being rewarded:

- a. Self-interest is key for us all to individually prosper.
- b. The investment in the concept of *society*, rather than *self*, promotes social loafing and laziness. Selfishness is good because it incentivises and motivates.
- ii) *There is no alternative* (TINA) to the status quo.
- iii) The alternatives to neoliberal capitalism that may/do exist are not feasible because:
 - a. They are less desirable because they promote reliance on welfare – those who scrounge from the State or rely on others to be productive,
 - b. on balance, the status quo is *as good as it gets*. The problems of inequality are outweighed by the good stuffs (i.e. the availability of commodities),
 - c. In the end, the communist/socialist alternative is not feasible because it is idealist and utopian, not practically realistic and end with brutality and barbarism.
- iv) Inequality is natural. It has always existed in human relations, and always will. It is nature and part of the history of past, and will be the history of the future.
- v) We are genetically wired to be competitive and neoliberalism facilitates this most inner urge. Self-interest promoted in political economy and socio-culture (i.e. education policy that focuses on personal investment and return in the labor market) aligns with our nature.
- vi) Neoliberalism advances civilization through advancement in productive technologies.

These messages are spread ubiquitously and they are the mechanisms that generate the *appearance* of the narrative that a) nothing *needs* to be done b) nothing *can* be done for serious change. This latter point is effectively symbolized in the popular British cultural slogan: *keep calm and carry on* with suffixes such as *shopping*, *drinking tea*, and so forth. While these narratives and slogans may seem benign, they represent a deep mechanism that generates mystification that in turn generates a tendency for the maintenance neoliberalism in every auspice of lived reality that is almost inescapable. The point here is that the dominant hegemonic ideology cannot exist without the apparatus that support it in lived reality. For example, neoliberalism

cannot be maintained by the ruling class without their supporting organs, which includes schools and popular culture that seek to establish the consciousness for its *consent*. The strategy for struggle needs to include educating about class relations and neoliberalism. Along with the belief in social mobility and meritocracy, people have been conditioned to get-on with life with the message *be a striver rather than a moaning skiver*. In addition, very few people would want to risk themselves against the very powerful State apparatus for fear of reprisal and negative consequences. The continued successes of these apparatuses mean that there is relative stability – an equilibrium despite some knowledge of injustice. A question that critical education needs to grapple with is, what is the masses' tolerance level of injustice and what are the conditions that create this level? The answers to this dual question can be the pressure point in strategic thinking about change. Even in the state of general and mass acquiescence, spaces always exist for struggle because appearances are difficult to maintain while gross inequalities and inequities are very evident.

Feasibility of Alternatives

The Italian communist Antonio Gramsci viewed that it was necessary for the masses to have a new *conception of the world*, thus meaning that people must be convinced to believe that history is open to new ways of being, and this could be facilitated by revolutionary thinking and action (Gramsci, 1971, p.465; Forgacs, 2000, p.429). In recent times it seems that a renewed mass consciousness is emerging amongst the working class. This is a consciousness of the way that democracy is used as a mechanism of appeasement, as well as a rendering of alternatives to the status quo as being unfeasible. For many years, the ruling capitalist class hegemony that has created an *appearance* of equity and social mobility and meritocracy; but this appearance is being unveiled and demystified, especially during socio-economic crises. The prevailing mass consciousness has been that democracy is what differentiates the free (neoliberal) world from the (non-neoliberal) unfree world but this appearance is wearing thin. The ruling capitalist class have continually reproduced their hegemony via (i) mass apathy to politics and also by (ii) people actually participating in parliamentary politics voting for a mainstream (and centrist) Party, the function of both practices results in maintaining the status quo of neoliberal

capitalism – it is a catch-22. The emerging problem for the capitalist ruling class is that the previously apathetic masses are seemingly more aware of their inaction, and apathy is being channeled into more class conscious practices. The massive support of comedian turned political activist Russell Brand, Podemos and other examples such as the Occupy and Uncut movements’ are demonstrative of the embryo of a people’s class consciousness emerging as part of hegemonic struggle.

Parliamentary *democracy* is now under scrutiny like it has never been before. The cultural apathy and acquiescence that maintained and reproduced class relations is being questioned because voting is perceived to be an impotent way of getting change to inequality, thus claims of political representation through voting have been debunked. The mentality that Brand describes as “Stick your X into this box and congratulate yourself on being free” (Brand, 2014, p.78) is no longer cultivating consent as it has historically. However, things may be about to change with the symbolic leadership of the likes of Corbyn, Sanders, Obrado – all of whom created a consciousness that alternatives to the last 40 years of marketisation and privatisation of education and other public provision were feasible. The popularity of these sentiments about change being necessary and possible is a radical departure from just a few year ago. Brand effectively points out the way in which this type of oppositional consciousness that is mainstream was situated as culturally deviant and/or dealt with, by *ad hominem*:

When I was poor and complained about inequality they said I was bitter; now I’m rich and I complain about inequality they say I’m a hypocrite. I’m beginning to think they don’t want me to talk about inequality (Brand, 2014, p.113).

Brand is being used as an illustration here because he represents something interesting from a Marxist perspective. As a global celebrity who came from a troubled and humble background, he represents the ultimate Hollywood dream. His story can effectively be used to show that in neoliberalism people can make it against the odds. The story seemingly represents social mobility and meritocracy in materiality with the

message – talent will not be held back by background and class. But what is interesting is that Brand has turned his back on capitalizing maximally on the trappings of celebrity fame and fortune and subsequently devoted his time, money and energy on acting against the very system that brought him financial prosperity. This life history opens-up the valuable idea that beyond basic needs financial reward is: vacuous, superficial, unfulfilling and unsatisfactory. Put simply, there is more to life than the language of money and consumption. More importantly, his life represents the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness that exists within neoliberalism itself (Marx and Engels, 1848; Mayo, 2015). In the case of Brand, he had taken neoliberalism to its limits, and it was during this neoliberal journey *itself* that he became conscious of the way that neoliberalism does not work for the many. The point is that the lived world in neoliberal times incorporates social transformation within itself, revolutionary ideas are generated within this materialism and not outside of lived reality. Class consciousness and desires of personal and political change are not separate from the world that is experienced. Brand's journey is demonstrative of the Gramscian idea that "all men [sic] are intellectuals" (1971, p.9). He is somebody who had lived the *common sense* of neoliberalism, and came through this with *good sense*.

In terms of critical education teaching and scholarship, for criticism to be effective in contextualizing the need for change, it needs to be accompanied by visions of utopia as feasible. Utopia is deployed here not to mean a fantastically perfect paradise but rather an alternative where wealth and power can be massively redistributed, and social justice, equality, equity, and political representation take priority over markets, commodities and privatization. Many neoliberals, especially of the free market Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek type (see the Adam Smith Institute), argue that there are no feasible alternatives any longer (as discussed earlier). However, historic examples show that democratic socialism or even Left Social Democracy has benefitted the masses far more than capitalism has (and can do). Earlier the issue of participation in parliamentary democracy was discussed, recent history shows that democracy works better in socialism than in capitalism, in the latter very few people actually turn out to vote. Contrastingly, in the last two decades, presidential elections in countries where there is a socialist candidate receive a turnout of up to 80%, giving a genuine mandate to the victor, as was the case with the late President Hugo Chavez

of Venezuela. The case of Cuba arises continually as a point that critics use to dismiss claims of a feasible radical-Left alternative and democracy existing simultaneously. The term dictatorship is often casually deployed by neoliberal-advocate/apologists in these discussions about Cuba. However, the case of Cuba shows that democracy can be more representative and in the interest of people when democracy is about socialism and solidarity.

In Cuba, bottom-up political representation is alive and thriving, it is *designed* to be integral to the governing system. The principle behind Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), the Organs of Popular Power (OPP), and the mass organisations (including: Municipal Delegates, Provincial/National Assemblies, Work Commissions, Popular Councils) is about enabling people to have a voice for direct democracy. The word democracy etymologically is a combination of *demos* meaning [common] people and *kratos* meaning power, thereby constructed as people-power this seems to be the case in Cuba. Similar principles to those applied in Cuba were also established as part of the then Chavez-led re-writing of the Venezuelan constitution, and subsequently where people were permitted to recall and remove their President before the end of their term. One must question the fate of Tony Blair and George Bush if this principle for democracy had been in place in the UK/USA on the issue of the invasion of Iraq, and on the issue of austerity in Spain and many parts of the capitalist ‘democratic’ world.

Being educated in the tools to do critical thinking is fundamental for feasibility of an alternative to generate, and it could be speculated that the ruling class are making higher education unaffordable in many countries and making access to a critical and creative curriculum unobtainable (for by example cutting funding for social science and humanities funding) because it opens the way for workers and the working class to be educated about neoliberalism, mystification, and feasibility.

The work of critical education for class struggle at the level of culture that, for example, Brand and other organic intellectuals' practice, represents the necessary negation of the claims of the capitalist ruling class. This kind of negation of negation – a sidestepping of the mystification and creating a feasibility of an alternative to be possible represents a crisis moment in terms of what Thomas has described as placing the “very foundations of bourgeois hegemony in doubt” (2009, p.145). The role of critical education *inside of* and *beyond* formal State institutions is crucial here. This “doubt” must also be accompanied by effective strategizing that takes seriously questions of class as the basis of cultural forms. These classed cultural forms create the conditions for consent, the importance of agential action of organic intellectuals, and also the unpredictable but conceivable tendencies of history to materialize in different ways. Struggle for demystification and for alternatives to be feasible must be part of critical education in all its forms, thus to raise consciousness, only then can a momentum as an organized laboring class be established against the neoliberal status quo (Marx, 1847).

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