

Chapter 1

Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities and Limit Situations

1.1 Theorizing Practice and Practicing Theory

This is a book about critical pedagogy and the everyday classroom. Critical pedagogy is a praxis, with praxis constituting “action and reflection” (Freire, 1985: 155). Praxis involves theorizing practice and practicing theory. Praxis is thinking about what and why you’re going to do before you do it and then reflecting on what you did, how you did it, and how it turned out. Critical pedagogy involves an ever-evolving working relationship between practice and theory. It is a relationship that is always in progress, involving a constant give-and-take, a back-and-forth dialectical informing of practice by theory and theory by practice.

As a praxis, critical pedagogy cannot be stagnant. It demands reflection and reconceptualization between what goes on in our classrooms, why it goes on, and what and whose ends are served—which is what makes a book like this difficult to write. How presumptuous it would be of me to say what I just said about praxis and then offer a how-to guide. My hope is that critical pedagogy will allow you to understand your relationship to education, to the institutions—the schools and colleges, boards and departments of education—in *which* and your relationship to the individuals—students and parents, teachers, administrators, and community members—*upon whom* education plays out and is played out by. Critical pedagogy takes as its starting point the everyday classroom, whatever that might look like in your locality, region, country, and time period.

Critical pedagogy is also a discipline. You can go to university and, in everyday classrooms, attain master’s degrees and doctorates studying critical pedagogy. But the praxis of critical pedagogy implies action and transformation beyond the individual. True, if your goal is to add more letters behind your name or more framed certificates on your wall, you could do that through the discipline of critical pedagogy. But while critical pedagogy recognizes the importance of the individual and her interests, it also recognizes that the individual and her fulfillment depend on her social relationships with others, inside and outside the classroom.

Critical pedagogy requires thought and deed together, reflection and action. One without the other does not amount to praxis. As Paulo Freire warns, “Cut off from practice, theory becomes a simple verbalism” (1985: 156). The opposite holds

equally true. “Separated from theory, practice is nothing but blind activism” (Ibid.). Thus, Freire cautions, “there is no authentic praxis outside the dialectical unity, action–reflection, practice–theory” (Ibid.).

Activist-scholars in critical pedagogy have much in common in their definitions and deployments of critical pedagogy while, at the same time, bringing their own and their students’ subtle nuances to it. Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy seeks to “make oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed” with the hope that “from that reflection will come liberation” (1997: 30). Peter McLaren defines critical pedagogy as “a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state” (2000: 35). Henry Giroux recognizes critical pedagogy as a *political* pedagogy—indeed, critical pedagogy in all its forms recognizes that *all* pedagogies are political—aiming to connect “understanding and critical engagement with the issue of social responsibility and what it would mean to educate students to not only critically change the world but also be responsible enough to fight for those political and economic conditions that make its democratic possibilities viable” (2006: 209–210).

There is no trite, one or two sentence definition of critical pedagogy that explains exactly what critical pedagogy is at all times for all people. As Joe Kincheloe notes, “All descriptions of critical pedagogy—like knowledge in general—are shaped by those who devise them and the values they hold” (2004: 7). Critical pedagogy is context specific, which means a critical pedagogy on a 21st-century American Indian reservation is going to look different than a critical pedagogy centered in working class Staten Island, New York in the 1980s (see for examples, Grande, 2004; Shor, 1997). Even in one location at one time, various critical pedagogies are possible.

Yet there are common characteristics that transcend different critical pedagogies in practice. A critical pedagogy is both descriptive and prescriptive, or as Freire explains, it “formulates a scientific humanist conception that finds its expression in a dialogical praxis in which the teachers and learners together, in the act of analyzing a dehumanizing reality, denounce it while announcing its transformation in the name of the liberation of man” (1985: 57). By “man” Freire meant human beings, inclusive of women. Critical pedagogy is descriptive in that it critically analyses the world we live in. A teacher–student–scholar informed by critical pedagogy does not take the status quo as inevitable or unalterable. Critical pedagogy looks at how the pedagogical, political, social, and economic aspects of life play out and inform one another. Critical pedagogy asks why do these things exist the way they do? Who benefits from this way of things? Why? Who suffers? How? Asking these questions and working with your students and other teachers to develop answers are the path to critical consciousness.

Critical pedagogy is also normative in the sense that it is prescriptive. While allowing one to critically understand our world, critical pedagogy as a praxis *demand*s we work to change that world. Critical pedagogy resonates with us because it affirms our suspicions that things aren’t the way they should or could be. Critical pedagogy offers suggestions for change, but not cut and dried blue prints. Critical pedagogy

reaffirms the democratic faith in human beings' ability to make and remake our worlds. Critical pedagogy allows us to marshal reason and emotion in the service of understanding, transcendence, and transformation. Critical pedagogy will help us uncover situations that stifle humanization—limit situations. At the same time that these limit situations are recognized, limit acts or the untested feasibility of a dehumanizing situation become possibilities. Critical pedagogy offers us hope that things can change but it is up to us to change them.

A critical pedagogy must hold itself up to the same standards of criticism, assessment, and judgment that it does other pedagogies. Freire describes “the crux” of the matter as this: “I must be constantly open to criticism and sustain my curiosity, always ready for revision based on the results of my future experience and that of others” (1985: 11). Elsewhere he explains how a critical pedagogy must be continually “made and remade” (1997: 30). Any critical pedagogy, like the human beings it works to humanize, remains unfinished, constantly evolving, a work in progress. This is a good thing.

Because critical pedagogy is all these things and more, it makes writing a book like this complicated. If you have come to this book expecting step one–step two–step three suggestions for implementing a critical pedagogy, let me tell you right now you will be disappointed. The first time I read Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I was excited. I finished it on a weekend and lay in bed that night thinking about “culture circles,” “Problem-posing education,” and “generative themes” (Freire, 1997). I confidently strode (strutted?) into my middle school classroom on Monday thinking I’d apply what I’d learned. It didn’t happen that way. “Mr. Tony,” said Tony Crisp, a seventh grader with the amazing ability—all too common among middle schoolers—to endear himself to me at the same time he made me want to rip all the hair out of my head, “Mr. Tony,” he said, “why you wearin’ those nut-hugger jeans?”—Tony’s way of telling me he thought my pants were too tight.

“Funny, Tony,” I told him, “but not appropriate,” suddenly wondering if my pants were too tight. Before I knew it I was directing Tyrese to sit back down in his chair, asking Brandon to open his book instead of playing with the pick in his hair, wondering if that was cigarette smoke or marijuana I smelled coming off Chris, imploring Charlene not to pick on her little brother Gary In other words, Monday morning was looking a lot like Friday afternoon, with most of my time spent on classroom management. So much for “culture circles.”

I wondered what *I* was doing wrong. Surely I had misunderstood Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a classic. His ideas had to be applicable to my 5th through 8th graders. If there was a problem, it was with me and my failure to tap into the man’s ideas and implement them in this rural Johnston County, North Carolina classroom.

Turns out, I had misunderstood Freire, but not for the reasons I’d thought. I’d missed the whole point of critical pedagogy’s context specificity: that what was applicable to Freire’s work with illiterate Brazilian peasants in the 1950s wasn’t necessarily equally valid in my American south public middle school in the 1990s. I’d missed the point that Freire’s critical pedagogy was crafted in non-formal literacy circles and here I was entrenched in an institutionalized school setting. I’d

missed the point that critical pedagogy isn't some Michele Pfeifer or Edward James Olmos feel-good movie where an altruistic teacher serves as savior to her students. I understood every word in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* but still I had to look up as the true meaning and implications of the book passed over my head.

1.2 How to Use This Book

Less the preceding paragraphs sound too dour a note—*Why'd I buy this book?* (Because it was on the professor's reading list?)—let me explain how I think this book will be useful to you. Critical pedagogy strives to help the individual develop critical consciousness or (in Portuguese, Freire's native language) *conscientizacao*. Critical consciousness “represents the *development* of the awakening of critical awareness” (Freire, 1974: 15; unless otherwise noted, throughout the book, the emphasis in quotations is always in the original). Critical consciousness is more than *knowledge of*, it is *action for*, “the process by which human beings participate critically in a transforming act” (Freire, 1985: 106). Donalddo Macedo clarifies that critical consciousness “refers to the process in which men [sic], not as recipients, but as knowing subjects achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality” (in Freire, 1985: 93).

Critical consciousness—recognizing limit situations for what they are and for who they serve—is the first step toward purposeful transformation. Before we set out *with* our students on making a better tomorrow, all of us have to understand today. We must also have some grasp of yesterday and all the days before that brought us here. What is it about the everyday classroom and the relationships it engenders that we don't like? How did things come about this particular way? By drawing as often as possible on real-world examples from classrooms I have taught and been taught in, I hope to illustrate what critical pedagogy can help us understand about the everyday classroom, its institutional–structural position, and the political–social–economic relationships in which it nests.

Transformation involves imagination and possibility. Different critical pedagogies offer different visions of and for the future, various utopias if you will. Where is change possible within the everyday classroom? What can this change look like? What shouldn't it look like? Critical pedagogy implies (or, as in Giroux's quote above, explicitly embraces) a faith in democracy as a way of life. As often as “democracy” is bandied about, by those with power as well as by progressives challenging them, the concept has been stripped of nearly all meaning. What is democracy and why do we think it is good? This is a question critical pedagogy must concern itself with, instead of making democracy just another word, an item of faith, or, worse, a shibboleth of the discipline. “Pssss . . .” “What's the password?” “Conscientization, praxis, democracy. Let me in.” This book attempts to tackle the issue of democracy, its problems, promise, and potential, what it could mean, and why its realization is important. I think this task alone is of no small importance given the constant temptations to pigeonhole democracy as a mere form of politics

or discard it altogether in favor of an aristocratic elitism, whether we call that special little group a “talented tenth,” a “vanguard of the proletariat,” or an “ubermensch” (Nietzsche’s concept of the superhuman).

I said that as often as possible I want this to be a book about the everyday classroom, to show theory at work in practice along with the practicing of theory, and that is where I wish to go now. The examples I use in this book will be my own unless otherwise cited. My examples come from 10 years of teaching in the United States of America, the Caribbean, and South Korea. They also come from my numerous years as a student, both inside and outside of schools, but for the sake of this book mostly inside. Where I thought it necessary I have changed the names of students, teachers, administrators, and parents. This book is written with teachers in mind but can be read by a non-professional audience. Above all I have striven for clarity and ease of reading. So long as I have made my ideas and the ideas of others clear I will be satisfied, even if I leave you, dear reader, unconvinced.

1.3 Meet Pete

Let me tell you about a student. Pete is a tenth grader in an affluent suburban high school in New York State. High school staff were given a heads up at an “articulation” meeting toward the end of Pete’s middle school 8th grade year that they would be getting a student who had a “history of violence,” like the movie. No Viggo Mortensen, Pete was known for frequent fist fights with individuals, and, in one case, the infield of the baseball team. The usual cause of Pete’s fights was other children and their picking on him.

Since the 6th grade, Pete had been served under a 504 Plan. Students recognized and/or labeled with disabilities in American public schools are served by either 504 Plans or Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Where IEPs require sometimes significant modifications in instruction and even the curriculum, 504 Plans offer students modifications aimed at helping them access the standard curriculum (as do IEPs). Around the time he was 10 or 11 years old, Pete’s parents and teachers started to notice that he was “a bit slow on the uptake.” Pete was the kid who “didn’t get it” right away, whether “it” was a joke, new academic material, or social cues from peers. For example, Pete’s teacher could be discussing one subject and 5 min later Pete would ask a question about the previous subject, something that was already old news for the rest of the class, which had moved on. Citing slow processing speed, a 504 Plan was jointly developed between school staff and Pete’s parents that would provide Pete with extended time, teacher redirection, and checking for understanding in all his classes. Do you understand what I’m saying to you about Pete? (Checking for understanding). If not, I want you to go back two paragraphs and read them again, okay? Stop daydreaming while you’re reading this book, okay? (Redirection). Otherwise you’ll get to the end of this chapter but not remember a single thing you read about.

Pete worked hard throughout elementary and middle school and continued to do so in high school. His high school teachers were happily surprised to find that

his supposed belligerent behavior did not continue in the 9th grade. They quickly figured out that the reason Pete got into so many fights in middle school is because other students would make fun of him. Pete wouldn't "get" a joke, would have to verbalize it for several seconds and then break out in apparently inappropriate laughter.

Here's one that gets a kid like Pete rubbing his head. Daddy mole, mommy mole, and baby mole are running up the mole hole. Daddy mole stops short. What are mommy mole and baby mole left doing? Smelling molasses. (Thanks go to Jackie the Jokeman Martling). Thirty or more seconds later Pete would have an "a-ha" moment and burst out laughing. Problem is the rest of the class or his group of friends had moved on to something else, so the laughter really looked out of place and inappropriate. New material presented in class wouldn't sink in right away with Pete. The teacher would explain that "nationalism is love for one's country" only to have Pete immediately ask, "What is nationalism?" Some students laughed, pointed fingers, and called Pete names. In middle school Pete would then beat these kids up or try and beat them up.

High school was different for Pete because he was immediately placed in a small specialized program designed for emotionally fragile children. Students in Pete's program ranged in their fragility, from Pete, who felt "pretty much normal" other than feeling "I just don't fit in" to students who wouldn't go to the cafeteria on their own or feared transitions between classrooms when the hallways were crowded. Teachers and teachers' aides assigned to the program accompanied their students from class to class to cafeteria to gymnasium as needed. Here's how this looks in person. Pete would be sitting in his "mainstream" science class with 24 other students, the science teacher teaching the class, a teacher from his special program sitting near him or maybe in the back of the room. The teacher from his program found it best not to identify herself as being there "for Pete," offering her help to any student in the class who needed it. At the same time she kept a special eye out for Pete. If Pete asked a question the science teacher had just answered she went over to him and quietly explained it to him. If another student gave Pete a look like he was an idiot, she went over to *that* student and asked him how he was doing, effectively letting him know *she knew* how he was feeling, that his reaction was inappropriate, redirecting and refocusing the others' attention all at once.

Pete's story does not begin or end here, but let us stop and consider certain aspects of it before returning to it and others' like his in future chapters. There are certain aspects of Pete's situation that any teacher, committed to a critical pedagogy or not, would be concerned about. For example, even if one thinks wider issues of morality and justice are beyond one's influence, what goes on in our classrooms is under our sway.

The whole bullying situation, with Pete being picked on, is one that cannot be countenanced in our classrooms. Unfortunately it often is. Nearly 30% (over 5.7 million) of youth in America are involved in bullying as either the bullied, the bully, or both. Of 6–10th graders, 13% admit to bullying others, 11% admit to being bullied, and 6% admit to alternately being bullied and bullying (Nansel et al., 2001). I suspect, based on my observations as a teacher, common sense, and my experience

as both bully and one bullied, that these figures are lower than what actually goes on, as being identified as either bully or bullied carries with it social stigma. It's like rape in prison. It goes on a lot but is underreported.

Bullying occurs across cultures. Bodyguards have been made available to South Korean school children to address the issue of bullying (Watts, 2007). Bullying undoubtedly plays a part in the Japanese phenomenon of *hikkimori*, or extreme social isolation, where school students and others lock themselves away from the world for months on end.

Why does bullying occur? When I was a kid in school, alternately being bullied and bullying, we were told that bullies lacked self-esteem and bullied others because it made them feel better about themselves. Recent scholarship finds that instead of being existentially unsure of themselves, bullies are confident and have high self-esteem. Bullies tend to be hot-tempered, angering easily; impulsive, they lack significant levels of frustration tolerance; physically aggressive, they usually harbor pro-violence outlooks (Nansel et al., 2001).

Bullies do not grow up in a vacuum. From infancy children are looking around them to the adults in their lives for moral cues as to what is acceptable and desirable and what is not (Coles, 2000). What are they seeing in their homes, neighborhoods, schools, and on TV? According to the Federal Bureau of Information, in the United States husbands and boyfriends kill four women each day. It is estimated that 2–4 million American women are beaten and battered by their intimates annually. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that up to 5,000 women die yearly as a result of “honor killings,” which are carried out, for example, against rape victims who are seen as bringing shame to their families. Some countries’ laws (like Jordan’s) allow for the premeditated murder of women by relatives who cheat on their spouses; others’ (like Morocco’s) make it legal only for the husband to kill a philandering wife. Other countries (like Turkey) sentence women to life imprisonment for cheating.

Women have struggled under the bullying yoke of patriarchy and testosterone for millennia. Traditionally men as a whole have been bigger and stronger than women and used their advantages to control political and economic power, lording it over women. Men have written history, and it has been a history that largely ignored women and accorded them subservient status and roles. Male-dominated religions with father-figure deities never tried to hide women’s second citizen status: the Judeo-Christian tradition holds that women were created from man’s rib to serve men; the Koran that “rebellious” women can be (depending on your favored translation) beaten, spanked, or abandoned by their husbands (MacFarquhar, 2007). The Enlightenment’s appeal to reason and rationality was twisted such that these were identified with men while impugning emotion, which was held to be the purview of women and women-like men. Manly men have controlled political life, the public sphere, relegating women to the private life of the family with slaves and children. Interestingly enough a change appears to be underfoot, as the private is championed—less government, more “choice” in things like schools—and the public derogated, with public schools constantly under attack, with the welfare state derided as the “nanny state.”

Of course not all men are culpable in the exploitation of women; history is full of examples of males who have stood with women to challenge it. The point is twofold: bullies pick on those they perceive as weaker than them, and life can be structured in such a way that unfair advantages are enjoyed by some over others, often with a country's or time period's legal, ethical, and social imprimatur. The victims of bullies tend to be anxious and insecure, with low self-esteem, perhaps socially isolated, and lacking social skills (Olweus, 1993). The bullied also have a way of not defending themselves when bullied. All too familiar are the stories of battered women who make excuses for the husbands and boyfriends who batter them, as if they themselves were partially responsible for their mistreatment.

1.4 Recognizing and Confronting Limit Situations

We live in societies where the subjection of women is condoned, encouraged, or turned a blind eye. In the United States, boys who sleep with many girls are considered “playas,” “playboys,” or “studs”; girls who sleep with many boys are “sluts” and “whores.” Girls pledge their virginity to their fathers in bizarre prom-like ritual dances; there are no such equivalent soirees for boys (Baumgardner, 2007). Men wear “wife-beater” t-shirts and think nothing of describing these sleeveless white undershirts as such. Women with high school diplomas or their GED can expect to make \$6,000 *less* than men with a similar credential; women with a Bachelor's degree or higher will earn \$10,000 less than a similarly accredited male (US Department of Education, 2006c). This widening pay gap between female and male college graduates continues unabated even as women constitute 58% of college enrollment in the United States (Leonhardt, 2006). Despite the steady stream of female MBAs, only 16% of corporate officers at Fortune 500 companies are female, with women filling less than 2% of the chief executive jobs at Fortune 500 companies (Creswell, 2006). Female civil servants in India have been asked to discuss their menstrual cycles in job appraisal forms (Talwar Badam, 2007). Women are being brutalized in the Congo in numbers and severity—sexually assaulted with bayonets and wood chunks that destroy their reproductive and digestive systems—never seen before (Gettleman, 2007). Girls in America are being blamed for the declining number of boys who read because these boys are being “sent home with . . . new-wave young adult problem novels, which all seem to be about introspectively morose young women whose parents are either suicidal drug addicts or fatally ill manic depressives,” and what boy would want to read that kind of dreck (Brooks, 2006)? Leaving DNA evidence all over the crime scene, O.J. Simpson can get away with double murder, then co-author a book explaining “If I Did It, Here's How It Happened” (on Simpson's guilt, see Bugliosi, 1997). Is it any wonder American women report being unhappier than men (Leonhardt, 2007a)?

Laws exist in countries like the United States to protect people from being victimized. As I wrote this book the Supreme Court shafted women when they ruled that workers could not bring law suit under Title VII unless they had filed a complaint with the proper federal agency within 180 days of their pay being set (Greenhouse,

2007b). Workers may not notice within 180 days that they're being unfairly paid. Because women are paid less than men for the same work, women will suffer disproportionately from this ruling.

The kid we discussed above, Pete, has a 504 Plan while other students classified as special needs students have IEPs. Pete is lucky enough to live in a country where the rights of the disabled are taken somewhat seriously or, at the very least, where ignoring or discriminating against those with special needs is outlawed. Pete's "disability" is mild compared to the 30 million other Americans identified as disabled. Postsecondary educations were once closed to the disabled; today 11.3% of undergraduates report some type of disability (US Department of Education, 2006c).

Bullying in our classrooms—of one gender by the other, of one race by another, of the disabled by their non-disabled peers, of the weak by the strong—is unacceptable. One needs no familiarity with critical pedagogy to be against bullying. But critical pedagogy can help shine a light on why we take a stand against bullying. Bullying is a limit situation in that it limits people from achieving the full realization of their humanity. Obviously the bullied are dehumanized, but critical pedagogy shows how the bullies also lose something along the way. "Dehumanization," notes Paulo Freire, "... marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it" (1997: 26). Consider: bullies are more likely to drink, smoke, and get into trouble than their peers and are very likely to experience legal and criminal problems later in life (Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993: 437). Bullies have often suffered bullying and/or abuse themselves. Children who grow up in homes where they are exposed to violence against themselves and their mothers are four times more likely to become violent juvenile offenders and five times more likely to commit or suffer violence as adults compared to their peers who grew up in homes lacking violence (<http://www.now.org/issues/violence/stats.html>). Bullying illustrates Freire's claim that "the situation of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress" (1997: 29).

By now some readers will be shaking their heads, saying, "Of course I wouldn't sit still for bullying in my classroom or home, but let's be realistic here: bullying has always gone on and always will." Dehumanization appears to be a fact of life. Okay, *let's* be realistic here. Some people are convinced they derive satisfaction from bullying, which is why it continues. Dehumanization serves certain groups, which is why it continues. Yet bullying and other forms of dehumanization are not inevitable. Freire considers humanization the vocation of the human race, today's "inescapable concern," what we strive for as a species (1997: 25). He admits that dehumanization, which he views as "a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human," happens and has happened, "but it is not an historical vocation" (Freire, 1997: 26). Dehumanization, "although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors . . ." (Ibid.).

Human beings need to be *more* human, not less. The problem occurs when some seek what they see as the road to their being more at the expense of others, instead of realizing that we're all in this together as a species, that my full realization and humanization as an individual is only possible with the realization of the

humanization of all men and women. That's an insight critical pedagogy offers that helps us understand why bullying is bad, not just to the bullied or even the bully, but to humanity as a whole. It also helps understand why critical pedagogy is a democratic exercise.

But how does critical pedagogy go further and help us analyze Pete's daily class life? Pete was identified as a student in a well-to-do suburban high school replete with special "articulation" meetings between middle and high school staff to alert the later of the arrival of 9th graders with special concerns. His is a high school with special programs, such as the one he is in, catering to "emotionally fragile" students. These things cost money. Lots of money.

Lots of things cost lots of money. There are things our money is spent on. The Iraq War, for example, costs American taxpayers \$200 billion annually (Leonhardt, 2007b). The US Department of Defense has a budget of some \$441.5 billion a year (Defense Industry Daily, 2006). Then there are the things we might like to spend our money on but do not. Universal Health Care for the 50 million Americans without it would cost \$100 billion annually (Leonhardt, *Ibid.*). Universal pre-school in America, half days for 3-year olds, full days for 4-year olds, would run some \$35 billion per year (*Ibid.*).

Notice the normative values revealed already in my examples. Obviously I think the war on Iraq is a waste of money—and lives, with over 27,000 American casualties and over a million Iraqis since the start of the war (Beaumont & Walters, 2007). I list the estimated prices of providing health care and pre-school to my fellow citizens, when I could have mentioned that a brand new 2007 BMW 328 xi Coupe runs somewhere in the \$40,000 range. As much as I might like to drive a BMW, as a high school teacher this represents a luxury for me, a "dream item." A car with a \$40,000 sticker price is part of a dream I may have, but we'll get into what makes and constitutes our desires soon enough. Further, raised with certain *values* like thrift, an appreciation for the value of a dollar, and other *values*, such that the car a person drives is a reflection upon the person only to the extent that she needs it to be and that *that* is a telling reflection in itself, if I *had* 40 grands to shell out on a car, I *wouldn't*. Universal health care and pre-school may be just as equally "dreams" of mine, about as likely as my achieving (less so actually) the ownership of a luxury sedan, yet they are important for me to mention, as a reflection of my values, of the world I want to live in, of the person I try to be.

1.5 Engaged Pedagogy

Again, the point: critical pedagogy is critical and prescriptive. Which brings us back to Pete's situation in high school. Critical pedagogy is *always* politically engaged. All too often we are asked to accept that school is a politically neutral site or, if not, somehow *should* be. Liberal professors, invoking their country's constitutional guarantee of free speech to bash that very country and its institutions, those guys are political (see www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org). Mentally unstable teachers like Professor Terguson (comedian Sam Kinnison's character in the 1986

film *Back to School*) who rant at their undergraduates that “. . . I was ‘there’ [the Vietnam War] . . . I was up to my knees in rice paddies . . . Going in there, looking for Charlie, slugging it out with him. While pussies like you were back here partying, putting headbands on, doing drugs and listening to goddamn Beatles albums! Oh-oh-oh!” *they* are political (and probably mentally unhinged). Proponents of creationist-inspired challenges to Darwinian evolution like “intelligent design,” these folks are political. Atheist teachers in classrooms, well, there shouldn’t be atheist teachers in classrooms, right? But they’re there and they’re political. Forbidding high school students from using the word “vagina” in an assembly where the play “The Vagina Monologues” is to be mentioned, that’s political (O’Connor, 2007). The idea is that the political, whatever it is, is relegated to the fringe, to the far-left 1960s burnout-leftovers or the far-right puritanical family’s value proponents. Everything in-between, we are somehow supposed to believe, is somehow neutral ground, not political.

Critical pedagogy takes as its starting point that *everything* in schools is political. Everything. The way desks are arranged in a classroom is a political issue; what a teacher says or doesn’t say when a student says something “is gay” carries political implications; the curriculum is political and the way it is taught is loaded with political import. The dreams, desires, and values our schools instill, uphold, enhance, and quash in us, these are all political. Kincheloe notes that “proponents of critical pedagogy understand that every dimension of schooling and every form of educational practice are politically contested space” (2004: 2). Education *is* politics and teachers, though we may not be out kissing babies and pressing flesh, are politicians. All these and many other examples will be explored later in the book. For now let us be clear that the word “political” needs to be understood broadly, as encompassing far more than mere partisan politics, and that everything that goes on in schools carries political ramifications.

Back to Pete and his school. Pete’s high school has the programs it has, a special place for “emotionally fragile” children, because Pete’s high school is located in a wealthy suburban school district. In the United States of America, local tax bases pay for more than half the cost of education. “Resources” (read: money) are allocated to schools in greater or lesser degree depending on the socio-economic status of the neighborhood a school is situated in. The federal government, which finds all sorts of ways to spend American taxpayer dollars on a “defense” budget (a politically loaded euphemism if ever there was one) and war (with war always taken for “defensive” purposes, whether as protection from supposed weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in 2003 or Hitler’s and Stalin’s fear that the mighty Polish cavalry posed a threat to German and Russian territorial integrity in 1939), this government allots a measly 9%, or \$37 billion, of the annual \$440 (fiscal year 2002/2003) spent on education in the United States. States and localities make up the rest. And in case you think all that money you spend on the lottery is bringing education coffers to the brim, sorry, but it just ain’t so (Stodghill & Nixon, 2007).

So, differences persist between and across districts in school funding. In New Jersey’s Hudson County, Hoboken City spends \$19,363 per student for the school year 2006–2007; in the same county the same school year, Guttenberg Town spent

\$7,426 per student (Hu & Fessenden, 2007). New York City sets aside \$14,642 per year for each of its public school students. Less than an hour to the north, in Westchester County, Scarsdale allots over \$21,000 per pupil per annum. As the NY State Education Department explains, in New York State “the spending per pupil in the lowest wealth districts is about two-thirds of the spending per pupil in the highest wealth districts (\$10,028 versus \$15,968)” because “the lowest wealth districts raise less than one-seventh of the local revenue per pupil that the highest wealth districts do (\$1,480 versus \$12,974)” (www.oms.nysed.gov).

The people of Scarsdale are, by and large, perfectly lovely people. My wife and I regularly travel down to Scarsdale to buy my comic books and eat at one of our favorite Korean restaurants. This is not meant as an attack on Scarsdale or its excellent, well-funded schools. What it’s meant to point out is that all schools should be as well funded as Scarsdale’s are, that the quality of school one attends shouldn’t be dependent on one’s luck in the genetic lottery, of being born to parents wealthy enough to live in a neighborhood like Scarsdale, where the average price of a home is \$665,280 and median annual household income is \$182,792. The people of Scarsdale are hard-working people who have earned their money, and its students are entitled to the finest education that can be provided. But there are a lot of hard-working people who don’t see their work rewarded, whose children don’t have schools like Scarsdale’s, whose kids can’t look forward to Advance Placement classes, after-school enrichment programs-clubs and teams, trips to Europe, programs for the “emotionally fragile,” but to overcrowded, violent classrooms, a scarcity of up-to-date textbooks, high-stakes Regents exams, and asthma (Fernandez, 2006).

1.6 Alienation

The problems with America’s—or any country’s—schools is a structural problem. Things are set up in such a way that some benefit and some do not. Some appear to be humanized, others dehumanized, but in reality all are dehumanized.

Pretty strong words, humanized and dehumanized. What exactly do I mean? To illustrate I’d like to turn to an example from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marx and Engels aren’t so much in vogue nowadays as they once were, and maybe that’s a good thing. Good in that some of the worst crimes against humanity have been perpetuated under the guise of their names; good also in the sense that, if Marx’s comment to Engels that “All I know is that I’m not a Marxist” is any indication, neither man would appreciate the way a good amount of subsequent history appropriated their names and ideas. Yet the impact of Marx and Engels’ work is undeniable, even if critical pedagogy itself does not always acknowledge their influence (though Peter McLaren never fails to do so) or does one, two, or more steps removed through the Frankfurt School or other Marx and Engels’ inspired theorists.

A central concern of Marx and Engels is alienation. Marx and Engels argued that human beings are alienated from their work, themselves, their species, and nature. “Estranged labor” is work that does not serve the human needs of the individual for

sustenance combined with creativity (Marx & Engels, 1978: 75). Estranged labor robs one of her humanity by objectifying her existence in the object of her labor, an object that does not belong to her but to someone else who profits from it where the creator does not. Marx and Engels were addressing the division of labor under the rapidly industrializing capitalist mode of production, but they extended their critique backward in time to encompass slave- and feudal-based modes of production as well.

Humans are animals, and like other animals we wield tools and work, we have our own unique “life activity” which can manifest itself in various ways, but unlike other animals we are one or more steps removed from our life activity (Marx & Engels, 1978: 76). Think of a craftsperson. A skilled artisan can sit down, figure out what she wants to make, how she will make it, and then make it. The product of her labor isn’t part of her the way a bee’s nest or a beaver’s dam is. True, a carpenter may build a house and then live in it, but he could equally as well build a house that others will live in, or build a house to satisfy an aesthetic desire, or build a Malibu Dream House for his Barbie dolls.

Humans conceptualize what we are going to do *before* we do it. Other animals have life-activities and produce, but their life-activities are one with what they produce and they produce what they need “one-sidedly,” “under the dominion of immediate physical need.” Ants, bees, and beavers follow instinct in producing their nests and dams, products of their labor that serve the immediate needs of themselves, their children, and their species. Marx and Engel’s point is that the human animal is unique because we do not create for these reasons. Freire explains that “Men [sic] have the sense of ‘project,’ in contrast to the instinctive routines of animals” (1985: 44). Marx and Engels explain that, for human beings, “the object of labor is . . . the *objectification of man’s species life*: for he duplicates himself, not only as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created” (1978: 76). A carpenter creates a house, can stand back and look at it apart from himself, take satisfaction from a job well done, and not expect to move into the house.

Under the capitalist mode of production, the carpenter doesn’t build for himself. He sells his labor to a boss who pays him a wage. When he is done building his *part* of the house—the division of labor under capitalism is unlike any other that has ever existed—that part of the house doesn’t bring him satisfaction in and of itself. He may have satisfaction from the wage he has earned—but Marx and Engels argued that the peculiar nature of wage labor is that a boss gets more out of it in the form of surplus value than he pays for in wages—a wage that allows the worker to pay his bills, feed his family, and go out to dinner Friday night. But he is torn from his species life as “estranged labor makes man’s [sic] species life a means to his physical existence” (Marx & Engels, 1978: 77) just like any other animal. Human life activity becomes nothing more than the “*means* of satisfying a need—the need to maintain the physical existence,” and not the “life-engendering life” it should satisfy (Ibid.: 75–76).

Estranged labor tears a person away from the object of their labor. The kitchen cabinets in the house confront the carpenter who has built them at \$24.00 an hour,

his wage. He has put a part of himself—his planning, his expertise, his blood, sweat, and tears—into those cabinets and now they are alienated from him as they will bring someone else more value than he received for the labor he put into them. The worker finds his labor “is not his own, but someone else’s, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another” (Marx & Engels, 1978: 74). He finds himself also alienated from his species being in that this particular manifestation of his life-activity becomes a means to satisfy other ends, rather than an end in and of itself. Our wage worker “only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself”; he “is at home only when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home” (Ibid.).

In short, our carpenter is somehow *less* human than he could be. He is dehumanized. That’s the central concern for critical pedagogy. Marx and Engels hold that workers are exploited by non-working capitalist bosses, a conception that doesn’t ring true when even Harvard drop-outs like Bill Gates get up and go to work in the morning. The problem is systemic in nature, allowing for situations in which an individual like Gates can amass and be worth more than \$50 billion in a country where the median annual income is \$44,389 (<http://www.census.gov>), where the wealthiest 1% of the population accounts for 33% of the wealth, 20% of the income, and 34% of all stock owned while the bottom 80% accounts for 16% of the wealth, 41% of the income, and 11% of stock owned (Domhoff, 2006). *The New York Times*, using census data, reports that income inequality in the United States is greater than at any time since the Great Depression (Johnston, 2007). Bill and Melinda Gates’ philanthropy—they have given away over \$30 billion—is well known. The Gates are not evil people; they are actors in amoral institutional arrangements that allow and encourage dehumanization. Of course billionaire philanthropists like the Gates and SunAmerica Inc. founder Eli Broad have a vision of what public education for everyone should look like. They are spending \$60 million in a political campaign to bolster nationwide curriculum standards, the lengthening of the school day and school year, and merit pay for teachers (Herszenhorn, 2007c).

1.7 Institutional and Systemic Dehumanization

In another work (Monchinski, 2007) I called these “structures of dehumanization,” and I’d like to discuss a few examples here because in large part they form the central core around which this book is built. I want to explore a few examples to show how they work, how pervasive their influence is, and how it is we go about our daily lives immersed in these institutional arrangements, often thinking nothing of them, leveling our criticisms against other victims and not the structural architecture that makes dehumanization a daily reality.

Perhaps it will be useful to start with a discussion of the 1999 science fiction film *The Matrix* to delineate what I have in mind and what I do not. The first of the Wachowski brothers’ trilogy of films is a visually slick, imaginatively scripted, over-the-top science fiction yarn blending Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, and postmodern philosophy. Keanu Reeves’ character, Thomas Anderson, spends his

days in his cubicle as a program writer for a software company. He spends sleepless nights on his computer as “Neo,” his hacker alias, eaten up by the question, “What is the Matrix?”

Neo’s life soon becomes complicated when cyber world legend, Morpheus (Lawrence Fishburn), he of the black trench coat and pince-nez sunglasses, enters it to save him from the clutches of three ominous sun-glassed and suited agents. Morpheus has knowledge of this thing called the Matrix, explaining to Neo that the Matrix is everywhere, “You can see it when you look out your window, or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.” Morpheus drops the bomb on Neo that the Matrix is a prison humans are born into, “a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.” Neo is offered a choice between two pills: a blue one will return him unawares to what he thought was his life in the real world but is actually life in the Matrix, a red one will allow him to stay in “Wonderland” and explore the depths of the rabbit hole he finds himself on the cusp of. He chooses the red pill.

Waking in a fluid-filled pod, sputtering for breath, Neo tears intubation and other tubes from his body. His eyes hurt because, as he is told, he has never used them. Onboard Morpheus’ hovercraft, the *Nebuchadnezzar*, Neo is schooled in the way of things. He finds out he has spent his entire life inside the Matrix, a “neural-interactive simulation,” a “construct-loading program,” in short a computer program, a “computer-generated dream world built to keep humans under control.” Humans have been programmed to believe that it is 1999 when in fact it is nearly a century *later*. Morpheus and his crew explain that artificial intelligence overcame the human race in the early 20th century, enslaving the species in pods. Human electromagnetic energy is harvested for the machines, and humans are fed their own liquefied dead.

The real world, beyond the Matrix, is a bleak, overcast “desert of the real.” The last human holdouts hole up in Zion, an underground city near the Earth’s core, fending off attacks from search and destroy sentinels. They await the return of “The One,” a prophesied savior with the power to remake the Matrix and free the human species. Morpheus, prophet of this messiah, believes Neo is he. Neo, for his part, protests, “I’m just another guy,” slow to accept his destiny. Back in the Matrix there are, in the words of sentient program and hunter, Mr. Smith, “billions of people just living out their lives, oblivious.” Morpheus warns Neo that the Matrix is a system that has infiltrated the very minds of the people they’re trying to save. Most people “aren’t ready” to be unplugged from the Matrix. They will fight to defend that which enslaves them, which allows for Neo and gal-pal Trinity to blow away dozens of the enemy throughout the film.

The Matrix, which appears as streaming green code on a computer monitor, is the ultimate structure of dehumanization. Human beings within the Matrix play a part in their own domination, oppressing others, practicing the “horizontal violence” of the oppressed against the oppressed that Franz Fanon and Freire spoke of. The Matrix is all-encompassing, ubiquitous, mirroring the hegemonic status of the ideologies that pervade and shape our lives.

As enjoyable as the Matrix is as escapist fantasy, there are several points in the film a critical pedagogy has to take issue with. For one, the Matrix's separation of the real world versus the world of appearances smacks of philosophical idealism, which, going all the way back to Plato, posits that a world of ideas exists separately from the world of lived experience. This idealism and my criticism of it will pervade this book. Critical pedagogy holds that humans make and remake their worlds based on our material circumstances, the conditions we find ourselves in every day. The Oracle in the Matrix chides Neo for denying his destiny. Critical pedagogy doesn't accept fate; men and women have agency and make our own futures. These futures are not predetermined, not written in stone. They are futures of possibility. Though we find ourselves in often dehumanizing circumstances, with future dehumanization looming before us, humanization is also a future possibility.

Messianism pervades the Matrix trilogy, with Neo dying at one point and resurrecting to save humanity. "You're my savior, man," a character tells Neo, adding "My own personal Jesus Christ" in case the point wasn't clear. Critical pedagogy is a democratic project where people work to understand and shape the circumstances of our lives. Critical pedagogy is suspicious of any messiahs that want to come and "save" us. Paulo Freire speaks of "prophetic" thought, but his is a vision of prophecy tied to possibility, not inevitability, of prophecy as advocacy. While there are luminaries of a sort in the field of critical pedagogy, we have gone wrong if we elevate these men and women to god-like status. Instead we should study their ideas for their applicability to our lives. My first reading of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, described above, was in this misguided vein.

As much as I like the first Matrix film—and I really do, it works as escapist fantasy—there is one last criticism of it I must make. Throwing together a hodgepodge of historical myths and philosophy lends the Matrix an esoteric feel. Books have been written on the philosophy of the film (Faller, 2004; Irwin, 2002, 2005; Lawrence, 2004; Yeffeth, 2003). A lot of people spend a lot of time viewing and re-viewing the film, trying to tease out its thematic motifs. I "got" some of the motifs, and one of them that concerns me is the film's indebtedness to postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard. "The desert of the real" is a reference to Baudrillard's work; Neo secures an illegal minidisk in a hollowed copy of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*. Baudrillard himself was not thrilled with the incorporation of his work with the film and refused to work with the directors on the two sequels (Poole, 2007).

Nearly a decade after its original release, *The Matrix* is still a mega hit, earning more than \$600 million worldwide. I have students in my school who love this film, who walk around quoting lines and pursuing references from it. They come to Baudrillard, can't understand a word the guy is writing, and assume that means his work must be truly profound. That's my problem with Baudrillard in particular and certain strands of postmodernism in general. The temptation to become an academic icon—obituaries described Baudrillard as "a globetrotting academic superstar" and "the hero of the polo-necked, pointy-spectacled classes" (Poole, *Ibid.*; Harkin, 2007)—with its privileges, titles, and tenure is very real. MIT linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky points out that "part of the whole intellectual

vocation is creating a niche for yourself, and if everybody can understand what you're talking about, you've sort of lost, because then what makes you special?" (2002: 229). I agree with Marshall Berman (2002) that postmodernism's "most attractive quality" is "its skepticism towards everything," its charge that we "should always be self-scrutinizing and self-critical," attitudes I think very much in line with critical pedagogy. I take issue with postmodern scholars—like Baudrillard—who may have important things to say (for example, scholars I respect like Joe Kincheloe find worth in Baudrillard's concept of "hyper-reality") but who the hell can tell because their prose is indecipherable. And it's not bad translations or the profundity of their ideas that is to blame; some of these scholars' styles are *purposefully* abstruse, as though the greater the opacity, the greater the insights to be gleaned. If you have something important to say, say it clearly and say it so that people can understand you, otherwise you're guilty of mental masturbation.

This is not to deny that there are complicated ideas out there, but if "hard science" writers like Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Dawkins, and Susan Oyama can lay out punctuated equilibrium, selfish genes, and developmental systems in language that is accessible and open to the lay reader, is it too much to ask that writers in the fields of education and philosophy do likewise? "Whenever I hear a four syllable word I get skeptical," notes Chomsky, "because I want to make sure you can't say it in monosyllables" (2002: 229). Further, feels Chomsky, "it's extremely rare, outside of the natural sciences, to find things that can't be said in monosyllables . . ." (Ibid.).

Readers like myself are tempted to dismiss writers like Baudrillard when he claims that "the Child no longer exists"; that the 1991 Gulf War "did not take place"; that France is "a copy with subtitles" (Harkin, 2007); that *The Matrix* is "surely the kind of film about the Matrix that the Matrix would have been able to produce" (Poole, 2007); and that, of his own existence, his own ontology, "What I am, I don't know. I am the simulacrum of myself" (Ibid.). Readers like Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont show how Baudrillard makes use of "a profusion of scientific terms, used with total disregard for their meaning and, above all, in a context where they are manifestly irrelevant," a use meant to lend "an appearance of profundity to trite observations" (1998: 153). A temptation surely exists to spend countless hours pouring over and deciphering these works, somehow figure out—or think you've figured out—what they mean, and then assume a haughty attitude of "I understand so-and-so." "What makes you special," explains Chomsky, "has got to be something that you had to work really hard to understand, and you mastered it, and all those guys out there don't understand it, and then that becomes the bases of your privilege and your power" (Ibid.). Unfortunately I see this all too often in the department where I am working on my dissertation, among both professors but usually more forcefully among students. My gripe with *The Matrix* isn't that it borrows from postmodern philosophy, but that it borrows from *bad* postmodern philosophy.

Oppression in our classrooms, in our societies, in our world, emanates between humans. There are no tyrannical computer-program overlords dictating our lives and subjugating our species. Society and its relations—political, economic, cultural—develop from interactions between people. This is sometimes hard to remember because we are born into families, neighborhoods, countries, and societies that

appear to us pre-packaged, disconnected one from another, and, if not exactly awaiting our arrival, ready enough to absorb us upon introduction. Reality appears to us as something that has always been and always will be. Further, the dominant ideology of our time downplays our interconnectedness, attempting to make of us distinct islands in a vast stream. Yet Marx and Engels note that “The more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual . . . appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole,” that the human being, a political animal, is “an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society” (1978: 222–223). Sometimes it is hard to see the forest for the trees; difficult to recognize that societies and their mores change given the demands and desires of individuals and groups of individuals. Social conditions, John Dewey reminds, shape us (1954: 10). Everything and everybody is connected, even if we are not always aware of the connections. What I do affects other people. “Conjoint action” and “association” have consequences. Some of these consequences are foreseen, others are not (Dewey, 1954: 22). Some of these consequences have ends desirable for all, others not. Some of these consequences humanize those involved, others do not.

1.8 Power: Negative and Positive

Not everyone has an equal hand in deciding what a society values and considers important. Power exists, but it is not wielded equally by all at all times. Power conditions what we consider real, good, and possible (Therborn, 1980). Power forms us as subjects, conditioning our desires, dreams, our day-to-day reality.

Power is a subject that elides a simple one-sentence definition. Instead, I’d like to draw a few observations about power and illustrate power at work, sticking to the classrooms that are our chief concerns here to begin with. Traditionally power was conceived in negative terms, as the ability to say “no.” The king dictated to his subjects what they must do; the state encroached on the liberties of the individual. Power was conceived as repression, as a boot in the neck. Indeed power like this exists, has existed, and isn’t always bad. Parents and teachers tell their children “no” all the time, sometimes to protect their wards, sometimes just because they can.

Michel Foucault importantly points out that “power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage, and repression, in the manner of a great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way” (1981: 50). Again, certainly power like this exists and continues to be wielded to censor, exclude, block, and repress. Yet, “if power were never anything but repressive,” Foucault asks us to consider, “if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it?” (1981: 119). In schools students are asked to unquestioningly accept the authority of their teachers. A lament often heard nowadays is that “kids just don’t listen.” One way power works is to reward those who serve it while castigating those that do not. For example, if you give the teacher the answer he wants to hear, you’re in his good graces, he might tell you how smart you are in front of the class, and you’ll get good

grades. On the other hand, if you challenge the teacher or do not do what you are asked to do, he will in all likelihood make a mental note to keep an eye on you, associate you as a troublemaker, and be less likely to look favorably on you when it comes to assigning grades. I'm not glorifying bad behavior here. Some actions and attitudes shouldn't exist in a classroom. But neither should the only thing we award be docile, meek recitation of prescribed answers to vapid questions, which a good deal of education, at all levels, unfortunately continues to be.

History is replete with examples of people rising up and overthrowing oppressive power (alas often substituting other forms of repressive power which are, in turn, later challenged and overthrown). Through this all, power still "holds good" (Foucault, 1981: 119). We must beware that we do not limit our conception of power as a "phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogenous domination over others, or that of one group or class over others" (Foucault, 1981: 98). As Foucault explains it, "the interdiction, the refusal, the prohibition, far from being essential forms of power, are only its limits, power in its frustrated or extreme forms" (1988: 118).

There is a *positive* aspect to power; positive not in the sense that it is good—although power *can be* used for good, which we will talk about below—but in the sense that it does more than repress and negate. "The relations of power are, above all, productive," notes Foucault (1988: 118). Power "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (Foucault, 1981: 119). Foucault likens power to "something which circulates" through and among individuals, "as something which only functions in the form of a chain" tying individuals together, some for the better, some for the worse (1981: 98). Power is best viewed in "a net-like organization," with individuals not just passively acted upon by power but themselves active "vehicles of power," caught in the web but "also always in the position [of] simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power" (Ibid.).

Consider this example from a high school social studies class. The class is studying the 1950s Civil Rights Movement. Reading aloud, they get to the story of Rosa Park deliberately sitting in the front of the bus, refusing to give up her seat, and being arrested. "That's gay," remarks one student, voicing her disapproval of segregation and racism. "You're gay," another student snaps, kidding around. "Shut up fag," retorts the first. "You shut up bitch," rejoins the second. "Ladies," says the teacher, "Can we continue our reading please?" The girls glance at each other, perhaps embarrassedly, then return their attention to the text as another student continues reading.

What just happened in that classroom? Kids were fooling around, jostling each other verbally, no harm intended. But harm has been done. "Gay" and "fag" are not synonymous with "wrong" and "stupid," although they are often used in our classrooms in just this way. "Bitch" is not a term of endearment, even if used as such in pop culture songs like DMX's "It's all good," the refrain to which goes, "I love my niggaz but where's my bitches?" (1998). This teacher glossed over the entire episode and was just happy to get the class back on track, to see that the words weren't escalating to something more verbal or physical. The teacher did not address the homophobia or misogyny exhibited. And *that's* the point. The kids in

that class just learned a lesson: it's okay to dismiss someone as a "bitch" or "fag," to deprecate something you don't like as "gay." But it's *not* okay to disrupt class; to interrupt the steady flow the teacher has going on. Never should we accept disruptive behavior in class that takes away from the educative process. Yet imagine if you're a gay child in that class or a child who thinks she might be gay. How would you feel? Actually, by the time you're in high school you'd probably be used to such antics, as homophobic and misogynistic speech is tolerated and encouraged in our society.

But forget the possibly gay student or students in the class for a minute. What do all the other students in the class learn by what just went down? Again, it's reinforced for them that using this kind of speech is acceptable. This is a concrete example of power at work. This teacher and her class are not the economic and political masters of the universe dictating how everyone live their lives. They're quite normal children and adults, living their lives, touched by power and perpetuating it. This is an example of Foucault's "capillary action" notion of power at work on and through individuals, wherein power acts upon individuals at the same time that "each individual has at his disposal a certain power, and for that very reason can also act as the vehicle for transmitting a wider power"(1981: 72).

The teacher calls the students out but doesn't address their bigoted remarks. The students learn that the authority of the teacher to head the class is not to be challenged. The students' transgression wasn't that they chided each other as "fags" and "gay," but that they interrupted the teachers' class. Again, I'm not arguing here that the teacher's authority necessarily *should* be challenged. But another type of authority is being reinforced, is being normalized and internalized as dominant, as natural, the way of things, the authority of heterosexuality. This is accomplished through the diminution of homosexuality, which is accomplished by allowing the words used to be used in the way they are, as puts downs, to diss. We can see how entrenched this is if we consider this: what if the kids had dissed each other as "too heterosexual" and the like? Do such disrespectful terms even exist? Where they do they're tied to misogyny, castigating females who enjoy sex or have "too many" sex partners. Tell a boy he's too heterosexual. Does that even have a meaning? Call that boy a "fag," though, and the meaning is clear to that child and all around him.

Power forms identities, conditioning subjectivities. Ask yourself: who are you as a person? Power plays a part in answering your question. "The individual," explains Foucault, "with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces" (1981: 74). Sticking with the example of homosexuality because, again homophobia is so rampant and still widely accepted, if you're born gay in America, you're born into a society that largely "devalues" you (Hardy, 2006). You're born into stereotypes and assumptions. You're born into a culture that argues whether you're even born gay or not, if your homosexuality is a lifestyle choice or a disease that can be cured. For instance, after a male prostitute who claimed to procure drugs for him also "outed" him, the former president of the US National Association of Evangelicals claimed to emerge "completely heterosexual" from a Christian center after only 3 weeks of treatment.

Foucault speaks of the “level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors, etc.” (1981: 97). If you’re gay in America you live in a society where you can go to school and study about the struggle for equal rights for blacks, women and the working class at the same time that people ignore *your* civil rights, dismiss you as a “fag,” tell you you’ll burn in hell, hold you in contempt, or even plan your death (Karoub, 2007). In less than a month period while I was writing these words, former NBA Miami Heat All-Star Tim Hardaway made it public that “I hate gay people” (Jackson, 2007); actor Isaiah Washington referred to a fellow actor as a “faggot”; and darling of the American right, Ann Coulter, called presidential candidate John Edwards “faggot.” Coulter, who less than a year earlier dismissed former Vice President Al Gore as a “total fag” on national television (Buchanan, 2007), admitted on Fox TV to bullying but not homophobia, saying “The word I used has nothing to do with sexual preference It isn’t offensive to gays It’s a schoolyard taunt, meaning wuss” (Fox News, 2007). Sure Ann, that makes it okay. If someone called Coulter a nasty “cunt” would she dismiss the blatant misogyny exhibited? Doubtful. A Republican US senator looking for man-on-man love (okay, maybe not love) in the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport finds himself shunned by his own party even after swearing he isn’t gay and wasn’t looking for nookie playing footsy with the undercover cop in the stall next to his (Yardley, 2007). Born gay in America, you’ll find yourself in a society that has largely turned its back on you, to the point that, in the struggle to fit in, you may marry a person of the opposite sex, leading yourself and lending to your spouse an unhappy life as you pretend to be someone you’re not.

I want to be very clear that I do not think the teacher or the students in the above example are evil people. They might be wonderful people. At the same time they are making choices that foster dehumanization. Gay children in that class or in the lives of the children in that class are dehumanized. Heterosexual children in that class are dehumanized. We’re all human. We’re all in this—life—together. My fulfillment as an individual shouldn’t depend on the denial of your humanity. I don’t have to approve of homosexuality or embrace it for myself; but I need not knock you for it or hold you in contempt. This example might sound childish, but I remember back in high school, when all I wanted to do was connect with the opposite sex but doing so seemed so difficult, I thought that the more gay people there were the better for my potential dating opportunities.

As a teacher I have seen this on-going subjection via the formation of identities and subjectivities, but becoming a father has cast a new light on this same process. Before our son was born I could care less about what colors he might wear, even though in the United States baby boys are expected to wear blue and baby girls’ pink. You might scoff and say “expected” is too strong a word, yet the societal expectation exists, less so in the negative form of power dictating than in the positive form of lending itself as an expectation, as an assumption, as common sense. Before my little guy was born, I could think this clothing practice through and attribute it to the influence of 18th century painter Thomas Gainsborough’s *The Blue Boy* and *Pinkie*. After little Tony emerged things changed. I began to realize—or not—just

how caught up I am in how society arbitrarily defines gender. For instance, we'd go shopping and I found myself dismissing pink, red, and soft-colored outfits, opting instead for the darker, bluer, harder colors.

"You're the most beautiful baby boy in the world," I find myself telling him, words he doesn't comprehend yet and who's message—that he's in competition in a looks contest with all the other baby boys on Earth—I work on myself to stop perpetuating. "Look at how handsome you are," I tell him, honestly floored by his beauty. "The little girls aren't going to be able to keep their hands off you." I assume he'll be heterosexual and instead of worrying that little girls will touch him in ways he doesn't want I convey a message that he'll be desirable to the opposite sex and that their attentions—even those that violate his personal space and bodily integrity—are desirable. If I keep talking to little Tony this way, how might it affect his sexuality and what it means to be a man for him when he grows up? Will he grow up, as I did, assuming and normalizing heterosexuality? Will he emerge as an adolescent, a teenager, and then as a man who thinks "scoring" or "banging" as many women as he can is a good in and of itself? Why, for that matter, is heterosexuality from the male point of view so often painted in terms of dominating women, either violently as foes (we males *bang* women, *fuck*, *nail*, and *pound* them, *tap that ass*, *hit skins*, etc.) or as in a sports contest (we talk of *scoring*, *getting to second base*, etc.). I might add that the way I talk to my son isn't fueled by homophobic or lecherous inclinations. These words and thoughts just come "naturally" to me.

1.9 Ideology and Hegemony

This brings us to the next point in our exploration of power at work in institutional and systemic relationships. What comes "naturally" reflects power at work, the hegemony of ideology. In American high school history classes students are taught that ideologies are systems of ideas and beliefs. The subject of ideology is usually first presented to students in the context of the rise of European continental liberalism and conservatism, which usually is relegated—incorrectly—to the 19th century along with nationalism. When American students study totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany or Stalin's Soviet Union, they are reminded that they are studying ideology. I don't doubt that these are examples of ideology, but I always try and stress to my students that ideology has a much broader sweep.

Antonio Gramsci points out that the original meaning of ideology was "science of ideas" (1971: 375). Ideologies, like the ideas they purport to understand and explain, surround us. They're not natural phenomena like the air we breath, independent of us; ideologies are in our heads, lived out by our actions, transmitted by our words and deeds. In this way we are immersed in ideologies, although we rarely see them because of their hegemonic status. Ideas come from somewhere (see Chapter 2) and not from thin air. Ideas are created by people and the people creating the ideas have the most to gain from them. Anthony Giddens explains that an ideology is "shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups" (1997: 583).

Like the power they reflect, ideologies would be vulnerable if they were only imposed on subjects from the outside. In my school district, for example, like most school districts, there is a big drive to save money and reign in costs. One way this is done is to cut back on the costs associated with special education. I have been in meetings with higher ups discussing the upcoming annual review of a student with special needs where my superiors told me “the committee [on special education, or CSE] will recommend” such and such. Wait a minute. I’m part of the committee. Committee decisions are supposed to be made *after* discussion with the *full* committee on special education, which includes the student’s parents or guardians, any advocates (e.g., family friends, pastor, medical professional, even lawyer) they may have in their corner, and the student herself. There I was being told what my decision would be beforehand. It didn’t sit well with me. I challenged it, along with some colleagues. But that is another story for another time.

A truly effective ideology works because it is hegemonic, it pervades our lives to such an extent that we accept its ideas as normal and natural, as common sense. In Michael Apple’s words, ideologies “are not only global sets of interests, things imposed by one group on another,” instead, “They are embodied by our common-sense meanings and practices” (1982: 249). Peter McLaren defines hegemony as “the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force *but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family*” (2006: 173).

Again I need to stress that power, operating through the hegemony of ideology, isn’t always the power of a dominator class over a dominated class. Much power functions in the form of horizontal violence, where the oppressed commit acts of dehumanization against each other. For example, there are stories of sexist attitudes on the parts of males active in the black civil rights movement. Frederick Douglass describes arguments between slaves of neighboring plantations, with “Colonel Lloyd’s slaves contending that he was the richest, and Mr. Jepson’s slaves that he was the smartest, and most of a man” (1997: 12).

Power works within individuals. When my father was a young man, he was what some would call a “cocksman” or *playa*, having sexual relationships with a lot of women. I grew up aware of this, if not the exact details of his exploits. I remember in elementary school my dad asking me how my love life was. How was my love life? I was a shy kid lacking self-confidence. I couldn’t figure out how to approach girls. But it bothered me that when my father asked me that question I didn’t have what I thought would be a satisfactory answer—based on what I thought *he thought* would be a satisfactory answer. Was there something wrong with me? I found myself doubting myself. Why should it have been so important to me in the fourth, fifth, or sixth grade to have a girlfriend?

Here’s an example of hegemony that I have felt throughout my life. I was born and raised in the Roman Catholic Church, even serving as an altar boy for many years while I attended a parochial elementary school. Somewhere in my early twenties I started to question my faith and by my mid-twenties I was completely non-religious. Thing is, America is a very religious country. According to a 2006 CBS

News poll, 82% of Americans believe in “God” (not “a god,” but “God,” like we all know who he—oh yes, he’s a he—is) and 43% believe that the Bible is the actual word of this god (www.pollingreport.com). According to a Fox News poll, 84% of Americans believe in miracles, 79% in angels, 74% in hell, and 67% in the devil (www.foxnews.com), and 51% of Americans believe this god created humans just as we are; 30% that our species evolved with this god guiding the process; and only 15% that our species evolved without any cosmic intervention (www.cbsnews.com).

Religion is something that I, as a nonbeliever, am always coming up against. For example, I watched my friends—few of whom attended church or were overtly religious—grow up and get married in church ceremonies, only because that was the way things were done and what was expected of you. I listened to couples tell stories of lying to their priest that they hadn’t been sexually active before marriage. The girls I knew and dated where I grew up in the northeastern United States especially looked forward to these big church weddings followed by outrageous parties in private catering facilities. I’ve been to these ceremonies and parties, I’ve been able to enjoy them, but I always knew they weren’t for me.

Marriage itself—as an institution—enjoys hegemonic status. Although the number of unmarried in America now outweighs the number of married—49.7% of households are made up of married couples (Roberts, 06)—there is enormous pressure still to grow up and get married. Older, never-married males and females are sometimes looked upon suspiciously, unless they’re “swinging” older males like the Larry character on the sitcom *Three’s Company*, too busy “scoring” with innumerable ladies to “settle down” with any one. If you’re past a certain age, female, and not married, some people will still consider you an old maid. If you’re past a certain age, not married, and male, people will wonder if you’re gay. That said, the percentage of married American couples reaching their silver (25th) anniversary has fallen, meaning married Americans aren’t remaining married as long as they once did (Roberts, 2007a).

What does marriage do? It joins two people legally. My wife and I used to talk about this. Would marriage make me love her more than I already do or she more I? No. If I gave her my word that she was the one for me and I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her, would marriage cement the commitment any more than my word, my bond? No, except in a negative, punitive way, with the threat of taking a financial and social hit come a divorce (Cowen, 2007). Marriage for my wife and I wasn’t about religion; I identify as an atheist, she as a Buddhist. It wasn’t about union before any god. We did marry but we married because the state sanctions marriage and given our circumstances—living in South Korea at the time, my looking to expedite my return to the States with Myoungmee at my side and not waiting for a girlfriend visa—marriage was the easiest way. Married taxpayers, we soon saw another way the state endorses marriage.

Again, to be clear: I am not knocking marriage as an institution here, although I think there are valid criticisms of marriage to be made. If you want to be get married that’s great and I hope you get what you want one day. I also hope it works out for you in the long term. I just hope you understand why it is you want what you want. Is it what everyone else around you does so you figure you have to do

it? Because that's how power works, the hegemony of an ideology appears to us as what we want. Further, what we want may not always be "bad" for us. McLaren makes the important point that "not all prevailing values are oppressive" (2006: 175). When British Imperialism came to India it ended *sati*, the practice whereby grieving widows were expected to throw themselves on their husband's burning funeral pyres. Overall I think British Imperialism oppressive and dehumanizing, but getting rid of *sati* was a good thing in the context of a bad thing. As all powerful as hegemony may seem, it is capable of change, of being unmasked, overthrown, and replaced. Giroux describes hegemony as "a process of continuous creation [that] includes the constant structuring of consciousness as well as a battle for the control of consciousness" (2006: 21).

1.10 Power and *The Kite Runner*

Power suffuses societies and individuals. Power is not a Platonic ideal form, out there somewhere in the atmosphere. For power to mean anything we have to understand that power is exercised in human relationships, that "there are only individual relations of domination and control" (Flynn in Gutting, 1994: 34). These individual instances of power at work need to be examined on a case-by-case basis. Remember, power cannot be construed in a purely negative sense (Ibid.). When a parent stops his child from running into the street, he is exercising his power over the child, and rightfully so (Chomsky, 2002). What we must ask of any power relationship is if it is justified, and "the burden of proof for any exercise of authority is always on the person exercising it—invariably" (Chomsky, 2002: 201). If it cannot be justified it has no reason to exist and should be dismantled.

Power and the relationships power engenders structure institutions. Individuals grow up in institutional contexts—the family, the school, the Church, Temple, or Mosque, the state. Power conditions individuals through these institutions, acting on and through them. Institutions are structured, and these structures evolve. They are time and context specific. I'd like to illustrate by way of three examples, one from literature, one from history, and one from contemporary times.

The Kite Runner is physician Khaled Hosseini's first novel. Set in Afghanistan, it tells the story of Amir, son of a prosperous, well-respected businessman. Amir is accompanied through most of his childhood by Hassan, the child of Amir's family's servant. Hassan is a Hazara, a Shia Muslim in a majority-Shiite Pashtun country. His ethnicity brings Hassan and his father grief, as the Hazara are looked down upon by most of Afghan society. Amir depends on Hassan to play with; to read of the exploits of the warrior Rostam and his horse Rakhsh; as an audience for his own budding stories—Amir will grow up to be a novelist; to help him catch the kites they cut free in the annual kite fighting tournaments.

As much as Amir depends on Hassan, his behavior toward the others can be despicable. Amir is not above taunting the Hazara boy. The boy Hassan cannot read and Amir takes advantage of this fact, teaching Hassan that imbecile "means smart, intelligent. I'll use it in a sentence for you. 'When it comes to words, Hassan is an

imbecile' ” (Hosseini, 2003: 25). Amir hides while Hassan is brutalized by Assef, the neighborhood bully, and his posse, the same group Hassan stood up against earlier to protect Amir from. Amir sets in motion the events that lead to Hassan and his father leaving Amir's family's service and their lives. The Amir character works because he is likeable at the same time he is despicable. As he mistreats his friend, the reader feels terribly for Hassan, but also bitter disappointment in Amir because we want to like him but his actions against Hassan knock him down in our estimation.

Kite Runner works on many levels. For the purpose of this book, I will attempt to show how the novel illustrates structures of dehumanization at work. In Afghanistan, Amir's father, Baba, enjoys larger-than-life status. Baba is almost more than a man in Kabul, where mythical stories of his wrestling a black bear are told. Baba is respected for his ability to overcome adversity—Amir's mother died in childbirth, leaving Baba to never marry again; his business acumen—defying naysayers to build and oversee “a wildly successful carpet-exporting business, two pharmacies, and a restaurant” (Hosseini, 2003: 13); his philanthropy—he funds and builds an orphanage; and, not least of which, his imposing physical presence—at six foot five a “towering Pashtun specimen with a thick beard, a wayward crop of curly brown hair as unruly as the man himself, hands that looked capable of uprooting a willow tree, and a black glare that would ‘drop the devil to his knees begging for mercy’ ” (Hosseini, 2003: 11). Amir grows up in Baba's Kabul mansion fearing his father, whom he suspects holds him responsible for his mother's death.

Things change when Amir and Baba are forced to emigrate to America in the early 1980s following the overthrow of the Afghani government and the Soviet invasion. We see clearly that Baba in Kabul was a big fish in a small pond. In California, Baba's renown and reputation don't carry him anywhere beyond his fellow dislocated Afghani émigrés. Baba gets a job pumping gas, a job that, at the end of the day, leaves him with “nails chipped and black with engine oil, his knuckles scraped, the smells of the gas station—dust, sweat, and gasoline—on his clothes” (Hosseini, 2003: 112). He suffers various indignities, including being asked for identification when he writes out a check at a local market and being unable to throw the lavish parties he once hosted in Afghanistan. Baba goes from being a big man in Kabul to an everyman in Fremont. In Afghanistan Baba seemed invincible; in America Baba gets cancer.

The American economy almost breaks Baba. Unlike Andrew Carnegie and other “captains of industry” students learn of in American history classes, Amir's father's tale is not an immigrant rags-to-riches story. Instead, Baba's is an immigrant riches-to-rags-to-struggling-to-survive story. He works his way up to manage the gasoline station; to buy his son a used car; to send Amir to college; and to pay for Amir's wedding. Baba is a man of keen intelligence with liberal tastes that put him at odds with certain segments of traditional Afghani society. He isn't afraid to work hard, but the job opportunities available to him in America—where lack of language and credentials prove nearly insurmountable barriers—aren't what were available to him in his native country. In Afghanistan Baba was an entrepreneur; in America he and

Amir raid yard sales for salvageable items to mark up and sell on the weekends at flea markets.

The American economy is structured in such a way that not everyone who works hard or does an important job sees the fruits of their labors in their paychecks. For example, the median income of car mechanics is \$33,050, school bus drivers \$24,070, child care workers \$17,050, home health aides \$18,800, and graduate school teaching assistants \$27,340. Compare those jobs to the median pay for lawyers (\$98,930), computer programmers like *The Matrix*'s Neo (\$63,420), and corporate chief executives (\$142,440). The median pay for legislators in the US is \$15,740; but keep in mind that many legislative jobs are sinecures or part-time gigs. Further, there are government officials like billionaire New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg who only accepts a \$1 annual salary; of 435 members of the US House of Representatives, 123 have incomes greater than a million dollars and 40 out of 100 senators are millionaires. I'm not knocking legislators, although many of them deserve to be knocked. Nor is this to say that the work a lawyer or computer programmer does isn't important; it is. But so is the work of the man or woman who takes care of your family member, drives your kids to school, and cares for them during the day, fixes your car, and teaches your undergraduate son or daughter. The point is that workers in general are underpaid. The hierarchy in salaries and remuneration needs to be restructured. The federal minimum wage is \$5.15 an hour in a country with one of the highest unemployment rates—officially 12.6% in 2005—in the industrialized world (US Census Bureau). Baba pumps gas and becomes manager of the service station, but we know he gets little reward, in satisfaction or money, from his labor.

While Amir is away, his native Afghanistan undergoes severe changes. The Taliban come to power. Women are forced to hide under the burqa, men behind beards. A Fatwa is declared against the Hazara, escalating the violence against this ethnic and religious minority. Bad things happen in Afghanistan and *The Kite Runner* shows dehumanizing structures bringing out the worst in people. Assef, the sadistic brass knuckle-wielding boy who took joy in tormenting Amir and Hassan, grows up to be a Talib. As a birthday present, the adolescent Assef presents Amir with a Hitler biography; Assef the man leads the public stoning of two alleged adulterers buried chest-deep in a sports stadium. The crimes of the Taliban are well documented, as is the American government's support for this regime (Coll, 2004; Rashid, 2001). Author Hosseini, through the Amir character, presents Assef to the reader as a sort of monster, with Amir even wondering if Assef's parents live in fear of their son. Amir uses the word "sociopath" to describe the boy Assef (Hosseini, 2003: 34). A bad situation nurtures the worst parts of Assef's nature—if indeed these are part of his nature—and rewards their manifestation.

Other characters in the novel resort to evil because of the situation they are caught up in. Traveling back to Talib-controlled Afghanistan years later as an adult to find Hassan's son, Amir visits an orphanage. Children cling to the director of the orphanage, Zaman, in his cracked glasses. Amir discovers that, in return for aid so he can feed the orphanage's children, Zaman allows a Talib official who visits to take a boy or girl with him. "If I deny him one child, he takes ten," Zaman attempts to justify

his actions to Amir and a companion. “So I let him take one and leave the judging to Allah. I swallow my pride and take his goddamn filthy . . . dirty money. Then I go to the bazaar and buy food for the children” (Hosseini, 2003: 225). Zaman feels he has no choice. Hosseini doesn’t tell us, but we get a sense that Zaman was a good orphanage director before the Taliban came to power. He cared for the children and they for him. Zaman points out that when the Taliban came to power, he did not flee Afghanistan for Pakistan or Iran; he stayed with the children of the orphanage and did what he thought best for them, even if that included selling some children off into sexual bondage so that the others could eat and have a place to live.

Novels work because they ask us to consider something about the human condition that we may not routinely stop and consider. Fictional, they ask us to suspend our disbelief for a period of time. Yet belief is always there, lurking in the periphery, because these characters are people who—for all their differences—bear some resemblance to people we know, maybe even ourselves. Amir resonates as a character due to his quest for redemption. He treated Hassan horribly, in a context where treating Hassan such—although always a choice—was easy to do. Amir begins to regret his decisions in Afghanistan, but he doesn’t confront them until he is living in America. Many of us have skeletons in our closets, things we regret, hide from others, hide from ourselves, and would “do-over” in an instant if we could. Amir’s skeletons are writ large on the pages of *The Kite Runner*, as is his struggle to wrestle them, a struggle larger than any bear Baba may have grappled with. *The Kite Runner* is an historical novel that brings the agony of a character and a country to life, showing the whole time the part circumstances play in encouraging the best or worst of which we are capable.

Present-day Afghanistan hasn’t changed much from the lawless land of the late 1990s that Hosseini paints. Six years after the American invasion, the Taliban still controls certain areas; opium cultivation continues to set records (93% of the world’s opium comes from Afghanistan); Paramount Vantage has had to delay release of the film version of Hosseini’s novel for fear of reprisals against its Afghani child actors; and terrorist mastermind Osama Bin Laden is still on the loose (Burke, 2007; Halbfinger, 2007; Rohde, 2007).

1.11 A Man Who Was Good at His Job

Unfortunately real life is all too replete with examples of structures of dehumanization at work on individuals, shaping and reshaping them, twisting and perverting them. Consider the example of Rudy. By all accounts, Rudy was a good family man who loved his wife and children. “Among his most outstanding characteristics,” notes Joachim Fest, “were strict attention to duty, unselfishness, love of nature, sentimentality, even a certain helpfulness and kindness, simplicity, and finally a marked hankering after morality . . .” (1999: 278). Rudy did his job and he did it extremely well, but it was a job that caused him no small amount of stress. He recalls nights when the pressures of work made “it impossible to go back to my home and family.” Instead, Rudy would “mount my horse and ride” or “seek relief

among my beloved animals” (Hoss, 1959: 172). As much as he tried to convince himself that he was doing the right thing, that he was doing what was expected of him as an employee of his state, Rudy couldn’t banish negative thoughts. “When I saw my children happily playing,” he recounts, “or observed my wife’s delight over our youngest, the thought would often come to me: how long will our happiness last?” (Ibid.).

Rudy’s daytime job was unlike most: as commandant at Auschwitz, which he himself took some pride in describing as “the greatest human extermination center of all time,” Rudolph Hoss oversaw the deaths of some 2 million human beings (Fest, 1969: 160). Unlike other Nazis, Hoss didn’t have a sadistic side that reveled in cruelty (or at least didn’t admit to one in his memoirs). Early on in the SS at Dachau, Hoss considered going to his superiors and explaining to them “that I was not suited to concentration camp service, because I felt too much sympathy for the prisoners” (1969: 87). He bore the Jews no special enmity. “I must emphasize here that I have never personally hated the Jews,” he wrote, lumping them in with other “enemies of our people” and priding himself that “I saw no difference between them and the other prisoners, and I treated them all in the same way” (1969: 146). Hoss opposed the anti-Semitic pornographic weekly *Der Sturmer* because it “played on people’s basest instincts” (1969: 144). During the Nuremberg trials and throughout his autobiography he maintained that he was doing his duty. Noting that “I could not allow myself to form an opinion” as to the necessity of the Holocaust, “for I lacked the necessary breadth of view,” Hoss remembers, “I had been given an order, and I had to carry it out” (1969: 160).

How did Hoss arrive at a point in his life where he could plan and set in motion the machinery of the Holocaust? Where he could witness the gas chambers in action and execute prisoners with his own hand (Hoss, 1959: 92)? “I am completely normal,” he wrote. “Even while I was carrying out the task of extermination I led a normal family life and so on” (Ibid.). Hoss recalls a childhood where his parents, who hoped he would grow up to be a priest, taught him “to be respectful and obedient toward all grown-up people, and especially the elderly, regardless of their social status. I was taught that my highest duty was to help those in need” (1969: 32).

Joachim Fest notes that Hoss, like many in the Nazi party, grew up without close ties to family or friends (1999: 280). “I always preferred to be alone,” remembered Hoss, “. . . I never had friends or close relationships with anyone, not even in my youth. I never had a friend. I never had any real intimacy with my parents—my sisters either . . . I always played alone as a child” (1969: 29). Hoss secretly joined the German army during World War I. After numerous woundings and decorations, he became the youngest non-commissioned officer in service. After the war, Hoss had difficulty re-adjusting to civilian life and instead joined the East Prussian Volunteer Corps for the Protection of the Frontier. He was part of a group of soldiers that ganged up on another that they beat with truncheons and then shot dead. For this crime Hoss spent 6 years in Brandenburg Penitentiary, a confinement that wasn’t disagreeable with him.

Upon his release, Hoss joined the Bund der Artamanen. It was in the Bund that Heinrich Himmler invited him to join the SS. Joachim Fest reasons that “the

monotonous theme of his life, the cardinal, desperate question of his as of every dependent, empty life was: "Where can I serve?" (1999: 282). In Chapter 6 we will examine the authoritarian personality. Suffice it to say at this point Rudolph Hoss perfectly exemplifies this character structure.

Hoss' autobiography details the effects of the concentration camps on himself and the prisoners. As commandant at Auschwitz, "where I found my so-called colleagues constantly going behind my back," Hoss "became distrustful and highly suspicious, and saw only the worst in everyone" (1969: 123). Hoss recalls fellow Nazis approaching him secretly in the camp, asking if the genocide was truly necessary. "And I," he explains, "who in my innermost being had on countless occasions asked myself exactly this question, could only fob them off and attempt to console them by repeating that it was done on Hitler's order" (1969: 170). Despite suspicions that what they were doing was wrong, Hoss and those under him continued to play their part in the machinery of death.

Daily life for prisoners in Auschwitz was deplorable (Smolen, 1995). Electrified fences surrounded the grounds, the entrance to which bore a sign, "Work makes you free"—Auschwitz having started as a work camp to supply the Nazi war machine, only later switching over to an expressly extermination camp. Prisoners were used as slave labor to build first the camp and then contribute to the German war effort, producing guns, mining coals, developing chemicals. Starvation, overcrowding, disease, torture, and execution were everyday occurrences. Medical experiments were conducted on prisoners. Hundreds of prisoners died daily in these circumstances. These dehumanizing conditions brought out the worst in many.

"One would have thought that in a situation such as this they would inevitably help and protect one another," Hoss writes of the Jews and other prisoners at Auschwitz (1969: 167). But they did not. A form of prisoner self-government existed in the concentration camps (Smolen, 1995: 47). Hoss' experience in concentration camps taught him well "the struggles for supremacy waged between the different categories of prisoners and political groups, and with the intrigues that went on to secure the higher posts," posts that were usually filled by "the most unscrupulous men and women" (1969: 147–148). While SS guards could be cruel and carried out the executions, Hoss maintains, prisoners "were mainly persecuted by members of their own race, their foremen and room seniors" (1969: 143). Hoss describes prisoners who "did not hesitate to get rid of their fellow prisoners by making false accusations against them" (1969: 145).

The Special Detachment (Sonderkommando) were prisoners who aided in the execution and cremation of other prisoners. They were regularly executed themselves every few months. Hoss expressed surprise over "the eagerness with which they carried out their duties," as they were "all well aware that once the actions were completed they, too, would meet exactly the same fate as that suffered" by the prisoners they helped the Nazis murder. Prisoners of the Special Detachment rarely rebelled, did not tell prisoners on their way to the gas chambers the fate that awaited them, and "were also quite prepared to use violence on those who resisted" (Hoss, 1959: 168; Nyiszli, 1993). A Jewish doctor served as Dr. Josef Mengele's personal research pathologist (Nyiszli, 1993). Using a divide and conquer strategy,

the Nazis fanned tensions between prisoners, with Hoss noting that “these enmities were keenly encouraged and kept going by the authorities, in order to hinder any strong combination on the part of all the prisoners” (1969: 133).

Dehumanization was the order of the day in the Nazi concentration camps. All prisoners suffered but not all prisoners suffered equally. Women and children especially faced harsh treatment, with Hoss noting that “the worst conditions prevailed at the women’s camp” (1969: 151). In the early days when Auschwitz was being built women and children were sent directly to the gas chambers (Smolen, 1995: 63). Women gave birth in Auschwitz; they and their infants often died, the mothers from infection, the children from malnourishment (Ibid.). Female prisoners—who included prostitutes and women who’d had abortions, acts deemed worthy of imprisonment under the Nazi regime—were placed in charge of other prisoners (Morrison, 2000: 40). Noting “they far surpassed their male equivalents in toughness, squalor, vindictiveness, and depravity,” that they “were soulless and had no feelings whatsoever,” Hoss explains that “these dreadful women gave full vent to their evil desires on the prisoners under them” (1969: 149).

In the face of daily brutality and depravity there were still those who struggled for humanization. The stories of women trying to protect their children are especially touching. Observing the activity around the gas chambers, Hoss “noticed that women who either guessed or knew what awaited them nevertheless found the courage to joke with the children to encourage them, despite the mortal terror visible in their own eyes” (1969: 165). When their mothers comforted them, children facing their deaths “became calm and entered the gas chambers, playing or joking with one another and carrying their toys” (Ibid.). Dr. Nyiszli (1993: 114–120) recalls how a 16-year-old girl survived cyclon gassing under the bodies of hundreds of other prisoners. Revived, the Nazis feared if she was returned to the general population of prisoners she would tell of her experiences, leading to an uprising. She was carried into a hallway and shot. “I remember,” recalls Hoss, “a woman who tried to throw her children out of the gas chamber, just as the door was closing. Weeping, she called out: ‘At least let my precious children live.’ ” (Hoss, 1959: 166). Noting that “such shattering scenes . . . affected all who witnessed them,” Hoss nevertheless let the woman and her children perish (Ibid.).

1.12 Education and Race

Thus far I have picked some extreme examples of institutions and situations where dehumanization is at work: Nazi concentration camps and the Afghani state under the Taliban. I did so because I wanted to show clearly how institutionalized dehumanization operates. Extreme examples often offer the most lucid, uncontroversial illustrations. But now it’s time to bring this chapter back to the practical, to what goes on in our classrooms. Much of the rest of this book will consider dehumanization in schools, as well as possible alternatives to this dehumanization. Here I would like to consider race in the context of education as a structure of dehumanization.

Race is a troubling thing because, like power, it isn't "real," yet the importance we have attributed to it have made it so. What is race? Although we as a species are a lot different than chimpanzees, there is still only a 1.23% difference between our genes and theirs (Wilford, 2007b). Genetically human beings are 99.9% alike, with more differences within than between ethnicities. It is impossible to tell if a person is white or black based on DNA alone. Yet so much emphasis is placed on the color of one's skin, the usual indicator of one's race.

This emphasis has real-world implications. For example, if you're a black man in America, your life expectancy is shorter than a white male born the same year; you're more likely to get and die of prostate cancer; and more likely to have cardiovascular disease in general and high blood pressure in particular (Payne, 2007). Low-income urban blacks are more likely to smoke cigarettes than other races and menthol ones at that (Eckholm, 2007). Male or female, if you're black or Hispanic in America you're more likely than whites to be in prison or to expect to be imprisoned during your lifetime (US Dept of Justice website). If you're non-white you're more likely to have your car searched by police, receive longer prison sentences, and face the death penalty (Glater, 2007a). If you're black or Hispanic in America you can expect to make less money over the course of your work-life than whites and Asians (US Department of Education, 2006c). This isn't an American thing. The standard of health for Aboriginals is "almost 100 years behind" other Australians, with Aboriginals still suffering from leprosy and tuberculosis (McMahon, 2007).

Schools are another scene where the consequences of race are lived out. College continues to be a very white experience for both students and faculty: 67% of American college degrees were conferred on non-Hispanic whites during the 2002–2003 school year. In 2003 about 15% of United States college faculty were non-white while 47% were white males and 36% white females (US Department of Education, 2006c). Non-whites in the United States are most likely to have an associates degree and less likely to have a bachelor's, master's, or doctor's degree (US Department of Education, 2005). In American primary schools, students designated "low performers" are twice as likely to be black or Hispanic than white. If you're Hispanic or black in America you're more likely to be retained a grade. You're also more likely to be labeled a special education student. Being held back is directly related to dropping out of high school. High school drop-out rates in the United States are higher for Hispanics and Blacks than whites, with 23.8% of 16–24-year olds of Hispanic origin, 11.8% of non-Hispanic blacks, and 6.8% of non-Hispanic whites dropping out of high school (US Department of Education, 2006c).

Despite platitudes that "we are all the same" and that people should be judged on the content of their character and not the color of their skin, race continues to weigh heavily on people's minds and the experiences of people in many countries. White American couples have sued fertility clinics that mix up their sperm samples, resulting in the birth of non-white children (Glaister, 2007). One movie I like to show in my global studies classes is Gurinder Chadha's 2002 film, *Bend it Like Beckham*. In the film Parminder Nagra plays Jesminder "Jazz" Kaur Bhamra, a British teen of Pakistani heritage who dreams of playing football (soccer) and the professional athlete she has a crush on, David Beckham. Jazz's parents have other ideas for

their daughter; proper behavior dictates that Jazz do well in school, learn to cook traditional foods—her mother wonders “What family would want a daughter-in-law who can run around kicking football all day but can’t make round chapattis?”—and, if she is to further her education, go to an Ivy League college to pursue academics. There is no room for sports in their vision of Jazz’s future, nor is there room for Jazz to date outside the Pakistani-British community. Jesminder is expected to grow up and marry a proper Pakistani boy, as her sister does.

I like to show this film because we always pause when Jazz expresses romantic interest in her white football coach but knows she can’t bring him home to mom and dad. Is Jazz’s parents’ not wanting her to date non-Pakistanis an example of racism? Many students in my class will say that yes, this is racism. Others will argue that it is not. Interestingly enough, the people in the room I usually get the strongest reaction from are my teachers’ aides. Once I had a nice Italian lady express that it isn’t racism to want your child to stick within their particular ethnic group.

According to Pew Research Center data, attitudes toward interracial dating and marriage in America are changing: 77% of Americans feel it is alright for blacks and whites to date one another. The change in attitudes is most noticeable among the young: 91% of Americans born after 1976 are cool with interracial dating. Attitudes are what they are, and practice is what it is: more than a fifth of Americans say they have a relative who is married to someone of a different race.

American history continues to struggle with race. Exactly why is it that if you’re not white you’re less likely to enjoy academic success, a healthy life, or a prison-free existence? One argument, although not always worded honestly, is that non-whites are not as intelligent or capable as whites. There is something fundamentally amiss with non-whites, this thinking goes, whether it’s a lack of intelligence, an over-charged sex drive, laziness, or a propensity for violence. Critical pedagogy argues that race is a social construction like gender and class, benefiting some, dehumanizing others. Activist-scholars working in the critical pedagogy tradition view scholars and “scientists” who attribute one’s lack of achievement to the color of one’s skin, class, gender, or sexual orientation as blaming the victims, a power evasion. While critical pedagogy recognizes the benefits that come with being white in America, it refuses to recognize some monolithic “whiteness,” cognizant of the ways class, gender, and sexuality rend even those with white skins. Oppression is a phenomenon that transcends skin color.

The language we employ around race illustrates more of what I termed a “power evasion” above. “Colored” traditionally referred to non-whites, specifically blacks; since when did *white* stop being a color? The point is that white became the default, the standard against which non-white was “othered.” I know a lot of white guys who, if you ask them, “What’s your type, do you like a Pamela Anderson or a Jenny McCarthy?”, they’ll reply, “No, I prefer a more ethnic look.” By ethnic they don’t mean Irish or Polish, they mean non-white. White represents purity and goodness, from white wedding dresses to “white hat” hackers who oppose the abuse of computer systems (contrasted with “black hat” hackers). Back in the 1980s, MC Serch of the white rap duo Third Base observed on the Gas Face, “black cat is bad luck, bad guys wear black, must have been a white guy who started all that.”

1.13 From Oppressed to Oppressor

America isn't the only country where race divides and makes some lives worse than others. Anti-Semitism is a form of racism and religious discrimination that has plagued Jews through the centuries and continues to do so. Iran hosted a 2-day conference of Holocaust deniers in late 2006. Attendees included David Duke, former imperial grand wizard for the Ku Klux Klan who opined that Israel "is the number one terrorist state in the world"; Robert Faurisson, who lost his tenure in France because of his denial of the Holocaust; and Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who opined that the Holocaust was a myth, the same guy who swears there are no homosexuals in Iran (AP, 2006; Tait, 2006). The Middle East isn't the only region where anti-Semitism and a denial of history flourishes. A 2005 poll found that 12% of Italians feel the Holocaust a Jewish invention; 31% of those polled felt Jews should stop playing the victim (Hooper, 2005). In 2007 the British government vowed to crackdown on rising anti-Semitism in the United Kingdom (Campbell & Taylor, 2007).

Horizontal violence pits the traditional victims of a long-lived, insidious racism against others. Almost a quarter of Israel's population is ethnically non-Jewish and mostly Arab (all of the following stats come from the *CIA World Fact Book*, available online at www.cia.gov). To be Arabic in the Jewish state and the territories Israel occupies is to be a second class citizen. Consider: the infant mortality rate in Israel is 7 deaths per 1,000 live births; in the Gaza Strip it's 22 deaths per 1,000 births and in the West Bank 19 deaths per 1,000 births. If you're born in Israel your life expectancy is 79 years; in the Gaza Strip it's 72 years and in the West Bank 73 years. Literacy rates in Israel are higher than in either the West Bank or Gaza. In Israel per capita growth domestic product is \$26,200, the unemployment rate is 8.3%, and the percentage of the population living below the poverty line is 22%. Due largely to Israeli government closure policies, per capita GDP in the West Bank and Gaza is \$1,500 with an unemployment rate of 20.3% in both areas. The percentage of the population living below the poverty line in the Gaza Strip is 63%, while in the West Bank it is 46%.

Palestinian life within Israel and the occupied territories is markedly different and inferior to Jewish life in Israel. Palestinian cars must have special license plates that identify the car as belonging to a Palestinian. West Bank roads are segregated with special roads for Jews and separate, military manned check-point and pothole-laden roads for Palestinians (Erlanger, 2007b). Palestinians *born* in East Jerusalem are considered permanent residents, *not* citizens. Palestinians who own land and homes inside Israel and Jerusalem but go live in areas the Israel government defines as "enemy territory" face confiscation of their property; Jews who move to "enemy territory" do not lose their property in Israel. Israeli settlers steal Palestinian land (Erlanger, 2007c; Medina, 2007c). Identity cards distinguish between Arabs and Jews. The *Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law* prohibits the spouses of Israeli citizens from the West Bank and Gaza from becoming automatic citizens of Israel (McGreal, 2006). Israel prides itself on being a democratic state with liberal institutions, yet it is first and foremost a Jewish state and sees no contradictions

between its identity, its institutions, and its treatment of non-Jewish citizens and residents.

The Israeli government maintains that its policies within Israel-proper and the occupied territories are necessary to ensure the security of its people. There is no denying that Israel is the scene of continued terrorist violence and this violence must be condemned. What is often denied is the terrorist violence perpetuated by the Israeli state. Once we face up to the reality of Israeli state terrorism supported by the US government, we can begin to seek out the connections between Israeli state violence and violence against Israelis. There is something (species) to claim you are protecting yourself when you are constantly attacking—militarily, economically—someone else. “If you’re crushing and destroying someone,” notes Chomsky in a context beyond the Israeli Arab situation but applicable to it, “you have to have a reason for it, and it can’t be, I’m a murderous monster. It has to be self-defense. I’m protecting myself against them. Look what they’re doing to me” (2005: 167). Chomsky shows how “oppression gets psychologically inverted: the oppressor is the victim who is defending himself” (Ibid.).

So it is that what the Israeli government does in the name of “safety” appears to much of the rest of the world as blatant racism. Desmond Tutu expressed that he was “deeply distressed” visiting Israel, noting “It reminded me so much of what happened to us blacks in South Africa.” “What’s so extraordinary,” notes Palestinian Edward Said, “is that what the Israelis are now doing on the West Bank and Gaza is really repeating the experience of apartheid and what the United States did to the Native Americans” (2001: 430). Stopping short of calling Israel treatment of Palestinians racism, Jimmy Carter notes that measures such as Israel’s separation wall on the West Bank represent something “more oppressive than what black people lived under in South Africa during apartheid” (Carter, 2006). At the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000, the *London Observer* noted “If Palestinians were black, Israel would be a pariah state subject to economic sanctions led by the United States.”

Yet Israel continues to be the recipient of massive amounts of United States’ foreign aid (Erlanger, 2007a). People in the Middle East understand that when an Israeli helicopter or tank kills Palestinian civilians it is an American tank or helicopter piloted by an Israeli soldier. I’d be remiss if I failed to note here that Israel—although the leading recipient of US aid—is not the sole recipient of US military largess. The Pentagon actually gives away billions of dollars in jets, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and naval destroyers to other countries like Taiwan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Jordan, Yemen, and Portugal (Wayne, 2006). It does so “to build good will,” “international friendships,” and to drum up future business for military contractors (Ibid.). The United States is also the leading arms supplier to the developing world (Shanker, 2007). “Aren’t there more constructive ways for the United States to make friends?” wonders the executive director of the Project for Government Oversight (Wayne, 2006).

Criticism of Israeli policy toward the Palestinians comes from inside and outside Israel. *Refusniks* in the Israeli Defense Forces refuse to serve in the occupied territories (see for example, Z Magazine, 2006). A 23-year-old American Rachel Corrie

was crushed by a US-made Israeli bulldozer bought with US taxpayer dollars in Gaza as she protested the Israeli army's demolition of Palestinian homes (Klein, 2003). Rachel's family has been told they cannot sue Caterpillar Inc., maker of the bulldozer, because to do so would have questioned US foreign policy toward Israel (Pilkington, 2007). The American government's continued support of Israel, in spite of Israel's often repressive policies toward its ethnic and religious minorities, is one of the reasons many countries in the world *hate* the United States.

There are Americans who support Israel and really do believe it is a besieged country, not an oppressor. Yet there are other Americans who support Israel for more instrumental, nefarious reasons. American evangelicals believe that Israel must control the Middle East before Christ can return, at which point the Jews will have the chance to convert to Christianity or burn in hell. Talk about anti-Semitic, huh?

What effects do Israel government policies have on the children that attend its schools? Not surprisingly, things are bad for Arab children. Israel's public school system is segregated between schools for Israeli citizens who are Jewish and schools for Israeli citizens who are Palestinian. "Separate but equal" conditions are the de facto and de jure rule for non-Jews in Israel and the occupied territories, with schools serving non-Jewish children overcrowded, understaffed, dilapidated, and often unavailable. The Israeli government spends more money on educating Jewish students than on educating non-Jewish students. Official curriculum is a Hebrew curriculum, which is later adapted for Palestinian students. Palestinian Arab students are required to study Jewish texts in Hebrew which appear on the matriculation exams governing graduation from high school and acceptance into college.

Palestinian Arab students are more likely to drop-out of school; by age 17, 32% of Palestinian Arab students have dropped out of school, compared to 10% of Jewish students (the following statistics come from Human Rights Watch's 2001 report, *Second Class: Discrimination Against Palestinian Arab Children in Israel's Schools*). Palestinian Arab students fare worse on matriculation examinations that are necessary to receive a high school diploma and get into college: the pass rate for 17-year-old Palestinian Arabs is 28%, compared to 46% for Jewish students; 40% of students fail this exam because they are missing a mandatory subject; for example, more than half of Palestinian students who fail do so because they lack English, which is taught as a *third* language in their schools whereas it is taught as a second language in Jewish schools; 45% of non-Jewish students who apply to college are rejected, whereas only 17% of Jewish students applying are rejected. Only 9% of non-Jewish students attend college while 91% of Jews attend, and only 6% of non-Jews receive a degree versus 94% of Jewish students who do. The universities Jewish and non-Jewish students attend have staffs that are less than 1% Arab.

I'm a special education teacher, so this is an area that is always of special interest to me. As bad as non-Jewish students in Israel's school system have it, non-Jewish *special needs* students have it worse. Palestinian Arab children have a higher rate of severe disabilities than Jewish children. While there are over 60 Jewish kindergartens where integration of special needs children with general ed students is practiced, no such kindergartens exists for Palestinian Arab children: 45 special education kindergartens exist for Arab students; 484 for Jewish children.

It wasn't until 2000 that a specifically Arabic special education curriculum was developed.

This is a terrible situation, as institutionalized racism oppresses Palestinian Arab students and foments hatred against Israel's population, the Jewish Diaspora, the United States and her people. Criticizing Israeli government policy often results in the worst of knee-jerk reactions, with charges of anti-Semitism leveled against the critic. For example, Alan Dershowitz has fought tooth and nail to keep Norman Finkelstein from receiving tenure, even leveling charges against the later (Cohen, 2007c). Both men are American, both Jewish. Finkelstein eventually resigned. Palestinian-American Barnard College assistant professor Nadia El-Haj finds her tenure bid embattled because of her scholarship; El-Haj wrote a book claiming that Israeli archaeologists destroyed the remains of other cultures in their attempts to find an ancient Jewish presence and thereby justify Israel's right to exist (Arenson, 2007).

There are anti-Semites like Iran's president and David Duke who criticize the Israeli government. But not all critics of the Israel government are anti-Semites. To immediately cry anti-Semitism of anyone who has the temerity to challenge the Israeli government's policies toward its non-Jewish citizens is an example of a power evasion. Logic that holds that a Jewish state cannot be an oppressor because the Jewish people have historically been oppressed is faulty logic. If the Anti-Defamation League resists calling the genocide of the Armenians by the Turks what it is for fear of angering their allies in Istanbul the hypocrisy of this needs to be pointed out (Banerjee, 2007). Critical pedagogy works to uncover, understand, and overthrow oppression in all its forms, wherever it may be, from whatever quarters it may emerge. There are no sacred cows. A history of oppression does not garner one a pass, nor should it.

1.14 Toward Humanization

We've seen what dehumanization can look like, how it can work on individuals and through institutions. But what does *humanization* look like? Can we encourage it through the same institutions that seem to do so much to stifle it now? Answers to these questions in the forms of suggestions and illustrations are offered throughout the remainder of this book. The answers are for the people involved in a day-to-day basis to discuss, decide, implement, revisit, and revise. Here I'd just like to lay out a few general, broad ideas that I feel are a step in the proper direction.

What is the relationship between education—specifically schooling—and the future societies that encourage the humanization critical pedagogy wishes to bring to fruition? “Democracy has to be born anew every generation,” Dewey posits, “and education is its mid-wife” (1993: 122). He hoped that instilling democratic character structures in schoolchildren through democratic schooling would foster to democratic societies peopled by democratic citizens (Westbrook, 1991). Freire notes that “it is possible to accomplish something important in the institutional space of a school or college in order to help the transformation of society” (1987: 130).

While Dewey, Freire, and others working in the tradition of critical pedagogy understand that education will play a part in the remaking of society, they recognize that this will be *only* a part, and possibly not the dominant part either. “I do not think,” notes Dewey, “that the schools can in any literal sense be the builders of a new social order” (1993: 127). Paulo Freire is very clear that “only political action in society can make social transformation, not critical study in the classroom” alone (1987: 175). Freire warns well-intentioned teachers that “education is *not* the lever for the transformation of society,” further “we are in danger of despair and cynicism if we limit our struggle to the classroom” (87: 129–130). Teaching alone cannot transform society (Shor and Freire, 1987: 37). Freire calls for political action *inside*—and just as importantly if not more so *outside*—our classrooms. “The structures of society, like the capitalist mode of production,” he explains, “have to be changed for society to be transformed” (Shor & Freire, 1987: 175). Dewey agrees, noting that “the schools will surely . . . *share* in the building of the social order of the future according as they will ally themselves with this or that movement of existing social forces” (1993: 127).

Schools must be democratic spaces that encourage democracy through democratic practice. Defining democracy as “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience,” Dewey posits that “it is only education which can guarantee widespread community of interest and aim” (1993: 110 & 122). Amy Gutmann (1999) makes a compelling argument for a “democratic state of education,” an education aimed at “cultivating the kind of character conducive to democratic sovereignty” (1941). A democratic education is a politically engaged education that recognizes itself as one seeking to “predispose children to particular ways of life” (1987: 43).

Schools must help students “to understand and to evaluate competing conceptions of the good life and the good society” (Gutmann, 1999: 44). Democracy must be *lived* and *practiced* in our schools. Gutmann introduces two principles of democratic schools, nonrepression and nondiscrimination. Nonrepression protects “the freedom to deliberate rationally among differing ways of life” (Ibid.). Nondiscrimination is understood in part as “a principle of nonexclusion,” barring the state or any groups in the state “from denying anyone an educational good on grounds irrelevant to the legitimate social purpose of that good” (Gutmann, 1999: 45).

In America today the “unschooling” movement continues to grow. Falling under the umbrella of an estimated 1.1 million homeschooled students, today’s unschoolers are motivated less by religious purposes than a sense that public education is not delivering the goods (Saulny, 2006a). In the 1970s Ivan Illyich argued for the disestablishment of schools. His arguments in favor of “deschooling” are still worthy of consideration, but need to be examined in light of Gutmann’s two principles.

The “guru of the deschooling movement,” Illyich worried about schooling’s effect on individuals and the societies they live in (Barrow, 1978: 127). Because “school is recognized as the institution which specializes in education,” other institutions are discouraged from assuming educational functions (Illyich, 1971: 8). Learning *outside* the institutional setting of school is viewed as suspect, with “learning on one’s own [viewed] as unreliable” (Illyich, 1971: 2–3). I’m not so sure that learning

outside of school is discouraged because of schools' monopoly over education, but I'd agree with Illyich that the legitimacy of other institutions as educational centers is questioned because of the emphasis placed on schools.

Learning goes on inside and outside schools. It always has and always will. The problem is that the "book learning" of schools is usually valorized over learning, book-wise or other, acquired elsewhere. Illyich feels this leads to a division of social reality wherein "education becomes inworldy and the world becomes noneducational" (1971: 24). What are the real-world effects of this division? For one, the more years you spend in school, the more years you can statistically expect to live—one social factor that has been linked consistently to longer lives around the world is education (Kolata, 2007).

Schools, Illyich posits, benefit some more than others. Schools are set up in such a way that they reward the "cultural capital" (not a term Illyich himself uses) of the white middle class, "advantages [ranging] from conversation and books in the home to vacation travel and a different sense of oneself" (Illyich, 1971: 6). Illyich feels that schooling "inevitably polarizes a society" by, in part, valorizing and rewarding the values of certain groups in society over others while concomitantly devaluing and punishing the values of other groups (1971: 9). Paul Tough notes that "the manner in which [the poor] are raised puts them at a disadvantage in the measures that count in contemporary American society" in a *New York Times Magazine* article about teaching poor students to act more like middle class ones (Tough, 2006: 49).

Some schools have made moves to assimilate minority students to this middle class norm and the markers or middle class success. Black students, who comprise 14% of the American student population, only account for 7% of the participants in Advanced Placement Courses that offer high school students college credit (Dillon, 2007). In Ossining, New York, black boys receive extra homework help and attend cultural activities such as visits to baseball games and museums with black teachers (Hu, 2007b). We don't want to let black or any kids languish culturally and educationally. But we need to re-examine what constitutes "success," why what we consider being successful is important to us, and how some aspects of culture are legitimated more so than others.

The licenses and certificates conferred by schools increase economic inequality as "selection for a role or category in the job market increasingly depends on mere length of attendance" (Illyich, 1971: 11). The employment rate for black male high school drop-outs is 33%, whereas it is 86% for 4-year black male college graduates (Herbert, 2007). Further, black males graduating 4-year colleges can expect to earn a million dollars *more* over the course of their lifetimes than black male high school graduates (Ibid.). Teachers with doctorates, years and years of experience, and untold student success stories are driven from public education and not allowed to teach because they lack the requisite certificate or state license (Freedman, 2006b). Sarah Whittier, with a Ph.D. in English literature and an award for excellence in teaching, found herself traveling 90 min one-way after school to attend classes for her teacher-certification program. "To me, it's a badge of shame," Whittier notes of the credentialing requirement. "It's an embarrassment. It's infantilizing" (Ibid.).

The school system, argues Illyich, has “monopolized . . . [the] distribution of life chances because of certification and degrees” (1971: 12).

Licensure and certification are “a form of market manipulation,” Illyich charges, “plausible only to a schooled mind” (1971: 15). While I think there is something wrong with keeping teachers with proven track records out of classrooms solely because they lack a piece of paper saying they are qualified to be in those classrooms, I don’t agree with Illyich’s contention that “[m]ost teachers of arts and trades are less skillful, less inventive, and less communicative than the best craftsmen and tradesmen” (1971: 15). Sometimes the best coaches *weren’t* the best players. Pieces of paper and initials after one’s name are so important in schooling that people will purposefully lie, appropriating for themselves titles and degrees they have not earned (Lewin, 2007). China in recent years has witnessed riots over university names on college diplomas (Kahn, 2006).

Instead of arguing for a more egalitarian distribution of school funding, Illyich attacks “equal schooling” (meaning equally funded schools) as “economically absurd” and “intellectually polarizing” (1971: 10). Illyich’s main concern seems to be that equal schooling is economically impossible, that it would cost too much to level the playing field between schools in affluent and indigent neighborhoods. However, as noted earlier in this chapter, and as Illyich seems to realize when he himself points out how much the United States spends on defense and the military, the money is there, although politicians choose not to spend it on education.

Because public schooling is compulsory, Illyich feels it puts a damper on “the open-ended, exploratory use of acquired skills” (1971: 17). One alternative Illyich favors to “obligatory schooling” is the “educational matchmaking” of people around a specific problem using computers to make the matches (1971: 18–21). For instance, if you’re interested in studying the history of the Mongol empire, you’d indicate so on a computerized questionnaire. The computer would find other people with the same interest and provide you their names and contact information, at the same time providing yours to them. This would allow you and they to facilitate informal meetings outside of an institutionalized setting where together you could study the topic.

While I like Illyich’s “educational matchmaking” idea and feel the internet can facilitate it, I disagree with him on the issue of “obligatory schooling.” Education *must* be compulsory. With 2.2% of students in grades K-12 homeschooled, 41% of Americans feel homeschooling is a viable choice for educating children. Christa Green and Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey (2007) found that parents who homeschool their children do so because they want to play a role in their children’s educations, feel they can help their kids learn, and have the time and resources or are willing to make the time and invest in the resources to make homeschooling possible.

Homeschooling is a practice critical pedagogy must be wary of. Children belong to families but they also belong to the societies they grow up in. Gutmann criticizes “the state of families” for arrogating exclusive educational power to the family. What if a family is racist and wants to teach their kids to be racist? What if the family is intolerant of religions other than their own and wants to teach their children to be such? What if the family is dedicated to a democratic lifestyle and would

teach their children likewise? The family *cannot* have exclusive right to educate the child because the child, with her connections to others and her embeddedness from birth in society, is not exclusively the family's to do with as they please (Gutmann, 1999: 30).

"[M]en will not see across and through the walls which separate them," explains Dewey, "unless they have been trained to do so" (1993: 122). Schools allow for "education which can guarantee widespread community of interest and aim" (Ibid.). Our societies are so complex and our beliefs and ideas so many that the "ability to understand and sympathize with the operations and lot of others is a condition of common purpose which only education can procure" (Ibid.).

The answers to the questions and conundrums that vex us are answers we will *not* arrive at individually. Public education has its problems but the solution does not lie in pulling away from public education. Any solutions worth having are ones reached by addressing the problems and solving them together. While some have the means to insulate themselves and their children from the outside world, the flip side of that is they are increasingly isolated, walling themselves and their own off, whether their "own" includes their children, members of their religious or ethnic group, or their class.

There is a tradition in socialist thought that bares resurrection. "In a real community," Marx and Engels explain, "the individual obtains their freedom in and through their association" (1995: 83). Just as Freire explained that dehumanization is not possible by simply switching tacks and putting today's oppressors in tomorrow's oppressive conditions, the individual's attainment of her full humanity is possible only within and amongst the larger community of humanity. "Only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community . . . is personal freedom possible" (Marx & Engels, 1995: 83). In a sense Defoe's Crusoe on his island, alone, was free, but what kind of freedom did he enjoy? And did he really enjoy it?

The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin disagreed with Marx and Engels vehemently on many an issue in their day but agreed with them on this point. "I am truly free only when all human beings around me, men and women alike, are equally free," he opined. All too often we view freedom as a scarce commodity, something only some can enjoy. The structures of our lives and the roles we play in these structures make it seem this way, whether you are master and I your slave, whether I am boss with plenty of leisure time and you worker with none at all. But in fact, "[f]ar from being a limitation or negation of my freedom, the freedom of my neighbor is instead its precondition and confirmation" (Bakunin in Guerin, 2005: 151). Hence "the necessary solidarity of the free development of all" of which Marx and Engels spoke, presaging a future society, "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (1948: 31; 1995: 113).

"To be human," Freire reminds us, "is to engage in relationships with others and with the world" (1974: 3). This tradition, of the individual realized *in* and *through* society, not outside and despite it, is a tradition critical pedagogists of all stripes—including those who self-identify as "socialists," "progressives," "democrats," "liberals," and "feminists," and those who do not—embrace.

Humanization needs power. Power truly isn't a four-letter word, even if its connotation is often negative. "[P]ower is the basis of all forms of behavior in which people resist, struggle, and fight for their image of a better world," remarks Giroux (in Freire, 1985: xix). bell hooks explains how she once thought of power in purely negative terms until she realized that "[i]t depended on what one did with it" (1994: 187). In our struggles toward humanization, inside and outside schools with critical pedagogy, we *cannot* abandon power. Power and the relationships it engenders can be a potent tool for being more, even if it has so often been wielded to make so many less.

With power we will weld and wield ideologies. When Freire (1998b: 267) notes that the formation of ideologies "is not a simple act of imposition" that ideologies are "produced by concrete actors and embodied in lived experiences that may resist, alter, or mediate these social messages," the important point to keep in mind is that we can create humanizing ideologies to counter dehumanizing ones. Of course, any ideologies we create must always be open to criticism, renewal, and replacement, just as we critically examine and hope to replace existing ideologies.

Schools are places where limit acts test limit situations, where the untested feasibility of "the constructible future" can be pursued (Freire, 1985: 106). "[T]here are always cracks, tensions, and contradictions in various social spheres such as schools where power is often exercised as a positive force in the name of resistance," remarks Giroux (in Freire, 1985: xix). Schools are places where we can attempt to bring our ideologies to life, to champion democracy, cooperation, and liberation over and against isolation, anomie, and damnation. "The fight," we must never forget, "is one of all human beings toward being more. It is a fight to overcome obstacles to the humanization of all" (Freire, 1996: 160). Ours is a struggle "for the creation of structural conditions that make a more democratic society possible" (Ibid.).

I have gone on at some length in this chapter about power, about hegemony and ideology, about structures of dehumanization. I have done so because I believe these are important concepts that shape and condition our lives. The remainder of this book will consider specific structures of dehumanization and offer alternatives to them where possible. Schools are contested spaces where greater or lesser humanization is possible. Schools, which at times are structures of dehumanization themselves, are like Russian dolls, nested in other structures of dehumanization. Chapter 1.14 turns to the structures of philosophy and ethics to explore their relationships to being more or being less human. Chapter 2.20 will critically apprise the mental health professions and explore more humanizing alternatives. In the pages that follow, I will be theoretical where I need to be, yet always strive to convey the ideas of myself and others clearly and concisely. Above all I will always return where and when I can to the everyday classroom.