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Critical Pedagogy as Collective Social Expertise in Higher Education

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Abstract

In this article, dedicated to the revolutionary educational work of Peter McLaren, we will deal with the question of practical teaching methods in higher education from the point of view of critical pedagogy. We argue that nowadays teaching and learning in educational and social sciences are too often meaningless from the point of view of critical collective learning. Thus the central task in critical pedagogy, and in reform of higher education, is to understand the oppressive aspects of present college life and overall society in order to generate pedagogical, individual and societal transformation while developing pedagogical strategies and study methods that work toward the elimination of various forms of subordination based on class, gender, race and sexual orientation, and strengthen students' possibilities for genuine collective learning while empowering them to fight against inequalities in the world. Our reflections stem from our academic life and teaching experiences both in Finland and the U.S. We suggest that in order to teach critically, educators need to use more collaborative and collective teaching and learning methods. Thus the idea of collective social expertise becomes a core aim of teaching in the context of critical pedagogy.

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I should just like to formulate this: the main problem, as I see it, is how human energy is channelled and used by every given society for its own purposes, and how in turn the human needs thus produced have an influence on social development; sometimes a revolutionary one but very often a reactionary one, because the character structure as it has been formed in the past by tradition, culture, teaching, family, etc., changes more slowly than the socioeconomic factors. Indeed, the slowness of the historical processes is to a large extent to be explained by the fact of this lag, that is to say, by the fact that man psychologically lives several generations behind the new economic and technical possibilities. If that were not so, the birth of a new society would not be as painful and difficult as it is. – Erich Fromm in his letter to the Soviet philosopher Vladimir Dobrenkov in 1969

In this article we will deal with the too often neglected question of practical teaching methods in critical pedagogy. By acknowledging the common critique of critical pedagogy – that it is too much a theoretical project without practical reflection (what it really means to do critical pedagogy in practice) – we focus on the question of teaching practices in the current university-factory. We claim that teaching and studying in educational and social sciences are too often meaningless from the point of view of critical experiential learning. Although we partly accept this criticism, we also believe that critical pedagogy would benefit from the division of labor: whereas some build theory, others use it practically, and some others evaluate the pedagogical usefulness of theories and practices by correcting and re-building.

The central task of critical pedagogy in higher education is to understand the oppressive aspects of present college life, and overall society, in order to generate pedagogical, individual and societal transformation while developing pedagogical strategies and study methods that work toward the elimination of various forms of subordination based on class, gender, race and sexual orientation, and that strengthen students' possibilities for genuine learning and powers to fight against inequalities of the world.

Our reflections stem from our academic living and teaching experiences both in Finland and the U.S. We want to suggest that in order to teach critically, critical educators need to use more collaborative and collective teaching and study methods. Therefore we argue for the idea of collective social expertise as a core aim of critical teaching in the context of critical pedagogy, which emphasizes the unity of human beings, in the positive sense of “unity in diversity”, as solidarity between people, or as a common good, and the equality of human beings irrespective of their class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or disabilities. By first taking up some general principles of critical pedagogy, and critical points of view regarding the present stage of teaching and learning in the university (of course, not suggesting that our observations describe the field as a whole), and then briefly describing a study method entitled “study circle”, we will place Peter McLaren’s work against the grey canvas of university teaching, for he has moved from the academic field of formal education to the organic and colorful field of learning in social and militant movements, and other sites of learning in people’s lifeworlds.

Pedagogical Principles in Critical Pedagogy

Over the years Peter McLaren has developed a unique and innovative theory of critical pedagogy by moving from critical (or lucid) postmodernism, and exegesis of popular culture as pedagogy, to a more radical form of Marxism by re-reading and renewing it in the context of global capitalist exploitation (McLaren 2005; McLaren & Farahmandpur 2005). In capturing McLaren’s critical endeavor and his pedagogical creed Zeus Leonardo, one of McLaren’s co-authors and a critical pedagogue in his own right, has referred to McLaren’s *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture* (1995) by summarizing its central tenets of critical pedagogy. In the following paragraphs we use Leonardo’s pertinent analysis in summing up McLaren’s contribution to the theory of critical pedagogy.

In McLaren's critical lexicon, the concept of pedagogy in general, and critical pedagogy in particular, is (or at least it should include) a form of social and cultural criticism by offering prospective teachers and in-service teachers possibilities for critical reflection as transformative intellectuals and cultural border crossers. In the manner of Antonio Gramsci's organic and engaged intellectuals, teachers can tear down the walls for new ideas, lifestyles, thoughts and actions to appear (Moisio & Suoranta 2006). Critical educators in schools and elsewhere need to recognize that socially and historically constituted linguistic relations mediate information and knowledge. Through their historically formatted linguistic and social relations people are mundanely related to the wider society, and other traditions of mediation such as family, peers, friends, religion, ethnicity, formal schooling, popular culture, and, as McLaren has emphasized, especially in his later texts, social class. (Leonardo 2005, 31-32.)

Thus, as often repeated, social facts are not "isolated from the domain of values or removed from forms of ideological production as inscription," but in critical pedagogy facts are value-laden, and also normatively loaded entities. This is also to say that relations of concepts to object are not inherently stable, or transcendently fixed, but often "mediated by circuits of capitalist production, consumption and social relations" (ibid. 32). As Leonardo further points out, McLaren's critical pedagogy keeps language as "central to the formation of subjectivity (unconscious and conscious awareness)" (ibid. 32), but, as he demonstrates in his later works such as *Capitalists and Conquerors* (2005), material histories of societies, histories of the class struggle, and the means of capitalist production have a firm place in them as fundamentals of the formation of world view, identity, and a sense of self.

It follows from this materialist conception of history (Marx's materialistische Geschichtsauffassung) that capitalist society consists of different groups, those who are

considered owners and rulers, and those of servants and scorned outcasts who merely obey. There are many reasons for class division and various forms of oppression. Critical educators should be conscious of these prevailing tendencies, and see that various forms of economic and social inequality and oppression are “most forcefully secured when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, inevitable or bequeathed to them as an exercise of historical chance” (ibid. 32). Although oppression has many forms and faces, “focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression vs. racism) often elides or occults the interconnection among them” (ibid. 32).

It is as if Leonardo interpreted McLaren’s view as utopian – if not even Messianic – when stating that “an unforeseen world of social relations awaits us in which power and oppression cannot be understood simply in terms of an irrefutable calculus of meaning linked to cause-and-effect conditions. Domination and oppression are implicated in the radical contingency of social development and our responses to it.” (Ibid. 32.) But if so, McLaren’s utopia is a Freirean one in the sense that, using Freire’s word, it builds on “the act of denouncing the dehumanizing structure and of announcing the humanizing structure” (Gadotti 1994, 64). As a methodological consequence, McLaren’s critical pedagogy maintains that mainstream social scientific and educational research practices are “unwittingly implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression” (Leonardo 2005, 32).

These tenets of McLarenian critical pedagogy can be compared with others such as those described by Stephen Brookfield (2005), Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso (2005). The primary task of critical pedagogy is to challenge ideology and to set people free from the servitude of repressive ideas. But, as Brookfield reminds us, ideologies are hard to catch since they are tightly “embedded in language, social habits, and cultural forms that combine

to shape the way we think about the world. Ideologies appear as common sense, as givens, rather than as beliefs that are deliberately skewed to support the interests of a powerful minority” (Brookfield 2005, 41). A critical pedagogy helps students to contest aspects of hegemony that affirm political control in the hands of the white, rich and powerful. Here Brookfield is using hegemony in the sense of the way people learn “to accept as natural and in their own best interest an unjust social order” (ibid. 43). And, as he aptly points out, “the dark irony, the cruelty of hegemony, is that adults take pride in learning and acting on the beliefs and assumptions that work to enslave them. In learning diligently to live by these assumptions, people become their own jailers.” (Ibid. 44.) A critical (race) pedagogy emphasizes the need to recognize and challenge “the traditional claims that the educational system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Solórzano & Yosso 2005, 70).

In addition, a critical pedagogy is directed at unmasking power. Critical educators help people to read reality analytically and critically, and encourage them to act on the power that they already possess. “Adults learning the possibilities of their own power through sharing knowledge, experiences, tactics, strategies, successes, and failures” (Brookfield, 2005, 48) forms an important dimension of what we are calling a critical pedagogy. A critical pedagogy helps students overcome alienation and creates the context for the struggle for human freedom, which can only exist in a non-alienated world. As Brookfield notes, “alienation is antithetical to freedom, and the abolition of the former is essential to the realization of the latter” (ibid. 50). Alienation describes not only capitalist conditions but all the other forms of living that reduce human beings to commodities in the economy or infrastructure of capitalist society. A critical pedagogy envisions “social justice education as the curricular and pedagogical work that leads towards (1) the elimination of racism, sexism,

and poverty, and (2) the empowering of underrepresented minority groups” (Solórzano & Yosso 2005, 71).

Therefore a critical pedagogy is learning about liberation. Although critical education emphasizes collective action, it reserves in its pedagogical agenda a place for reflective distancing. It thus sees momentary reflective privacy not a retreat from collective solidarity but a true revolutionary act, a deepening step into the real world. (Ibid. 51.) Another task for critical education has to do with reclaiming reason (ibid. 56). An important element of reasoning is to direct it toward a good cause, to criticize inhuman circumstances, and to construct a better world. Reasoning concerns all spheres of life, and can take various forms. In critical pedagogy it can refer to basic literacy (reading, writing, math) as well as other forms of literacy such as economic, health, and media literacy.

And finally, one of the central tasks of a social pedagogy is practicing democracy as part of the overall process of furthering political and economic transformation. Whatever the final purpose, critical education is always political in a strict and concrete sense of the term: “it is intended to help people learn how to replace the exchange economy of capitalism with truly democratic socialism” (Brookfield, 2005, 351).

Collective Social Expertise

Critical education aims to help human beings grow in their ability to think collectively, cooperatively, and in solidarity with their fellow human beings, and often adopts an eco-critical perspective with respect to the biosphere or nature. Critical education fosters critical and analytical skills to comprehend the world, to read the world, and to act within and upon the world in ways that build the conditions necessary for a critical society. In the context of critical education, critical thinking does not refer to isolated cognitive faculties, or

new business liturgies found in management textbooks, but to social reality, in that its focus is on “common interests, rejecting the privatized, competitive ethic of capitalism, and preventing the emergence of inherited privilege” (Brookfield, 2005, 351). These ideals of collective and shared work are operationalized in various group-based, or collaborative teaching and study methods.

Different “interactionist,” collaborative and cooperative pedagogies (see Shlomo 1994) are part of a larger idea we would like to call “collective social expertise.” Before describing the basics of collaborative study methods – and especially that of a study circle – we will elaborate on the concept of collective social expertise. One of the foundations of this idea is information overload. We don’t believe that there are many ways of increasing our human ability to handle and form knowledge (1). To acquire and thoroughly analyze the knowledge that we are getting from diverse sources is getting all the more difficult due to information overload. One factor seems to be the common experience of the intensification of time.

It seems that time has become a luxury commodity that most of us do not have anymore in the age of hyper-capitalism. On the sidelines of this larger cultural, and in most cases economic, process, it seems that fields of power/knowledge are differentiating, and, in turn, fields of expertise increasing exponentially. Resulting from these elementally politico-economical and social processes, the concept of “expert” is going through fundamental changes. This situation in which different fields of knowledge have become more specialized and more separate both linguistically and conceptually has brought forth a deep challenge to education: How can these experts share their expertise and understand each others’ in communicating their knowledge and evaluating each others’ viewpoints?

Although the amount of information available has been steadily increasing for the past several hundred years, and especially after the Second World War, the quantity of information has exploded since the Information Revolution of the 1960s. In the constant flow of new scientific information, the concept of expertise has been in the processes of re-definition and re-evaluation. On one hand, expertise has enjoyed high social status, and it has been distanced from ordinary knowledge into the realm of professional knowledge as the phenomenon of expertise has become more complex and wide. It seems as if there were no limit to what is required of the individual expert. On the other hand, the idea of expertise have been devalued, primarily for two reasons. Firstly, experts are becoming part of the working class and losing their formerly high social status and respect. Secondly, their specialized knowledge has tended to become so narrow in scope that in many practical fields – particularly in the human and social sector – it has somewhat lost its practical relevance.

Thus it is vitally important for the theory of critical pedagogy to develop a concept of open collective social expertise along with student- and dialogue-centered study methods as well as tutoring practices (2). By these we refer to constructing, creating, formatting, sharing, elaborating and connecting knowledge with two or more people so that the combination of these individual fields of expertise would be more than the sum of its parts. It is obvious for many different organizations that one human being alone – no matter how skillful she is – cannot gain the same amount and quality of knowledge as she would in collaborating with a group of experts from various fields.

Open collective social expertise consists of interdisciplinary research and teaching based on interdisciplinary elaborations of the themes involved. In the current condition of information overload, and capitalist exploitation of the individual worker (or expert), it is imperative that teaching and research be brought together in a fruitful manner. Then learning

can be seen as a joint venture based on the problems that have been produced together as experts, and with the people involved and touched by the problems.

Collective social expertise can first confront a certain problem or a field of problems, and start to tackle them. Collective social experts can work with teachers who can lead them to the sources of the problem. From there, they can use their theoretical and methodological knowledge in solving the problem, and simultaneously gaining deeper knowledge of it. But it is obvious that problem-solving and deeper understanding take time, and there are no shortcuts. The process of understanding can employ teachers' and students' perspectives alike. An apt example of this mutual process is studying the history of philosophy or the history of education together by breaking up the chronological order that is usually employed in these instances.

The students are at the center of educating in collective social expertise. Their individual needs should be addressed in personal counseling situations. One way to arrange this is to assign a group of students a teacher-tutor who interacts with them in different parts of their studies, giving advice and also rocking their personal and collective boats. This is necessary in order to we get rid of the business-as-usual understanding of expertise on which the university system as a diploma mill is founded.

This rigid profit-driven system is among the very reasons people are drawn further away from each other; in the university system, it's survival of the fittest. The capital-oriented system works almost like a hidden curriculum: everyone knows it, but no one cares. Both in academia and in various expert organizations, specialist expertise is usually seen as highest priority, something that is closely knitted to an individual, and her individually acquired special abilities. As the world becomes radically diverse, and harder to control with

former means and technologies, the old way of understanding expertise must also vanish if technological and social “progress” is to be maintained and carried on.

Thus today, rather than being an individualistic know-it-all character, an expert should be open, reciprocal, and trustful. Trust especially means that an expert does not cling to a hope that she can, based on her expertise, gain control over the changing world. Instead she should be able to evaluate the knowledge that is produced by other experts, and critically proportion her own know-how to it. This is perhaps the only way to act meaningfully as a collective social expert.

But this trust is not to be understood as a blind dependency on the knowledge produced by others, but understood as critical trust. Critical literacy is part and parcel of this critical trust as a core part of expertise. Critical literacy means both internal and external criticism. Internal critique involves the critical evaluation of the principles and guidelines of the production of knowledge. External critique aims at critical analysis of the connections of the knowledge produced in social processes and its interpretations and exploitations in other social processes.

The idea of collective social expertise can be seen as part of the debate on the direction of higher education in quite a paradoxical situation (see Aronowitz 2000; Giroux & Searls Giroux 2004). On the one hand, many universities are lacking both material and intellectual resources, and are increasingly defined in the language of corporate culture. In consequence, universities in the U.S. and elsewhere seem to have become “less interested in higher learning than in becoming licensed storefronts for brand name corporations -- selling off space, buildings, and endowed chairs to rich corporate donors” (Giroux 2004). On the other hand for the first time in human history everyone can pursue her own educational ends at any age, and for the goal of individual and collective development (Aronowitz et al. 1998).

The Management of Campus Life

Collective social expertise goes against the grain of current academic life, which on the surface emphasizes commitment, participation and community involvement (among other values claimed by the administration), but in reality, right below the surface, nourishes quite the reverse: individualism, competition, and superficial teaching and study methods. Without too much exaggeration, we are willing to claim that at stake is what has been called a university's contract between students and their teachers. This contract gives students a freedom to superficiality, as if they were studying and learning, and to their teachers a freedom to act as if they were teaching. As a result everyone is happy, and the university machine produces degrees for the meritocratic markets, or "meritocratic myth" according to which a social system gives advantage to people with educational merits, or capital. Rebekah Natham sums up her anthropological study on North American college life as follows:

Taken together, the discourse of academe, both in and out of classes, led me to one of the most sobering insights I had as a professor-turned-student: How little intellectual life seemed to matter in college. This is not to say that no one cared about her education or that everyone cut all his classes. Rather, what I observed was that engagement in the philosophical and political issues of the day was not a significant part of college student culture. (Natham 2005, 100.)

Instead, at present college life is seeing as purely instrumental, and controlled by three different management techniques: shaping schedules, limiting workload, and taming professors. Common to all these survival tasks is that there is little or no mention of learning or discovery, not to mention enthusiasm or dedication to learning. Quite the contrary, freshmen are encouraged by their seniors to give professors what they are assumed to want: acted effort and instrumentally performed opinions. (Ibid. 110-120.)

In more general terms, these observations evoke Erich Fromm's (1976) distinction between two learning modes (linked to two different modes of living), namely those of learning to have and learning to be. In 'learning to have' mode students try to write lectures passively into their notebooks word for word, and afterwards memorize them. Study contents do not become parts of their own thinking and reflection, but stay silent. But in 'learning to be' mode, students are prepared for and interested in their study contents, and their learning is active; a lecture or other form of teaching is more like a launch pad for future studies. For them teaching and learning have transformative and often unpredictable effects.

This problem of studying is probably more severe in the U.S. than in Scandinavian universities, for the myth of a triumphant individual is deeply ingrained in the North American psyche. It is clear, however, that purely instrumental teaching and studying cannot satisfy students' desire for full intellectual development. This is why the triumphant individualism of the era is completely different from the individual and collective intellectual development we are trying to bring forth. For this fully developed individual has nothing to do with individualism but everything to do with the ethical individuality, and collective humanity. Avishai Margalit (2004) has tried to capture this concept of individuality by arguing that all humans deserve respect because they are icons of one another -- that is, of humanity. Learning this requires a special kind of educational setting usually absent from the current profit-oriented university.

Educational systems of multicultural and multiracial societies are faced with the problems of conflicting basic values and assumptions regarding the decent society. In multicultural and multiracial settings, it is not plausible to try to act value-free by ignoring normative problems, abandoning prescriptive statements, and taking a neutral, seemingly objective stance toward pressing issues, which require debate and discussion, for as Dewey

(1920, 184) once wrote, “the educative process is all one with the moral process.” Education is and always will be – at least from the critical perspective -- about values, choosing why, what, how, and where to teach.

Ethical neutrality is impossible also on the individual level. The teacher cannot turn her moral self off every time she teaches, for she is an ethical human being with moral choices, and a “moral conscience.” This idea of “moral conscience” is something that Fromm tried to elaborate on in comparison with “authoritarian conscience.” According to Fromm, authoritarian conscience is “more or less what Freud meant by superego, a term much more popular today than the term ‘conscience.’ Authoritarian conscience, or superego, is the internalized power of the fathers, originally; later it is the internalized authority of society” (Fromm 1964a, 171). Against this there is a moral conscience which is “our own voice, present in every human being and independent of external sanctions and rewards;” it is “a reaction of ourselves to ourselves” (Fromm 1947, 158). In this respect, “to have a bad conscience” means that it “bothers” us not because of moral issues in our actions and omissions, but because we have failed to be true to ourselves in these very acts.

This idea is closely connected to division of the basic human needs Fromm articulated. The basis of Fromm’s division is the fact that human beings share with other animals physiological needs that must be satisfied in order to survive. But even after these needs are satisfied, human beings are affected by other drives and passions. And it is precisely these other needs, products of the social processes, that Fromm sees as essential to human beings in his humanistic philosophy (Fromm 1941, 27). In his *Sane Society* (1955) he lists the following needs: a need for relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, identity, and a frame of orientation as distinct human drives. One should notice, however, that we do not refer to these drives as things that predetermine human actions, but as ones that offer a

theoretical frame of reference for creating more humane and critical means for studying in higher education. In this respect we want to believe, like Albert Scherr (2005, 147), that students, and human beings in general, are not “‘trivial machines’ reacting to changes in their natural and social surroundings by fixed patterns of behavior. They rather deal with impulses and information on the basis of complex emotional and cognitive structures, in a manner that is not determined and likewise is not predictable.”

Next we want to elaborate on Fromm’s division of these needs as they illuminate our aim of developing a foundation for collective social expertise in higher education, and elsewhere.

The need for relatedness states that every individual has a need for a sense of belonging, or communion with others. However, as maintained by Fromm, and also by Marcuse, this is not necessarily achieved in a group but could also happen in conscious isolation, which Marcuse interpreted as an authentic revolutionary act. According to Fromm there are three ways to answer the need for relatedness: submission to external authority, repressing others, or love of humanity. For Fromm love means productive care, responsibility, respect, and wisdom. (Fromm 1955, 30-36.)

The need for transcendence is part of human beings’ inherent capacity to create. Human beings are thrown into the world without act of will, and taken out in the same manner. Animals live in a state of passiveness. But as Fromm stresses, human beings need to cut themselves loose from passivity. The need for transcendence turns human beings into creatures of reason and imagination who can transcend “beyond the passivity and accidentalness” of pure “existence into the realm of purposefulness and freedom” (Fromm 1955, 37). According to Fromm, this creative act is based on love, for as we create something we also care for it, respect it, and try to understand it more deeply. The act of love and care is

most vividly present in raising children. But what if one is not capable of loving? How then to answer the call of transcendence? Fromm's answer is linked to his concept of the active being, for if human beings are unable to create life, they might be quite able to destroy it. For by destroying life, human beings can also transcend it in order to demonstrate their activeness, and thus distance themselves from passivity.

The third need for Fromm is that of *rootedness*. As people move away from their mother's womb, breast, arm, and eventually from their presence, they must fulfill their infantile need for security by other means. After cutting themselves from these seemingly 'natural ties' there emerges the need for a separate or autonomous identity.

As long as I have not established my own identity, as long as I have not fully emerged from the womb, from the family, from the ties of race and nation – in other words, as long as I have not fully become an individual, a free man, I cannot throw away this individual and thus experience that I am nothing but the drop of water on the crest of the wave, a separate entity for a split of a second. (Fromm 1962, 162.)

There are many ways that people try to fulfill this need for identity. Among the frequently used means is to connect oneself to something larger. When asked about one's identity ("who are you?") it is relatively easy to identify oneself in terms of profession, nationality, political ideology, religion etc. This kind of "I am what you want me to be" type of thinking is connected to "herd identity" that rests "on the sense of an unquestionable belonging to the crowd. That this uniformity and conformity are often not recognized as such, and are covered by the illusion of individuality does not alter the facts." (Fromm 1955, 62-63.)

When human beings acknowledge that they are separate units in the chain of generations, they often recognize the need for a new frame of orientation, which then may bridge the gap between them and reality. By making the sensory experiences into a meaningful whole, the frame of orientation operates both on emotional and on cognitive levels. A human being “has to react to the dichotomy of his existence not only in thinking but in the total process of living in his feelings and actions. Hence any satisfying system of orientation contains not only intellectual elements but elements of feeling and sensing which are expressed in the relationship to an object of devotion” (Fromm 1955, 65).

Radical Teaching and Learning

There is, however, another way of learning besides that individualism and “having mode” described by Natham and Fromm, and through which it is possible to reach for a subversive and radical reading of the world, and the fulfillment of the human aspect of our lives. In order to change the modes in which students learn, it is imperative to focus on changing the way learning and students as learners are defined in higher education. For if we want to educate people who are ready to take a step toward productive being, to move closer to the ‘being mode’ of learning, we must envision new models of teaching. These are not the ones that within safe limits give learners room for self-activity and self-determination as forms of mental masturbation. Instead, new models of learning represent a radical change from unprincipled, indiscriminating, indifferent, mercenary, inconsistent, and opportunistic modes of learning, and from the character type that Fromm called “marketing orientation.” This type seems to have a deep indifference toward others, but is actually afraid of being alone since “his security lies in conformity, in never being more than two feet away from the herd” (Fromm 1964b, 97). The marketing human being is preoccupied with being attractive so she can be loved; the productive human being is attractive because of her capacity to love.

Thus, in this Frommian sense, productiveness means the realization of the human potential, and the use of one's powers. With the power of reason, human beings can gain their understanding and awareness; with the power of love they can break through the wall separating persons from each other; with the power of imagination they are able to begin to create. (Fromm 1947, 87-88.)

Prominent Finnish philosopher Juha Varto (2005) has pointed this direction by stating that productive and authentic learning can be reached by concentrating strictly on study contents that differ from students' previous experiences, thus representing the other. This otherness can offer truly liberating, and, in Fromm's vocabulary, productive learning experiences. Following these theoretical reflections we would like to turn to the following Table 1, which stems partly from Fromm's ideas, and partly from Freire's distinction between banking and "problem-posing" education. We will concentrate on its left side, that of radical teaching and learning, and leave the right side, for it is almost too well known to anyone who has ever studied or taught in the modern university-factory.

Let us take the left side of Table 1 for a detailed scrutiny. The concept of reality in radical teaching, as it is in Marx's view, is dialectical and contextual: In place of a "frozen" universe is an open and changeable reality. The goal of radical teaching thus is to liberate students from all sorts of fixed ideas about "the way things are" and replace them with the conviction that the world is a state of "coming to be" where students, as well as teachers, can invent and create themselves and the world anew. This is not to assert that there would not be any constants in the universe but rather that ideologies and beliefs change, and this is why values cannot be contemplated in isolation from their historical context.

This is also true with the concept of knowledge in radical teaching. Knowledge is not given to the students from above, but shared with them in a certain frame of reference. We

want to emphasize that as teachers our task is to see those “generative themes,” which are at hand, as broadly as possible and try to reframe them into meaningful wholes. In this students are important actors, for they give experiential and other impulses for reframing formal curriculum. It thus follows, in Freire’s (2004, 74) words, that in this mode “no matter whether a program is concerned with adult literacy, sanitation education, cooperative organization, or evangelization, education will be all the more effective to the extent that, while enabling learners to gain access to knowledge of the field they are dealing in, it challenges them to build a critical understanding of their presence in the world.” It is as Marx and Engels (2005/1848, 26) wrote: “Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man’s ideas, views, and conception, in one word, man’s consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?”

Table 1.

Two Models of Teaching and Learning

	Radical Teaching and Learning	Traditional Teaching and Learning
Concept of Reality	Changing and negotiated	Static and given
Concept of Knowledge	Dialectical, constructed knowledge	Bird’s eye view, encyclopedic knowledge
Learner	Agent (students and teacher as subjects)	Receiver (teacher as subject)
Range of Studies	Relatively open	Relatively closed
Form of Questions	Authentic and open-ended (answers are not known)	Unauthentic and closed (answers are known)

Group Interaction	Subject-oriented	Performance-oriented
Aims of study	Conflict, new questions and insights	Consensus, reproduction of existing knowledge
Subject of Study	Students and teachers	Teachers

Range of studies ought to be relatively open-ended in radical teaching and learning. By this we refer to the idea that themes and contents (texts and assignments) can vary during the class, and teachers and students can plan them together, and also invent new forms of assignments (3). This has also to do with the form of questions that are posed in the class. Usually pedagogical questions are closed, that is, the teacher knows the answer, and in turn students know that the teacher knows. Students learn this formal pattern early on in their school careers. In radical learning the truth must be demonstrated in praxis, that is, in reflective practice. Furthermore, and this we stress, group interaction should be educational, that is, it should focus on creative cognitive dissonances, and not performances; in other words, students should focus strictly on learning the given themes and topics, and not on pretending to participate.

A learning group should also learn collective self-direction without the teacher's continuous presence. This is essential in order to give students a sense of autonomy, and also a free space for collective wonder without the teacher's controlling power. We recognize that this is not a common procedure in the university, and are fully aware of the possible problem of free loading without the teacher's control. However, we do not see this as a major problem, for on one hand, the teacher's presence does not guarantee learning, and on the other hand, the group has an inner control system, and does not usually allow imposters. Autonomous group work not only enhances students' skill to do authentic group work, that is, read, discuss, and write together, but also develops their responsibility for their learning.

Autonomous groups may also allow new inventions and connections better than the one directed to happy consensus under the teacher's controlling eye. Thus, self-directed collaborative group work -- such as study circles (see below) -- offers, in our view, at least a partial solution for the general lack of learning motivation among university students.

When it comes to aims of study we are inclined to refer to Freire and his book with Moacir Gadotti and Sérgio Guimares Pedagogia: diálogo e conflito. In it Freire reflects on the distinction between the pedagogy of dialogue and the pedagogy of conflict. According to Gadotti (1994, 80) "the central idea of this book is that the pedagogy of dialogue does not exclude the notion of conflict. On the contrary, the philosophy of dialogue values conflict and works to overcome it. It considers conflict legitimate and relies on it as a means of fully realizing authentic dialogue. Conflict is the engine of history." Thus the aim of radical teaching and learning should be understood not only as a philosophical ideal but also in the very pragmatic sense, for if university teaching is understood, at best, as consensus, and at worst as a performance (as social theater in which each party pretends to teach and learn), then there is not much sense in having institutions of higher education at all (at least in social and cultural sciences including philosophy).

In regard to the last characteristic of radical teaching and learning, that of subject of study, again we would like to refer to Freire, and his famous notion of the roles of students and teachers in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972/2005). According to Freire (2005, 80) "the teacher-of-the-students and the student-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow." In a

sense both the knower and the thing known are in a continual process of mutual adaptation and transformation.

It is obvious that teaching cannot be executed without the idea of getting students to learn and digest information. The crucial issue is, however, how and in what ways learning is evoked. For there is a danger that the teacher thinks that learning activity is solely her responsibility, or that the subject matter is more important than the learner -- or even that by preparing for the class the teacher is doing the students' job, and actually learning for them. These accidents would produce negative responses to the needs elaborated above. Knowing about the good life does not insure that one will live the good life; this is something that both academic philosophy and the history of ideas has shown us. We might argue that a teacher has not fulfilled her responsibility by mechanically dispensing information. Therefore among the most important components in the teacher-student relationship is the way in which the teacher interprets authority. For as Fromm argued, there are two different types of authority: irrational and rational. The former is based on power and fear, the latter on competence and love.

In this process, all participants develop and transform into learners, or more precisely, into critical learning agents who do not merely give opinions for opinion's sake, and do not act learning but develop expertise in comprehending the word and the world, and thus develop their capacities to become knowledge creators. Even though our hope for formal higher education is sometimes fragile, and we concede the always-present dual character of education -- that of slavery versus liberty -- it is impossible to accept the following, somewhat one-sided and shallow criticism by McKenzie Wark in A Hacker Manifesto (2004): "Education is slavery. Education enchains the mind and makes it a resource for class power. The nature of the enslavement will reflect the current state of the class struggle for

knowledge, within the apparatus of education.” From the vantage point of critical pedagogy it is necessary to underline that the university – or any other institution of formal education – is not set apart from the ‘real world,’ and stress that it is another community of learning practice. This is also bell hooks’ (2003, 41) point as she writes that it is important to break “through the false construction of the corporate university as set apart from real life and ... re-envision schooling as always a part of our real world experience, and our life.” This way we may “share the knowledge gleaned in classrooms beyond those settings thereby working to challenge the construction of certain forms of knowledge as always and only available to the elite.”

Thus in the following we turn to describing a viable way of learning collective social expertise, which we feel is within the scope of critical pedagogy, and fits well into its pedagogical register.

Study Circle for Developing Collective Social Expertise

Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval, a critical scholar in Chicana/o studies, has a pedagogical motto: “Another classroom is possible.” By telling his students that “we cannot create that other world, that world where many worlds fit, unless we first create another classroom, one in which all voices and lives count,” he is in search of the means to actually establish such a classroom. “How can an egalitarian, exciting, challenging, and loving space, one where students and teachers talk, argue, laugh, cry, hold hands, sing, clap, role-play, and organize rallies and teach-ins, be created and sustained?” (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005, 34-35.) One possible answer for founding “another classroom” is to set up a study circle.

Practically speaking, a study circle (4) belongs to the family of collaborative learning methods that facilitate discussion and enhance thinking as well as overall academic skills. It

can also be used as a vehicle for enhancing collective social expertise. Study circle as a form of “associated life” means breaking free from the competitive and individualistically driven learning and embracing collaborative and interdependent learning as a more rewarding and permanent learning mode (see Bruffee 1995). A study circle consists of a group of 4-8 students who meet a given number of times to give presentations and discuss the reading assignments. Study circle is based on the following core educational principles:

- The focus of learning in a study circle is more on the process than product (“the road is made by walking,” perhaps by talking, too) and this process is understood as a collaborative exploration.
- The group is more than the sum of its individual members, thus collaboration is power.
- The emphasis is on critical learning and understanding substance (reading assignments), not in class performance (empty talking, and opinion making for its own sake).
- The aim is a cooperative atmosphere of responsibility in which each member’s work benefits all.
- Participants in a study circle are “agents” of their own learning (goal setting, scheduling, etc.). Agency in learning means that participants do not give opinions for nothing but develop expertise and become knowledge creators (see above).
- Studying in a study circle corresponds, and is in many ways analogous to, the “real world” learning situations in various formal educational settings, social movements, and workplaces.

A study circle has four phases: forming of a group, reading the required materials, having presentations and discussions, and evaluation. Study circle does not allow free loaders, for everyone is involved in doing a presentation, and serving as secretary in one meeting plus participating in all meetings. So the very format of a circle guarantees the commitment of each member to the core ideals of the circle. A circle does not tolerate the breakdown of a chain. Presumably this alternative social structure of learning might also help “students become autonomous, articulate, and socially and intellectually mature, and it helps them learn the substance at issue not as conclusive ‘facts’ but as the constructed result of a disciplined social process on inquiry” (Bruffee 1995).

In phase one, a study circle is established; usually this takes place in the first class meeting. Ideally, a study circle consists of 4-8 students. The schedule should permit sufficient time for group members to complete the required reading assignments. Most groups settle on weekly or biweekly meetings. Readings will be decided on in the first class meeting, and they partly depend on how many students form each study group. An optional book-participant-ratio is 1:2 -- that is one book per two participants, or 1:1, one book per participant (depending on time range, motivation, book length, themes etc.). In deciding the organization of the study circle, at least the following things must be taken into account: Reading time – how many weeks are needed for reading the required material and making presentations; meeting dates; presentation – who will present what and when; schedule – who will act as a presenter, and who as a secretary writing notes (minutes) about the discussion in the meetings. And finally, the group decides the final meeting with the teacher.

In phase two (reading and preparation), all participants in a study circle read all the required texts before the meetings start. When there is a large amount of readings, it might be useful to share the reading assignments in the group. However, this may create too much

pressure for individual presentations, and give too little opportunities for real discussions. In any case, it is useful to take good notes on the required readings in order to make a presentation and participate in discussion.

Instead of reading the required materials and then meeting afterward, the group may decide to read part of the material (a book, a few articles) first, and then have a meeting. Then participants read the second part, and have their second meeting, and so forth. This can be a productive way to proceed, but can lead to poor presentations for a lack of time.

A presentation should briefly introduce the overall idea of the text (a book, an article), as well as key concepts and ideas of the text. It should not be a summary, but a (critical) reflection or consideration of a given text. It should also concentrate on interesting questions in the text. A presentation should also include topics for discussion. It should be about 8-12 double-spaced pages, although the length of a written presentation is not important in itself. In this phase it is also possible to try to find alternative ways to approach and question the readings. One option for critical reading is to put different texts up against each other to see the possible discrepancies and similarities between them. Another possibility is to try to find other viewpoints than the ones in the text, perhaps in novellas, films, historical studies, philosophical texts etc. By cross-exposing the given themes, collective social learning could grow deeper and more lasting. Encouraging students to bring in their own experience in the forms of storytelling, family histories and biographies and theorize it can facilitate a sense of “collective belonging” (see Solórzano & Yosso 2005, 71).

In phase three, after reading the texts, a study circle meets for presentations and discussions. The length of a meeting varies from 90 minutes to two hours. A presentation should last around 20-30 minutes, and the rest of the time – 60-90 minutes – is for discussion. Everyone should participate. There are no “stupid questions.” Discussion should focus on

understanding a given topic. The secretary has a double role in the meetings, both in documenting the discussion (a tape-recorder can be used), and participating in it. In addition to a summary of the discussion, the minutes (around 8-10 pages) should include: who was present, and how long the meeting lasted.

In phase four, at the end of the course, members of the study circle meet with their teacher for the final discussion. One week before the scheduled meeting, members have sent their collected presentations and minutes as one chronologically organized document to the teacher. From a five-person study circle, the end result will easily be a 60-100-page document. In the meeting, members of the group and the teacher reflect on the group's work both from the academic and practical points of view.

It is up to the teacher's imagination to apply a study circle in a given situation, the central idea being to "learn freedom" with students by giving them collective assignments and respecting their intellect. Dialogue is sometimes taken for granted in the discourse of critical pedagogy, and kept as a solution for collaboration without deeper reflection on the concept itself or its practical uses as part of educational interaction. However, when striving toward collective social expertise, it is necessary to reach for a more complex mode of collaboration. In this mode, students (and teachers) are representing complementary domains of expertise by planning, deciding and acting, and most importantly, thinking together, and "combining independent conceptual schemes to create original frameworks" (Minnis, John-Steiner & Weber 1998). In a genuine collaboration students (and teachers) share resources, power, and talent. No one's argument or "point of view dominates authority for decisions and actions resides in the group, and work products reflect a blending of all participants' contributions" (ibid. 744). However, each group varies in these features, and may exhibit them only after long cooperation. (Ibid.)

All in all, the study circle as a means for creating collective social expertise, a sense of solidarity, and commitment to critical learning gives students, as subjects and agents of their own learning, a chance to oppose instrumental expectations, break with ordinary habits of studying, question the status quo, and, if needed, ignore norms and do the unexpected (cf. Scherr 2005, 147). The study circle fulfills one of the basic premises of critical pedagogy and collaborative learning: in the process of testing the quality and value of learning “by trying to make sense of it to other people – their peers” (Bruffee 1981, 745) students realize their responsibility for self- and collective education (cf. Gadotti 1994, 111).

Conclusion

While we have conducted our discussion inside the walls of academia, Peter McLaren has consciously taken his revolutionary educational theory into political praxis. He has made a radical decision to move from behind the university walls to the open *agora* of political struggle in the form of “traveling critique.” By taking this “natural next step” after theory, he has fulfilled his mission as an intellectual, but what sort of an intellectual? And is there a distinction between an academic and an intellectual? Using Steve Fuller’s (2005, 137-138) work we are inclined to say that McLaren has been able to invent a radical intellectual by providing a political context for the research findings in critical educational theory.

Among the various conceptions of intellectuals, such as traditional, specific, and organic (5), McLaren’s radical intellectual comes closest to that of Antonio Gramsci’s organic intellectual, and as its extension, the idea of committed intellectual articulated by McLaren with his *companeras* and *companeros*: “The committed intellectual is not someone who is interested only in resisting and defeating forms of cultural domination, but rather someone for whom the end of all forms of exploitation is the focal point of his or her commitment to transform the world” (McLaren et al. 2005, 277). McLaren has taken a

critical stance toward global economic capitalism while linking his metatheories firmly with diverse local communities and the people living and working in those communities. In the spirit of Gramsci's prison writings, and critical theory at large, he has formed himself into an intellectual who "can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator" (Gramsci 2000, 321).

In his writings and travels as a guest lecturer, which have taken him to every continent, but especially to Latin America, McLaren has practiced his revolutionary critical pedagogy as a variation of critical theory, which, in the words of Horkheimer and Adorno in the revised preface to their Dialectics of Enlightenment (2000), has a "temporal core to truth instead of ... truth as something invariable to the movement of history." McLaren's revolutionary thinking is inherently linked to the building of collective social expertise, for in his public engagements he has developed a theory of revolutionary civil participation in the spirit of radical adult and popular education. He has not only expanded the scope of his audiences, but also taken his theory and praxis to new heights of political formation. Captive as his audience was, and still is, in his home institution in Los Angeles, it is perhaps even more receptive, and, above all, reflectively active in various countries in Latin America, where he participates in numerous workshops, seminars and dialogues with his co-educators, administrators, politicians, social movement activists, political provocateurs, and common people. Many engagements are under the auspices of the Fundación Peter McLaren de Pedagogía Crítica, an organization established by a group of scholars and activists in Northern Mexico to promote projects in critical pedagogy and popular education.

McLaren lives dangerously in his trips in Latin America. After the World Social Forum and World Education Forum in Caracas Venezuela 2006, he visited Colombia, and

was told by several witnesses how the death squads of the local paramilitary hunt and assassinate teachers and teachers' union leaders. Shortly before his arrival in Caracas, a teacher was assassinated in front of her own students. In these locations of ultimate desperation, McLaren gives his speeches, and shares the sorrow, but also the spirit of hope and struggle, with teachers and union activists – almost always under heavy security, and still getting robbed and losing his belongings.

McLaren is a student of many figures, influences and thinking traditions, among them Marx and radical humanist Marxism, some lucid versions of postmodernism, and structuralism, cultural studies, feminism, postcolonialism, symbolic anthropology, race and ethnic theory, Freirean pedagogy, Frankfurt critical theory, critical ethnography and critical media studies (see Leonardo 2005, 44). This repertoire of influences gives him the perspective “to read the word and the world” and maintain critical reasoning in divergent situations. He has gained an ability to address various political and educational activists around the world and wherever he goes, the reception is passionate. This is partly because of his humanist radical and universal agenda, and partly due to his affectionate and always alert character. His message will not leave anyone unruffled, and his voice is heard, for wherever he tours he finds like-minded people, and they find him, as he announces his message of radical hope: that even in the most difficult times, the maladies of capitalism are not insurmountable when people come together and engage in the process of conscientization.

One of the main questions in critical pedagogy is, what keeps the hunger for learning, understanding, knowledge and social transformation alive, and how can we help to nurture it? And if we ourselves feel satisfied, how can we reawaken the process for critical learning? Nowadays there are many experts – or meaning marketers – who tell us how to think and act. But, in the end, no expert can help when the time comes to ask the ultimate question: “what

do you want from life,” or “what is a good life.” For these questions are about fundamental values, and about choices that are hard to escape on the sometimes rocky road to revolutionary critical pedagogy.

Notes

(1) But Kevin Kelly (2005) paints a different picture: “The human brain has no department full of programming cells that configure the mind. Rather, brain cells program themselves simply by being used. Likewise, our questions program the Machine [the Internet with diverse software] to answer questions. We think we are merely wasting time when we surf mindlessly or blog an item, but each time we click a link we strengthen a node somewhere in the Web OS, thereby programming the Machine by using it. What will most surprise us is how dependent we will be on what the Machine knows - about us and about what we want to know. We already find it easier to Google something a second or third time rather than remember it ourselves. The more we teach this megacomputer, the more it will assume responsibility for our knowing. It will become our memory. ... Each time we forge a link between words, we teach it an idea. Wikipedia encourages its citizen authors to link each fact in an article to a reference citation. Over time, a Wikipedia article becomes totally underlined in blue as ideas are cross-referenced. That massive cross-referencing is how brains think and remember.”

(2) However, in the present context of the modern university-factory it is not clear if these methods and procedures alone are enough to enforce a needed structural reform and conceptual re-thinking of higher education’s most corrupted study and other practices based on ultra-individualism, isolation and competition. What would be needed at minimum in the realm of pedagogy are methods of deconstructing the prior ‘bad’ habits of learning such as rote learning, and replacing them with innovative learning, organic learning, creative learning, aesthetic learning, and collaborative learning.

(3) One possibility is to make class learning more public by organizing open mini-seminars in the universities or in some other public places, or publish the learning outcomes in blogs, or in wikis. This sort of “externalization” of learning is true to the project of radical democratization of learning, and to the epistemology of collective social expertise.

(4) Study circle has its roots in 19th century adult (and folk) education both in North America and Europe, when knowledge was seen as an integral part of social change (see Byström 1996, 663). It also has a substantial resemblance and an inherent relationship to Latin America’s pedagogical traditions, especially Freire’s “cultural circles” (1970; 2004). Both in Freirean thinking, and in the basic ideas of study circle, the concept of culture has an essential place; “culture” refers to the people’s ways of thinking and acting in the world in order to transform it. The following words of Freire (2004, 81) are insightful, and worth quoting: “If it is possible to reach water by digging up the ground, if it is possible to decorate a house, if it is possible to believe this or that truth, if it is possible to find shelter from cold and heat, if it is possible to alter the course of rivers and to build dams, if it is possible to change the world we

have not created, that of nature, why not change the world of our own creation, that of culture, of history, of politics?”

(5) Traditional intellectuals “are people who produce decontextualized ideas” apart from any localities and practices, as if these “intellectual products are felt ... to belong to a realm which is peculiarly elevated” (Collins 1998, 19). Foucault’s specific intellectuals, for their part, do not want to tell others what needs to be done, or mold peoples’ political will. Instead through their analyses in their own field they question the common assumptions and habitual ways of working and thinking, and by doing so, as citizens participate in the formation of a political will. Gramscian organic intellectuals, who usually are of working class origin, participate in practical life, helping to create a counter hegemony that undermines existing social relations and capitalist means of production. However, this is not done in an ideologically blind manner, but always with self-reflection, by asking what one really is.

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