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Not McCritical Pedagogy: Will the Real Left Please Stand Up (and Educate)

Or “Critical Pedagogy: From Marx to Foucault [or Derrida or your other favorite “post” author] and back again.”

Critical pedagogy is a multi-faced educational movement that largely follows from and is informed by larger the wider leftist theoretical movements within the academy of the past 30-40 years. In brief, critical pedagogy can be seen as a movement liberating education from the narrow confines of “traditional” education and the constrictive language of hegemonic schooling. It is largely geared towards the growth of a critical consciousness, political engagement and radical democracy (or at least the possibility there of) and in its more radical versions the overthrow of the capitalist system itself.

Key predating figures include: Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and John Dewey with Pablo Freire and his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), being the “founders” of modern critical scholarship. Freirean education adopts a dialogical approach in which knowledge is not simply imparted from teacher to student, but instead both parties take on both roles. Though the Freirian model is still proscriptive—something that gets this style of education in trouble from certain camps on the left (and right)—this proscription is necessary for radical liberation to take place, the hallmark of critical pedagogy.

Important US scholars are: Ira Shor, Stanley Aronowitz, Henry Giroux and most recently, Peter McLaren. The last is (possibly) most important currently and a visit to his website: <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/pages/mclaren/> rev, reveals the strong neoMarxist leanings of this group. This brand of neoMarxism tries to incorporate insights from both traditional Marxist thought, e.g. the importance of the material and a general base/superstructure model for looking at the world, with important additions from “post” scholarship.

Assignment:

“The Corporate University”: As we have been/will be reading, the corporate fingerprint heavy on the campuses of educational institutions across the country. For this assignment, you are to examine the impact of the corporate presence on your education. Do this by locating example/s/ of corporatization of education (these can be from your current or past educational experience), describing them, and critiquing their effect on your education experience.

N.B. A critique can either be positive or negative and a good critique does not simply provide a superficial reading, but is one that is able to challenge the fundamental nature of that which is being critiqued.

Select Bibliography

Allman, Paula. *Critical Education against Global Capitalism: Karl Marx and Revolutionary Critical Education*. Westport, Conn. And London: Bergin & Garvey, 2001.

This book, which includes an foreword by Peter McLaren, is one of the most important works for reestablishing a Marxian/Gramscian/Freirian theory of education after the “postmodern malaise” of the 1990’s. Allman provides a rereading of both Marx and Freire to show how an education based on these principles is possible (if difficult). It is critical reading for anyone interested in neoMarxism in general and its application to education in particular.

Dimitidas, Greg and Dennis Carlson, eds. *Promises to Keep: Cultural Studies, Democratic Education, and Public Life*. New York and London: RoutledgeFarmer: 2003.

This collection seeks ways of integrating democratic education with cultural/critical scholarship. It does this largely through trying to excerpt from cultural and critical studies those elements which are most critical for radical democracy while discarding those elements which are not critical to the project. This collection is important for giving various theoretical perspectives which do not always completely agree with one another, but do form a useful theoretical framework for democratic practice.

Giroux, Henry A. *Schooling and the Stuggle for Public Life: Democracy’s Promise and Education’s Challenge*. 2nd edition. Boulder and London: Paradigm, 2005.

This is one of the “classics” of critical education. Written during the dreary days of the late 1980’s this Giroux wanted to provide a sense that there was still hope for democratic education. Giroux, Henry A. and Suan Searis Giroux. “Corporate Culture versus Public Education

and Democracy: A Call for Critical Pedagogy.” *Marxism and Communication: The Point is to Change it* 10, (2006), 203-216.

This article is similar to others, particularly the recent writings of McLaren, in that it argues that in this age of global capital, and neoliberal and conservativisms, critical education is “critical” for democracy to flourish and for education to stay in the hands of the people. This is probably the most concise argument for this position.

Lankshear, Colin and Peter L. McLaren, eds. *Critical Literacy: politics, praxis, and the postmodern*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1993.

This is an important early collection which tries to fit insights from postmodern ways of thinking into a critical education framework. Unlike later works, which more radically reject postmodernism as it came to be practiced within the academy in the 1990’s this book takes on the whole a more positive outlook on the integration of these two discourses. It points therefore, to the ways in which postmodernism was put to the use of neoliberalism.

McLaren, Peter and Ramin Frahmndpur. *Teaching Against Global Capitalism and the New Imperialism*. Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

A collection of articles jointly published by the two, this book overall reads as the most stunning critique of global capitalism as it relates to education. While there is some repetition, this does not detract from the collection as a whole. This volume or the articles individually, are important reading for anyone concerned about the relationship between the globalization of the past quarter century and the state of education.