

Editorial: Critical Education, Critical Pedagogies, Marxist Education

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Regular readers, contributors and reviewers of JCEPS are well aware of the journal's explicit political project to contribute to and advance "Socialist / Marxist transformative policy for schooling and education from a number of Radical Left perspectives" (see www.jceps.com). As a dedicated site for broad leftist critique of education and capitalism, and for transformative alternatives in policy and practice, JCEPS is a great resource for critical educators and activists. The importance of this sort of work, building theory, documenting and reflecting of radical practice, and imagining educational alternatives for a non-capitalist future, is clear for those of us committed to the transformation of capitalism. We are involved in an ongoing struggle to apply education to the project of transforming capitalism from within neoliberal capitalist structures and institutions, which includes goals of developing students' critical consciousness of and participation in this political project; and of imagining educational forms and practices for and within a post-capitalist future.

Paulo Freire (2012) succinctly expressed the liberatory and utopian character of this sort of work, writing that:

It is certain that men and women can change the world for the better, can make it less unjust, but they can do so only from the starting point of the concrete reality they 'come upon' in their generation. ... What is not possible, however, is to even think about transforming the world without a dream, without utopia, or without a vision (p. 45).

But even using the term 'utopia' risks alienating many, including some who might otherwise be allies in the struggle to transform and overcome capitalism, while mainstream critics are quick to dismiss such talk for invoking ideas that are unrealistic and inherently unattainable pipedreams, demanding that we lower our sights and 'be realistic'. Wallerstein (1998) argued that "utopias are breeders of illusions and therefore, inevitably, of disillusiones. And utopia's can be used, have been used, as justifications for terrible wrongs, "concluding that last thing we really need is still more utopian visions" (p.1). His solution was to elaborate an alternative that he termed 'utopistics', described as:

the serious assessment of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgement as to the substantive rationality of alternative possible historical systems. It is the sober, rational, and realistic evaluation of human social systems, the constraints on what they can be, and the zones open to human creativity. Not the face of the perfect (and inevitable) future, but the face of an alternative, credibly better, and historically possible (but far from certain) future (pp. 1-2).

Freire's poetic language is attractive, and perhaps more likely to inspire people to dream and take action, but the two invocations are not so different. In both cases there is clear shared project of developing a critical understanding of what is, of how things could be, and of taking action in the world to realise such change / transformation.

Žižek (2010) gives a good sense of the hegemonic discourse and climate that this sort of transformative project needs to contend with in current times. He cites "the virtual disappearance of the very term [capitalism] in the last two or three decades" (p. 211), and goes on to observe that, despite the generalised critique of Fukuyama's 'End of History', "most people today *are* Fukuyamaean: liberal-democratic capitalism is accepted as the finally found formula of the best possible society, all one can do is try to make it more just, tolerant, etc" (Žižek 2010, p. 211). More than a quarter century after the collapse of historical socialism this insight is not new, but the hegemony referred to is not monolithic nor impenetrable, as a host of recent political developments demonstrate. They include the growing anti-austerity movement in Europe, including Greece (however set back that project is currently via President Tsipras's concessions to the basic austerity package), the ongoing struggles to develop anti-austerity / anti-neoliberal / 21st century socialist projects in Latin American countries like Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and the current rise of anti-austerity social democratic figures within mainstream parties like Jeremy Corbyn (Labour Party) in the UK and Bernie Sanders (Democratic Party) in the US.

Understanding and negotiating these developments is an inherent part of our daily political, activist work, balancing critique with potential ruptures, short and long terms objectives, building hope for the possibility of non-capitalist trajectories without falling into uncritical support for specific initiatives, or inflated claims of impending victory. While this special issue does not explicitly take up these sorts of tensions, they can be felt through the work included here as a common part of the struggle for all of us. In a recent symposium in Melbourne, Australia, Antonia Darder (2015) spoke of the "imaginative and creative political vision" needed if we are to make education work "as a key democratizing force for the evolution of critical consciousness and critical democratic life". It is this broad project, potential and hope of a critical education, critical pedagogy, a Marxist education, that underpins the work included in this special issue.

This project was initiated by JCEPS founding Chief Editor, Dave Hill, originally as an edited book. It set out to bring together analyses of critical and Marxist education in countries with neoliberal policy setting; countries with alternative / counter policies from socialist positions; and non-country specific theorising of critical and Marxist education. That intent carries over into the resulting special issue, such that the articles that follow make a major contribution to this important and ongoing process – the need to document how critical and Marxist education interventions and practices, within and outside of formal educational institutions, can and are contributing to the transformation of capitalist society. Clearly this work is never finished. In particular, documenting critical and Marxist educational work and interventions within so-called post-socialist countries is an area in need of more research. Some challenges to the triumphant capitalist / Fukuyamean logic of linear transitions to free-market capitalism

have been made, highlighting how in many cases educators and populations value and struggle to retain multiple aspects of education under historical socialism (e.g. Griffiths and Millei 2013; Silova 2010). But more dedicated studies of contemporary critical education movements and interventions in these contexts are needed.

The papers of this special issue share some key features that can be seen as foundational to critical education centred on transforming capitalism. One of these is the very conception of critical / radical education as class struggle. Acknowledging the complexities of social class identities under twenty-first century capitalism, it is the conscious struggle against Capital, and interests of Capital and its accumulation, that sets critical education apart. Grant Banfield's paper, *Marx and Education*, expands on this through a deep examination of the nature of our labour as critical educators, elaborating the agency and radical use value of our labour power, as "revolutionary capacity-building work". Banfield reminds readers that that our conscious work to produce revolutionary subjects is inherently, and unavoidably, an act of class struggle, just as education is class struggle. Building on Marx's humanism, his work challenges readers to keep sight of the classical alienation of workers under capitalism, and the struggle to direct conscious human power to the full realization of our humanity. Banfield's paper thus emphasises our potential agency as critically conscious educators, and the dialectics of human actors making history through class struggle, and being transformed by their actions in the process, applying these core features of Marxist theorising to education.

On similar grounds, Kemal İnal offers what is perhaps for many readers a little known account of the historical origins of critical and revolutionary education in Turkey. Taking readers back to the late Ottoman period, he documents the rise of a science-based, secular model of education, linked to projects of modernization in the 1960s, leading to competing liberal and socialist trajectories on critical education. This history highlights the complexities and tensions educational developments in colonial and post-colonial contexts like Turkey, and the role of individuals and organisations in prisons, following the military coup of 1971, in the development of a revolutionary critical education as overt class struggle. It is this struggle that Kemal İnal advocates for contemporary times, moving decisively beyond the instrumental developmentalist agenda of secularist education to an explicit, counter-hegemonic, "dynamic democratic form of education" that includes peoples' participation in social movements and their protests and struggles as revolutionary acts, as part of a revolutionary critical education.

This potential is explored in Deirdre O'Neill's paper reporting on critical work of the *Inside Film* project, which brings critical and radical pedagogy to life through the concrete action of using film to work with prisoners within and on parole outside of jails. The project is grounded in a critical analysis of crime and the prison industry in the United Kingdom, and how "one of the major functions of prison is to deal with the people for whom capitalism has no use, but in defining the behaviours created by capitalism as criminal, the responsibility for people abandoned by the system becomes a question of personal and moral responsibility and not one of systemic failure". This fascinating work elaborates the class-based nature of the

prison industry in contemporary capitalist UK society, and how film as radical pedagogy can work to facilitate prisoners' consciousness of the empirical nature of what constitutes crime leading to incarceration, the class-based nature of contemporary prison populations, and in turn the realities of class-based capitalist societies that construct crime and define criminals to be incarcerated. Here again, through the *Inside Film* project, we see critical education as class struggle.

Whether occurring in prisons or classrooms, this work emphasises the praxis of critical / radical education, through which critical educators and students engage in class struggle. Three of the papers in this collection provide detailed and highly insightful analyses of critical / radical and Marxist educational praxis in two areas of the core of the capitalist world-economy: neoliberal Britain and the United States. In the case of Britain, Gail Edwards and Joyce Canaan emphasise how class consciousness is developed through praxis - the practice and action of class struggle. Their paper gives us an important history of critical and Marxist education in contemporary Britain, drawing attention to some of the urgent tensions between them that we need to work through, including the ways in which the current neoliberal hegemony appropriates potentially radical concepts. Concluding with an overview of recent campaigns linking trade unions and social movements in the struggle for public and free education, they illustrate the power of praxis within and beyond educational institutions to not just counter neoliberal prescriptions but to build a counter-hegemony.

Simon Boxley's paper is part reflection on his own education studies program in the UK, grounded in a Marxist materialism whereby students' critical consciousness / philosophical position / understanding of theory becomes a material force in practice, brought to all aspects of educators work in the classroom and the wider workplace. Through this work he provides a current perspective on the potential, and associated strategies, for education studies programmes that produce graduates who put critical theory into practice in their lives and their work. The risks of critical education studies programmes being completely closed down under current conditions of hyper neoliberal policy frameworks is highlighted, with the consequent need to find ways for the necessary disruptive activity of critical educators' action / praxis within such programmes to be seen or presented as part of students' developing "social responsibility to advance the common good", as one strategy to maintain space for this sort of critical work. Boxley concludes by returning to the explicit and covert action involved in this practice, transforming teacher and students who come away "knowing that we couldn't be the same again".

Jean Ann Foley, Doug Morris, Panayota Gounari and Faith Agostinone-Wilson, begin their analysis of the United States' case by highlighting mainstreaming of critical pedagogy within the U.S., working in effect to depoliticise or domesticate critical pedagogy. Their critique is rooted in a deeper Marxist analysis of contemporary capitalism and its official responses to growing critiques of social inequalities, corporate greed, etc, all of which fail to ever identify capitalism as the core of the problem. Through what makes up a very useful review of critical pedagogy's history and key tenets in the United States, including major critiques of and challenges to its trajectory, they arrive back at the compelling call for CP that "is dedicated to

cultivating both a *critical consciousness* among *social individuals* awakened to the public pedagogical force institutions of power exert in constructing values, attitudes, desires, choices, and subjectivities (Kincheloe, 2007), and to their own individual and collective power as *social* and *historical agents* capable of intervening in the world and producing themselves as *subjects* in transformative social struggle”. Here again the theme of developing critical consciousness through action to transform the world, as a foundational aspect of our work as critical educators, is powerfully articulated.

In a similar fashion, Roberto Leher and Paolo Vittoria review the history of critical pedagogy in Brazil, with an emphasis on popular education and its historical and current potential to develop conscious actors through the “dialectic between action and reflection necessary for social transformation”. Reviewing Paulo Freire’s work and legacy in Brazil, and the educational initiatives of the MST (Landless Workers Movement) based on classical Marxist scholarship, they argue that the MST made possible the convergence of militant Christian strand of activism that drew on Freire’s work, with a more explicit Marxist tradition, bringing a synthesis of popular education and Marxist critical pedagogy. Like Kemal İnal’s study of the Turkish case, Leher and Vittoria trace the historical rupture from a developmentalist agenda of national economic development, led by social movements grounded in concrete experiences and realities and inspired by Gramscian ideas of radical consciousness formation through action and struggle.

My own contribution to this special issue argues for the value of world-systems analysis, and the work of Wallerstein in particular, in our thinking and practice as critical and Marxist educators. This work highlights some core features of a world-systems analysis perspective – a critical understanding of social reality; consideration of liberatory alternatives; and action to move towards this future – as foundations for our curricular and pedagogical practice. This is a call for our engagement, as critical educators, with the argument that capitalism as a world-system has reached a series of systemic or absolute limits that underpin its transition towards an alternative but uncertain system, in which our collective human potential to influence the nature and direction of this transition is heightened. It is simultaneously a call to incorporate this analysis of current reality, and the action of imagining and working for alternatives, into systems of mass education.

The special issue concludes with two papers about countries that have experienced degrees of systemic change inspired by socialist principles and practice. Maura Duffy’s contribution documents and analyses a very significant initiative in contemporary Venezuela, tied to its project of re-imagining and constructing a socialism for the twenty-first century. In this context she draws our attention to overtly politicised “educational missions” that have generated new educational institutions, structures and spaces that emphasise horizontal co-construction of curricula and critical learning through critical action. Crucially, Duffy’s analysis avoids the trap of uncritical presentation of official Venezuelan / Bolivarian policy, acknowledging the multiple and almost inevitable contradictions and constraints, but in a way that holds on to the revolutionary potential of the project to radically redistribute power in and through education. Participants in her work identify the important of education in their

struggle to change society, “both as a means of developing the critical consciousness needed to assess progress to date and formulate solutions to ongoing problems, and as a means of promoting the protagonist participation necessary to overcome these obstacles”. Ongoing work on the Venezuelan case, and other participating countries in the Bolivarian Alliance for Our Americas (ALBA), like this, emerges as urgent for our collective project of systemic transformation.

The case of Cuba adds a further important dimension as part of the historical socialist bloc, in this case focused on the development of the field of comparative and international education in Cuba from the perspective of one of its proponents on the island, Rosa Maria Massón Cruz. Work in English from within Cuba is limited, and Massón Cruz’s article offers some crucial interesting insights from an educator who was educated in the Soviet-influenced model of scientific socialism, and has had limited access to the broader international work in the field of critical and Marxist education due to a combination of the U.S embargo, and internal regulation of ideologically appropriate materials. Grounded in this reality, her reflections and review of developments within Cuba highlight the legacy of the historical Soviet influence, and the entrenched insistence on the need for comparative work that accounts for the complex dialectical relationships between educational policy and systems, the social, political and economic context, and the practice of educators within systems in context. They also highlight the ongoing legacy of the massification of all levels of education in Cuba, responding to the identified needs of the majority, inspired by José Martí’s maxim that to be educated is to be free.

For educators committed to the radical critique and transformation of capitalism, the importance of these contributions to this special issue is clear. Collectively they add to our understanding of how education broadly, and particular educational interventions - whether within the formal classroom of established institutions, or via ‘non-formal’ projects, can and must play a part in such a transformation. While avoiding definitive prescriptions, there are common threads emphasising critical consciousness through action, and so realizing critical pedagogy’s potential through our practice with students, institutions and society, and through the associated practice of those we work with, underpinned by a materialist understanding of capitalist society and its transition.

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