

Critical Education Studies

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Abstract

Education Studies as an academic discipline within HE in the UK is a contested area. One thing most Education Studies programmes might agree on is that they are 'critical'. But what is a genuinely critical Education Studies degree? And, how could such a programme survive within the hostile neoliberal environment of the contemporary UK? This chapter argues from a materialist perspective that Education Studies which are critical entail the responsibility on the part of students and staff to put theory to work in their lives, and to provide the conditions for students to work on the production of their own capacity to labour. This represents a setting on its feet of the Hegelian model of Education Studies proposed by Tubbs and Grimes (2001). In order for Education Studies to remain critical, it is argued that something of its learning and teaching must remain covert, to operate within the interstices of bourgeois social structures.

Keywords: Higher Education, Education Studies, Critique, Marxism.

What is critical in Education Studies?

The higher educational landscape in the UK has changed rapidly in recent years with the introduction of fee regimes which have multiplied the sums paid by increasingly indebted undergraduates for degrees, including of course those in Education Studies. It is against this backdrop that we must consider not only *why* critical Education Studies, but *whether* the investment of time and money on students' behalf is really worth it. These material conditions under which we find students working should inform our understanding of the place of Education Studies in relation to employability, the production of capacity to labour, and intellectual activity.

Part of the argument I make here is about the benefits of a cloak of darkness with which to cover the criticality of Education Studies. Of course, paradoxically, it also blows that cover. While I wholeheartedly agree with Hill (2012a, 2012b) about the role of educators in challenging neoliberal orthodoxy, sometimes the strategies that radical educators in the field of Education Studies employ must necessarily be consciously subversive, and covert in the ways in which they operate within the terrain of Higher Education in which they find themselves. On the one hand, the possibility of radical opposition to reactionary educational

and economic positions must always be present, and should be advertised as such. For example, the Education Studies programme on which I work has always taken a principled position to make every set of lecture and seminar notes, every module outline, every aspect of the programme open access online for anyone, student or non-student (or government minister or educational employer) to view: take a look. On the other hand, it has proved to be the case over many years that the genuinely counterhegemonic potential of the programme is only realised in the difficulty, the rigour, the closeness and passion of the interactions that occur at the level of the relations between student and tutors. And it is these relations, and the activity of discussion which occur within a space governed only or principally by the mutual respect of participants, not the ministerial gaze, or the purview of the employer. This is the 'cloak of darkness' to which I refer, the impermanent evasion of the gaze.

In the UK, the emergence of Education Studies as a discipline in the early 1990's was marked by my colleagues at the University of Winchester (Tubbs & Grimes, 2001) as characterised by a certain shallow 'professionalism' or 'vocationalism'. In such a field, the opportunities for genuinely unsettling engagements with educational apparatuses and experiences were rather few, and the prospect of developing lines of thought which seriously challenged the fairly well established neoliberal orthodoxy of Thatcherism, as perpetuated in the UK by the administrations of Major and Blair, had to be developed through partially covert operations. The emergence of Education Studies as a subject in itself, is thus associated with the critical subversion of the professional and vocational form, the conscious 'fracking' of the relation of theory to practice, the shattering of the monolithic theory-practice structure where this occurs as a function of capitalist ideological functioning. Critical Education Studies is necessarily covert if it is to succeed in effecting this fracturing without rendering itself 'unmarketable' within the wider sphere of higher educational circulation and distribution.

The project of retrieving Education Studies from the vocational and professional form, for Tubbs and Grimes (2001), was to recast the discipline as "*the philosophy of cultural critique*." (p.6). They claim "we believe that studying what is actually educational about anything that calls itself education can lead to a coherent identity for the academic study of education." (Ibid.) This lends Education Studies a rather remarkable status. If it is the unique role of Education Studies to establish what it means for something to be educational, then the relation of theory to practice in Education Studies becomes a terrain which is constantly troubled by the restless movement of thought, alighting and settling only to be called back into a relation with itself. Towards the end of the programme of critical Education Studies on which I work, students work very actively on the theory they have acquired in their second year¹, moving from "learning about theory to becoming theoretical in practice" (Tubbs and Grimes, 2001, p, 8). In order to be able to do this they need to have engaged in critical understanding and analysis of theory in the second year of their degree, "encountering various theoretical concepts and perspectives in which they lose the previously held world of experience and of concrete objects and begin to look behind those objects and events in order to see the underlying forces at work" (Tubbs and Grimes, p. 10). Although originally intended by its authors as an idealist model, there is clearly no reason why this process might not be understood in a more explicitly materialist manner as representing a development through

engagement of critical consciousness. Such consciousness takes the student beyond the immediacy of experience, of what Freire calls “magic consciousness” (Freire, 2005, p.39) with its simple apprehension of things and attribution to facts of a superior power by which they are controlled and over which the learner has no control. For critical consciousness “always submits that causality to analysis” and is “integrated with reality” (ibid.), understanding the “forces at work” in that which is educational as raced and gendered instances of structuring circuits of capitalist production, circulation and exchange of labour-capacity.

For Tubbs and Grimes, the movement in the thinking of the student from the theoretical to the applied (the second to the third year in the programme at Winchester) is cast in the Hegelian manner as repeating and living the experience of the aporia which divide theory from practice. However, set right side-up, and understood as a material activity – as work – this relation becomes not a 'metaphysical' one in the sense in which Tubbs and Grimes understand it, but a cosmological one. Philosophical insights into the experience of the educational significance and import of the relation of theory to practice become the movement of human brain and hands in a world that registers and reacts to this activity, as locked into processes of contradiction with the material, ecological and class forces in balance under current conditions, processes which are necessarily temporary and conditional features of the "struggle of contradictions" (Mao, 1990, p.197). The covert perturbation caused by the genuinely critical educational study of the seemingly fixed and given is generative of an unceasing vortex of such contradictions in productive possibility.

This relation of theory to practice is, of course, endlessly creative. The theoretical criticism undertaken within Education Studies in no *substitute* for activity; rather, it *is* activity, creating and resolving material contradictions.

The weapon of criticism certainly cannot replace criticism of the weapons; material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory, too, becomes a material force once it seizes the masses. (Marx, 1970, p.137)

Marx makes clear that the capacity of theory as the practice of the philosophy of cultural critique to become a material force in the activity of the 'masses' - that is in the material movement of brains and hands - depends upon its ability to go to the root of the problem of the condition of humanity in the world. This 'rootedness' is of course the true meaning of 'radical' theory. It is a truly critical Education Studies that takes theory to the material conditions of education, not merely to inform debate, nor yet simply to sow the seeds of doubt, but rather to unearth and challenge the very root meanings of hegemonic thought about that which is educational in culture and society. So, every Education Studies student is to become a philosopher, in Marx's sense, for "it is the philosopher in whose brain the revolution begins" (Ibid., p.138). For this reason, the critical Education Studies programme is profoundly philosophical, at root, asking the most fundamental questions and examining first principles. However, philosophy alone cannot change the world, "[r]evolutions require a passive element, a material basis. Theory will be realized in a people only in so far as it is the realization of

their needs." (Ibid.) Thus, to teach in hazy generalities or to abandon theory to the realms of abstraction is to deny students the spark of theory's hope for purposeful activity in their lives and loves. It is therefore essential for a radical Education Studies programme to bring to policy documents and curricula, to historical trends and current inequalities in education, the weapons of criticism that enable our students' thoughts-in-action to meet material needs and realise themselves on the terrain of classroom and workplace strugglesⁱⁱ.

The means by which criticism is developed as a conscious activity among students of education may differ significantly under different material conditions, but the degree to which the student herself begins to embody the practice of theory is the measure of the material force of the critique. Aporia, uncertainty and doubt are positive starting points, but effect little change in the world unless they are brought to bear beyond the seminar-room in the intellectual, discursive, and pedagogical labours of those who materialise critical Education Studies in their relationships and labours. The Hegelianism of Tubbs is set right-side-up in the registration of the philosophy of cultural critique as a material force in the being, the active capacity and the grip of those students who live it.

Student and teacher of any genuinely critical Education Studies necessarily conduct their activity in such a way that its disruptive potential remains partially concealed from the gaze of the capitalist state and of those employers, particularly of those within bourgeois state schooling apparatuses, who could not but regard such counterhegemonic agitation with a degree of ideological suspicion. Like the fated lovers in Dan Penn's classic song, "At the dark end of the street/ That's where we always meet/ Hiding in shadows where we don't belong/ Living in darkness to hide alone" (Penn, 1967). We meet in offices and seminar rooms, we enjoy our subversiveness; life is electric, charged, powerful. But we know it cannot go on forever. Such a life is a break from normal service, a rupture. Its meaning is derived in part from its transience. And, troublingly perhaps, that temporary life of study remains not enlightenment in the traditional sense, not a step into the light outside the cave, but a kiss stolen in the darkness – something taken illicitly, in the hope that parents and authorities will not know. The contradictions are conceived in this womb of darkness, because to expose them too early to the harsh light of economic reality would be to cause them to dissipate before they become realisable.

Insofar as the study of education can become critical *in itself*, it is disruptive of stability within the social and psychological order. So, to be able to act upon critical thinking in any meaningful way, a student of education must move from conspirator to activist, emerge from the cover of darkness to practice this disruption with others, as agitator. Such activity may occur through the vehicle of paid employment but of course this also raises questions about the very profound tensions between the capacity to labour produced in the critical thought engendered by Education Studies and the field of possibility of realisation of this labour capacity.

Was it worth it?

Of course our time in the shadows had to end, and after our brief affair, students return to the well-lit highways of everyday life, that short episode closed. In a life whose expectancy is now close to ninety years, their higher education used up less than a twentieth of that span. So, the question remains: all the stress, all the high emotion of this affair, was it really worth it?

The first response I can offer is, worth it for whom? Just recently, I have found myself in arguments with friends about higher education. That should come as no surprise. One of my closest friends is convinced that she, as a taxpayer, should not have had to fund the likes of Education Studies students in any way. She trained as a primary teacher – the first in her family to go to university – and remains satisfied that teachers and perhaps social workers (but not doctors and lawyers who get paid too much anyway) should be funded through their higher education by the state. There are some professionals that our society needs and taxpayers should foot the bill to ensure that we have sufficient numbers of them. Taxpayers, she says, are guaranteed a return on their investment, and trainees in these professions have attendance requirements, ensuring that taxpayers' money isn't wasted whilst they are at university. But Education Studies is different. It does not guarantee the taxpayer anything. We cannot and do not promise to construct our students into a particular kind of professional labourer. We cannot even promise to make them 'employable'.

Students contribute an investment of time and money in their education, and, until recently in the UK, so did the taxpayer. Those students who graduated in 2014 were amongst the last to have received such a subsidy. Education Studies students in the UK are now self-funding: in effect, my wages as a "critical, organic, public, socialist, transformative intellectual" (Hill, 2012a, p.100) activist and teacher are paid by their fees – eight or nine thousand pounds a year. Repayable at a commercial rate and with accommodation and living expenses, they will be paying back £7 a week for thirty years for my disruptive, subversive labour. Quite right, my friend says. They choose to do something useless for three years, let them pay for it; they should have been paying for it all along.

So, prior to the introduction of changes in the UK fees regime in 2012, was it all worth it – that Education Studies programme of critical consciousness-raising – for those taxpayers who did not themselves attend university? This is not a straightforward question to answer. Let's pose the question again, this way: was the Education Studies student's period at university worth it for society as a whole, for the 'public good'? If yes, then there would be a justifiable reason for it to be at least part funded from general taxation (though, of course the inverse is not true - those schemes claimed to be in the 'public good' like the replacement for the Trident nuclear missile system, or the ongoing war in Afghanistan, are not necessarily justifiable, by any means). The onus, then, would be on those of us in the academic community, academics and students, our graduates, to justify to 'the public' their contribution towards our continued existence. Let us imagine for a moment that the argument is not already lost. Let us imagine that in England there is still the possibility that the government – the taxpayer – will go some

way towards funding students of Education Studies. Unlike the system of Ofsted-driven teacher training, we have remained in the shadows since our inception. As the twentieth century rolled into the twenty first, we in Education Studies, like many in the arts and humanities have retained our mysterious cloak of darkness and we have often seemed to believe that it would be beneath us to justify our existence. But now the penetrating daylight of fiscal accountability is creeping in on us: “They’re gonna find us, they’re gonna find us, they’re gonna find us someday...” (Penn, 1967). On one side, the response of the academic bureaucracy has been to talk in terms of the immediate contribution to the public good of community interest company spin offs and volunteering, of community work. Like many other institutions, my own is increasingly moving towards accrediting this kind of activity: a kind of national service scheme with assignments thrown in. This is an attempt to show that here and now, students are useful. On the other side, in Education Studies, we sometimes talk as if criticality, living with/in contradiction, 'knowing thyself' are both ends in themselves *and* of such societal value that they demand public funding.

Many of us have agonised over this. People make choices which may or may not be in the public interest for a set of personal reasons which others cannot fathom. One person may have a minimal income or survive on benefits, but chooses to have five children. Another may decide to undertake an undergraduate course of study (in Education Studies, say) which is, by any practical measure, useless. And *deliberately so*. In each case and many others besides, the extent to which society is able to support the inevitably varied and sometimes seemingly bizarre free choices of its members is the measure of its civility. We may not like some people’s choices, but with a range of caveats that we need not discuss here, we should in principle support them *through general taxation*; this is some sort of application of the dictum, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” (Marx, 1996, p.205). And, anticipating objections that such arrangements encourage laziness, I am reminded also of Stonewall’s great slogan, “some people are gay, get over it!”. Well, some people are lazy, get over it; some people are just curious, get over it; some people work harder than is healthy and some want more than they can afford, and so on. It has forever been thus, and the new “nudge politics” or the punitive politics of scapegoating are not likely to do anything about it, not under capitalism at least. Both carrots and sticks are for donkeys: if we want humans to work and to act responsibly then we need to treat them as fully human, which means they need to act of their own free will under conditions they play a part in shaping, as critical agents, not stunted by ‘magical consciousness’. But, my friend would say, that’s not the real world. No indeed! It is the world that lingers in the darkness where lovers and conspirators meet, and that sometimes even clings to the shadows in the corners of Education Studies seminar rooms.

But I recognise that the masses of the country of the United Kingdom are not on my side. Indeed, over recent years the published results of the annual Social Attitudes Survey shows that public opinion has hardened very significantly against redistribution of wealth, and against benefit claimants (NatCen, 2012). There has been much comment about the resurgence of the idea of the 'undeserving poor', and the 'undeserving' more generally. The great African-Caribbean writer, Franz Fanon recalled a lecturer at university telling him in the

1940's, "Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you" (Fanon, 2008, p.92). I have always likewise said to my students, hitherto in receipt of public moneys, whenever you hear anyone abuse the *undeserving*, pay attention, because they are talking about *you* Education Studies, arts and humanities students. You invited the label of 'undeserving' by your choice, so you must either challenge it or live with it. I continue to defend the right of people to make well-informed bad (or at least uneconomical) choices, and to redeem themselves, and to fail again. And again. But I increasingly find myself also needing to find additional ways to defend my belief that, as far as society as a whole goes, Education Studies is worth it. I believe that if sufficiently radical, Education Studies makes possible the co-creation of the conditions which might allow some to make well-informed *good* choices in the light of the critical examination of experience, balance of forces, policy. This is the question of the *responsibility* which being an Education Studies graduate confers and I will return to this at the end.

Like any labourer, our graduates sell their capacity to work on a market whose fluctuations are well beyond their own control. That means, in good times, they may be able to use an Upper Second or a First Class degree as leverage to raise their wage a little when offering their labour capacity on the open market, and in terms of securing employment in the state education sector, the grade numbers still remain very significant. However, for all students, recession "puts a curb on their pretentious" (Marx, 1990, p.792) and Education Studies graduates joining the "active army of labour" (ibid.) often grudgingly accept a consequential reduction in the value of their labour capacity, good degree or not. A crucial aspect of this variability in the value of their degree as labour capacity-by-proxy is the size of the reserve army of labour, which weighs heavily upon their ambitions. At the time of writing, nearly a quarter of young people between the age of 16 and 25 are unemployed across the entire European Union (European Commission, 2013)! For the most part, over the last few years we have produced more graduates than there are 'graduate' jobs. That is, our education system is 'over-schooling'. This may be a particular contemporary form of overproduction crisis, an overproduction of intellectual labour capacityⁱⁱⁱ. One might think that a solution to this problem for the bourgeois state would be to either draw back from mass credentialism all together, or to begin to redefine the meaning of degrees in terms of 'wellbeing' indices or 'public goods' and to consequently lower expectations of a direct correspondence between degree ownership and labour value. Indeed, as some commentators (Ainley and Allen, 2013, p.4) have recently remarked, in a context where the employers' demand for skills has become less important than the structural absence of jobs for youth, the role and function of all higher education is indeed being redefined. Ainley and Allen (2013) argue that continuation in education in the absence of employment prospects functions primarily as a means of social control and of producing 'personalised' and competitive attitudes among youth, rather than establishing new forms of correspondence between skills and employment. Whilst this is a persuasive argument in general, it is clearly not the case for Education Studies graduates - at least those on genuinely critical programmes - either that their time served in education has a disciplining reproductive effect (as we are discussing, I hope the effect will be quite the opposite), or that it has an entirely negligible effect upon their employment prospects. Although hugely complicated by the diversification and marketisation of the sector, for those

intending to move into teaching in UK state education, gatekeeping mechanisms which exclude from postgraduate initial teacher training those with degree classifications below lower second class honours, and de facto, below upper second class for primary and some subjects, mean that the correspondence between qualification and perceived capacity to perform this kind of work still largely pertains, and the increase in value of labour capacity-by-proxy derived from ownership of even a radical, critical Education Studies still holds^{iv}.

The central point, though, is that an Education Studies degree of a genuinely critical nature does not and cannot guarantee employment or employability, not under current conditions, and these are unlikely to change significantly in the near future. For my own graduates, a few return to the types of jobs they left to take up their studies. For others the degree marks a change of direction in their employment. For many, their career path after university starts with non-graduate employment such as teaching assistant work. Only around twenty percent of students on my programme consciously choose to cash in on the added value of their labour capacity by moving immediately into postgraduate teacher training. So, is a critical programme of Education Studies worth it in employability terms? In the long run, possibly; in the short term, the evidence from current UK KIS data (UNISTATS, 2013) hardly suggests an enormous boost in the value of our students' labour capacity. My friend, though, is certain, that there is not a sufficiently secure basis in social benefit accruing from enhanced employability to justify use of taxpayers' money on a radical and philosophical programme of Education Studies.

I can be quite certain that this next question is not going to win her or public opinion to my side. If it was not worth the investment as an experience of intellectual challenge – of learning – and if it was not worth it in employability terms, did it *change* this group of Education Studies students in some other sense? In this regard, I am convinced that the specific nature of Education Studies is far less important than some of us – perhaps Tubbs and Grimes (2001) – would like to believe. The content of the programme plays only a part in the transformation. Yes, transformation. Critical educators are very familiar with this process, the one that renders graduates wondering how they previously left so much unquestioned, and settled for relations in their lives that were so unequal. It is likely that *relatively* little of that has to do with the mainstays of our critical degree, Kant, Plato or Adorno, or even, whisper it, Marx. I have asked groups of my graduates, how many of them fell in love whilst on the degree, and how many split up, how many formed friendships which they thought would last until they are ninety. The results are entirely unsurprising and each student could, of course, have done any of these things without going to university at all, never mind taking a course of Education Studies. But, the material reality is that, as it happened, each did so under conditions which were at least in part shaped by the intellectual context of the programme, opening a space of uncertainty within which radical possibilities that might have hitherto seemed unthinkable could take root. Who they fell in love with, split up with, developed a friendship with or left behind cannot be wholly separated from the ways in which their ideas and thinking were changing through their (undercover) interaction with their 'organic' educators. But, should the general public pay for undergraduate students to fall in love, grow up, develop their politics, or become less certain?

I no longer have a clear cut answer. I used to say, yes, unequivocally, a civilised society must support its members in their individual endeavours through the distribution from each according to his ability to pay, to each according to his need to learn and grow. But, of course when Marx wrote of such an imperative he used it in reference to a "higher phase of communist society" (Marx, 1996, p.215). Under current conditions, we struggle to keep alive any vision of a better world. For the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, as for his forerunner Margaret Thatcher, there is no such thing as society – the so called 'big society' is a vacuum into which rush disparate and competing groups, Hobbes' "war...of every man against every man" (Hobbes, 1985, p. 185) – and in society's general absence, our personal growth is our own business and we should all have to pay for it: something closer to the contemporary visions of the American or Chinese 'dream'^{iv}. Under these conditions, do we really expect such a state to financially support institutions or programmes which breed dissent or uncertainty?

Here is the reality – and we must start always from the material conditions within which we find ourselves: over many years, intellectuals, students and activists have won a degree of academic freedom from the operation of the capitalist economy, from the state, and from their overarching ideological expressions. Now, in the absence of a prior wide-scale transformation in public-consciousness, including student-consciousness and expectation, full exposure to a free market fees-driven model of higher education *might* shut down radical, critical Education Studies programmes, unless we deliver on students' expectation of employability. And, as far as the market is concerned, academic freedom be damned (Nocella, Best, McLaren, 2009), it's 'all academic' anyway. So, we fight such a move. But, in order to do so, we need more in our critical arsenal than just the argument that taxpayers should support the undeserving seeker after enlightenment. Whilst we still have the chance, we should make the most of the case for responsibility borne by our students - call it the "return to the cave" if you like (Plato, 1973, p.281) I'm not referring only to those of our graduates who enter teaching as a consequence of honing their labour-capacity; what I am referring to is a more general sense of life-work agitation, an expansion of Rikowski's crucially important question for the critical educator, "[w]hat is the maximum damage I can do (given my biography, skills, talents and physical health, etc.) to the rule of capital?" (Rikowski, in McLaren, 2001, p.3) The teacher on a critical programme of Education Studies has a *responsibility to disrupt*, and this confers on graduates something similar. The acquisition of this responsibility by our students, during slow and rigorous engagement theory, and the painful experience of the application of theory to lived experience as an act of material realignment, gradually changes the motivations of many in relation to their own and others' education. Put like that, of course, this too might not appear a particularly attractive reason for a State to financially support Education Studies students! However, re-presented as a social responsibility to advance the common good, the fruits of our students' labours appear a less threatening set of outcomes, and more worthy of taxpayer support, even as the covert activity of counterhegemonic disturbance continues.

Marx wrestled with some of the same difficulties in drafting his 1866 resolution on child labour and education: given that the bourgeois state is inimically opposed to supporting critical education aimed at planting the seeds of revolution among the working class, what,

asked Marx, should be the approach of conscious workers and students to the state subsidy of such education? The argument for any public funding of critical higher education programmes should have regard for his answer. Marx resolves that among sections of the working class, there is a recognition that "children and juvenile workers must be saved from the crushing effects of the present system. This can only be effected by converting social reason into social force, and under given circumstances." (Marx, 1985, p.189) His argument repeats that of twenty-three years earlier, cited above, the realisation of theory as a motive force in history in the hands of the 'masses', now more clearly defined as the working class. Here, though, Marx is explicitly referring to educating working class children and youth, and, given current circumstances "[t]here exists no other method of doing so, than through general laws enforced by the power of the state" (Ibid.). So, what can be the justification for so supporting state powers and state education under a bourgeois order that seeks to crush critical educational opportunity? Marx's answer might be regarded as opportunistic. I prefer to think of it as subversive in the manner promoted here, a covert attempt to use state funds, acquired through progressive general taxation, to effect a change in the nature of the state itself, for so doing "the working class do not fortify governmental power. On the contrary, they transform that power, now used against them, into their own agency" (Ibid). The argument of course rehearses very familiar questions which have redounded down the years: those of the radical or socialist's attitude towards the bourgeois state, and its capacity for advancing working class interests even under capitalism. Insofar as concessions have been won in this regard, every defence of the critical capacity of any even partially state funded Education Studies programme represents an act of subversion, to transform state power into potential class agency.

Conclusion

My own programme of Education Studies is critical to the extent that it enables students to play an active part in labouring at and producing the outcomes of their own education. But it remains to be made clear exactly what the student-as-producer is producing. Mike Neary's important work (Neary 2010, 2012) actualises student-as-producer with great determination. But, what I would like to add to Neary's formulation is that, for the student working in Education Studies as the philosophy of cultural critique, the principal product of her labours is *herself*. Student as conscious producer of herself is the aim of the critical Education Studies degree. The active intervention of the graduate in the world of course signifies a wider process of social production, but the condition for the possibility of such activity is the student's active production of their own capacity to act, of their intellectual labour capacity. Despite his admirable and provocative promotion of communist revolutionary science in the academy, and his avowal that "political subjectivity is not regarded as detrimental to the research process but is, in fact, the essential objective reality out of which practical critical knowledge is derived" (Neary, 2012, p.3), perhaps this aspect of the central role of workers' critical self-construction has been underplayed by Neary. It is not possible to overestimate its significance to those cultural workers of the self who struggle at the chalkface of theory.

Was it worth it? Maybe only if each student, now, as you read, is more conscious of herself, of who she is as the product of her own work, one year, two years, ten years after her degree; and if she does something with who she has become, bearing the responsibilities of her higher education seriously. Would it not be a shame – can I even say a betrayal of those who won and defended academic freedom – if such students had developed both an understanding of the operation of, say, gender roles in schools and a frame of mind which was informed by that understanding, and a grasp of the material context into which to place these relations, and they *did nothing*. In a sense, specific knowledge is of the least importance. The student might recall little of the detail of some theorist from their degree, and let's face it, few people really carry with them the words of Rousseau or Gramsci in their everyday life. But if she is aware of the way in which she has been changed by the whole experience, then the graduate of a critical Education Studies programme carries with her until she is ninety something of the rewards of the investment made. If her views on disability, on social inclusion, on immigration, on the environment, on capitalism, or human nature are different now from those she held before her degree in Education Studies, *but* she acts as if *nothing had changed*, what then? What if she carries on as if she could ignore that knowledge, that understanding, what she has become? Then, no it was not worth it. Not for her, though perhaps for employer who gets a walking talking wage-earning simulacrum of the real human. In the words of another fine song,

“It's not just what you're born with
It's what you choose to bare
It's not how big your share is
It's how much you can share
It's not the fights you dreamed of
It's those you really fought
It's not what you've been given
It's what you do with what you've got”
(Kahn, 1985)

So, the responsibility and we might add intellectual maturity I speak of is to “have courage to use your own understanding!” (Kant, 1990, p.83) Remembering, of course, that “immaturity is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it” (Ibid.). Sometimes it is our responsibility to be awkward, obstructive, disobedient. To have the very great courage it takes to act on small instances of injustice, to refuse to participate in oppressive or alienating activities. Education Studies can and must fulfil its potential to realise this responsibility in the materialisation of theory in the grasp of the masses of our students.

So, we met under the cover of darkness and conducted our affair. Away from the gaze of employers and parents and ministers. And when it ended, as we always knew it must, we came away knowing that we couldn't be the same again, neither teacher nor student: whilst some pretend that they can carry on as they were, for many the question of whether it was all worth it has acquired a responsibility and meaning realised in action.

ⁱThe manner in which the University of Winchester Education Studies programme was structured formulated its tripartite development on models deriving both from Kant and from Hegel's three fold model of philosophical experience, consisting of immediacy, mediation and spirit, each of these corresponding to a year of study. In the first, each student conducts an analysis of the particularities of experience, and an encouragement to relate these to their structuring features of class, gender, race, ability/disability and sexual preference; these are placed in historical context and regarded through the lens of Kantian universal imperatives. The difficult second year introduces students to the demands of theorizing and invites them to do so using, centrally, Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx, and others.

ⁱⁱ For a sense of the ways in which my own programme asks students to critically apply theory to a wide range of educational concerns, the modules archived on the open access website <http://www2.winchester.ac.uk/edstudies/courses/courselist.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ This should hardly be a problem, as in a society driven by need not profit and in which an individual might find rich cultural outlets through which to express their intellectual capacities, the absence of specific forms of intellectual wage labour would not so much matter.

^{iv} This is not to suggest that there is not a real possibility of a collapse in the educational currency, a devaluation of degrees with the consequent inflationary pressure on qualifications. Here we in the UK lag a little behind the USA, South Korea and elsewhere in this respect, where an undergraduate degree alone may not confer sufficient value-by-proxy, and a masters qualification is necessary for the demonstration of the requisite 'employability'.

^v Unless, that is, such growth coincides with priority areas of economic need such as engineering in which case the government might just part-fund one's future.

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