

Constructing a Critical Democratic Education: Is it possible?

A critical review essay of 'Philosophical Scaffolding for the Construction of Critical Democratic Education' By Richard A. Brosio (Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York 2000, 365 pages ISBN 0-8204-3939-8)

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Abstract

It is the intention of this essay to examine Richard Brosio's proposition that, on the basis of a conflict of imperatives between capitalism and democracy in schooling and in the absence of universally agreed principles of establishing truth certainty, educators, and citizens generally, must engage in philosophical discourse as a means of constructing a justifiable and publicly defensible philosophy of education as scaffolding for the construction of an education which is critical and democratic for democratic empowerment, social justice and respect for diversity. To this end Brosio offers a pedagogical text in which he demonstrates the process from the perspectives of pragmatism, educational progressivism and political liberalism.

Keywords: Education policy and practice, Public Schooling, Democracy, Capitalism, Critique, Pragmatism, Educational Progressivism, Liberalism, Philosophy of Education, Existentialism, Postmodernism, Politics of Identity

The question I seek to address, with the aid of a Marxian imminent critique directed towards analysing his presuppositions, is whether Brosio's project is possible without first mounting a rigorous critical analysis of the imperatives of the contemporary capitalist market economy and its totalising impact on schools in particular and society in general.

The critical review concludes that Brosio's project is possible if he and others can 'develop' rather than 'construct' a theory that studies the imperatives of and the relationship between capitalism and democracy, a task which would entail an epistemological and philosophical shift on his part.

Introduction

On the face of it Brosio's book presents itself as a deceptively simple manual directed towards educators and ordinary citizens 'who are interested in education for democratic empowerment, social justice, respect for diversity and the possibilities for a more "caring" school and society' (p. XI). It promises a holistic educational experience in how to become engaged in democratically formulating a philosophy of education as a necessary preliminary towards constructing a critical democratic education. In these critical times for education such a project could not fail to appeal particularly to the cohort of hardpressed educators at the chalkface of the most vulnerable sector of US education, K-12 public schools.

Underlying the simplicity, however, is a wealth of scholarship and teaching experience which has led Brosio to formulate and adopt a particular philosophical, methodological and pedagogical approach as a means of fulfilling his aims. It is therefore important not only for his project but also for the educators and citizens towards whom his book is directed to test the adequacy of his approach for the task he envisages.

It must be recognised that Brosio's book has a great deal to recommend it as a positive attempt to provide educators in the frontline, as it were, with the analytical tools to challenge capitalism's colonisation of education. However, its focus on constructing what is essentially an ideal, yet to be realised, in terms both of democracy and education is likely to have the negative effect, however unintentionally, of supporting and maintaining the status quo without a rigorous critique not only of capitalist market conditions, particularly within the US, but also of his philosophical approach and the theories on which he draws as scaffolding.

Such a critique, of course, is beyond the scope of this review and belongs to a much more extensive series of analyses. But in raising the question whether on the basis of

his presuppositions Brosio's construction of a critical democratic education is possible. I offer the following immanent critique as a contribution towards this much wider and important task. The critique is divided into three sections: Brosio's philosophical orientations; his method and pedagogical approach; followed by an immanent critique of his project.

Brosio's Philosophical Orientations

It is evident that while Brosio identifies the incompatibility between the imperatives of capitalism and democracy as a major problem, particularly for educators as articulated through education policy and practice, the main focus of his book is to provide a manual which demonstrates for the benefit of his readers how to engage in philosophical discourse in constructing a philosophy of education which is socially acceptable for the construction of an education along the lines Brosio proposes.

The main priority, as Brosio perceives it therefore, is to assist his readers not in the first instance to analyse the impact of capitalism's imperatives which have shaped the circumstances of their work, but rather to construct a democracy and an education congruent with it not only as an alternative to the oppression, inequality and discrimination which characterises much of schooling today, but also respectively as a forum and vehicle in and through which people are empowered to debate and reach a consensus on what the issues of general social importance, such as those experienced in K-12 schooling, are and how they might be resolved for the improvement of society as a whole.

As Brosio recognises, however, if his project is to 'get off the ground' two interrelated issues need to be settled: one is to prove that claims to truth certainty, particularly those on which the dominant philosophical framework informing and legitimating current public school policy and practice is based, can no longer be sustained in a heterogeneous society like that in the US; the other is to formulate a philosophical frame of reference which has the possibility of negotiating a way through the claims of truth certainty associated with orthodox and authoritarian principles on the one hand, and on the other, claims to truth uncertainty which can lead to relativism and to a fatalistic outlook, the outcome of which is likely to leave the status quo unchallenged.

For Brosio such a philosophical framework can be found in philosophical pragmatism, educational progressivism and political liberalism as a middle way in which people can actively pursue change without recourse to truth claims in order to validate their interpretive and theoretical propositions. The methodology that follows from this philosophical orientation depends on a philosophically literate population of citizens versed in the conventions of philosophical discourse and the principles of the scientific method of inquiry.

These are the parameters in which Brosio offers his book as a contribution towards fulfilling at least some of these requirements. His justification is that in a society in which there is little agreement on epistemological and ethical issues it is incumbent upon all citizens to do philosophy as a means of constructing a philosophy of education for instance, in such a way that it attracts wide acceptance and can be translated into 'liberatory, sober and responsible plans for action in schools and societies' (p. V).

These features of Brosio's project tend to situate him within what Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995, p. 256, 258) describes as the new pluralism of the left, a perspective which emphasises diversity and difference within an all-inclusive notion of democracy and which in a postmodern world all old certainties have been dissolved. This new pluralism or politics of identity, according to Wood, aspires to a democratic community which unites diverse human beings and acknowledges, encourages and celebrates all kinds of differences and identities, equally and without prejudice or privilege from gender to class, from ethnicity or race to sexual preference without allowing these differences to become relations of domination and oppression. Yet, in Brosio's position there is a touch of what may be called historical liberalism as opposed to historical materialism, if by that term is meant something that is dynamic in the same sense as historical materialism but still remaining within the fold of liberalism.

By way of demonstration Brosio builds his philosophy of education for the benefit of his readers by incorporating into his thesis chapter by chapter the categories which are intended to constitute the scaffolding for his project. In his introductory chapter he sets out the blueprint modelled on the ancient Greek democratic experience, and then having established the basis of his epistemology in Chapter 2, he draws on 'Various

Reds' (Ch. 3) for the category of criticism because he deems it 'central to critical democracy, as well as to the education necessary to achieve it' (p. 79). He follows this in Chapter 4 by including categories largely drawn from Dewey which are constitutive of his conceptual framework and method. In the rest of the chapters he draws categories from existentialist philosophy (Ch. 5); philosophical and religionist liberationism (Ch. 6); the politics of identity (Ch. 7); and lastly, from postmodernism and the Greens (Ch. 8).

The centrepiece of this architecture is reserved for Chapter 4 in which Brosio outlines the principles of pragmatism, Dewey's educational progressivism and his scientific method of inquiry on which he, Brosio, bases his conceptual framework. The aim is to establish 'a widely accepted method with which to solve societal problems in a country where enduring orthodoxies could be enforced only by proselytizing or force' (p. 124).

Characteristic of Brosio's methodology is his eclectic approach of incorporating into his project as scaffolding a range of concepts and ideas, the original definitions of which within their former philosophical orientations may not be compatible with his project, but are justified on the basis that they reinforce his philosophical construction (p. 72). It is a methodology that is exemplified in his claim in the opening of Chapter 4 that there is a close kinship between Marx's notion of praxis for instance and Dewey's notion of scientific inquiry as a problem solving strategy without recognising the faultlines which exist between their two philosophical approaches.

From a Marxian standpoint Dewey's method is useful as a 'bandaid' solution which does not get to recognise and deal with eliminating the basic causes of the problems it seeks to solve, namely capitalism's social class structures. It therefore lacks the dynamic force of praxis for transformative change, if by praxis is meant critique in the Marxian sense. This is mainly because of Dewey's pragmatism and liberalism which leads him to reject class struggle as the agent of social and educational transformation, although as Brosio (p. 123) point out, he did understand 'the need for constant reconstruction of practices, processes, institutions, and of status quos themselves'.

There is therefore a world of difference between the approaches of Dewey's reconstructionism, or reformism, and Marx's transformative or revolutionary

historical materialism which cannot be satisfactorily bridged without a Marxian, that is an immanent critical analysis, rather than merely referring to ‘various scholarly sources’. A critique of this kind shows that the works of Dewey and Marx are indeed correlative but in the structural rather than the philosophical sense in so far as they express the two dialectically related sides of the capital-wage labour relation.

The rest of Chapter 4, apart from a critical evaluation of Dewey’s legacy, is devoted to outlining the principles of the latter’s progressive, pragmatist and liberal interpretations of the scientific method (p. 129) which roughly parallels Brosio’s own philosophical principles.

A key figure in the protest movement against the dominant authoritarian tradition of US schooling, Dewey accorded the scientific method, broadly conceived, a central place for a democratically empowering educational philosophy and practice and for democratic politics in the wider society, according to Brosio.

Basing himself on Enlightenment principles Dewey concluded that in view of the failure of the quest for truth certainty and the breakdown of commonly held meanings and values in a multicultural society, ‘without a common frame of reference—one that needed to be democratically constructed—it would be difficult, if not impossible, to solve public problems’ (p. 125). In these circumstances Dewey felt the need to construct a method based on the demonstrative power of the scientific method, and to constitute a means of deciding among competing claims and counterclaims which ideas warranted democratic support.

An important aspect of the method, according to Brosio, is the evaluation of the consequences as a way of gauging the desired effectiveness of the resolution of problems, so that according to the rule of pragmatism, if H represents a concept, then the meaning of H is whatever consequences result from putting H into action. ‘No consequences, no meaning!’ However, this does not mean that many ideas and propositions, which cannot be translated into action, are not true. It simply means that they are not meaningful. In the absence of the verities of truth claims ‘meaningfulness and warranted assertibility are all we can claim in the human condition’ (p. 131).

For Brosio (pp. 132-134), these principles constitute the basis of Dewey's progressive philosophy of education which is encapsulated in the slogan, 'We learn by doing'. In this schema education is the reconstruction of mere happening or occurrence into experience, a reconstruction that is centred on the scientific method of inquiry and critical reflection on whether the consequences of action taken are beneficial to the individuals concerned and the problem solved. In this way human beings can partially direct the course of future events. It is therefore important if people are to become empowered, that they acquire competence in the use of the scientific method. This is what progressive education is all about, according to Brosio. Optimally, the success of the task is dependent on the existence of a democratically structured, supportive community which, on Dewey's own admission, is almost impossible to achieve under capitalism.

Brosio goes on to point out that progressive education was part of a wider liberal reform movement which, influenced by Enlightenment beliefs that the human condition could be improved through widespread intelligent reform of both society and the schools, sought 'to reconstruct the "ideals of moral equality and individual worth" in the revolutionary development of the capitalist political economy' (p. 141). In this context Dewey believed that the best means of social reconstruction are educational because 'through education society can formulate its own purposes, can organize its own means and resources, and thus shape itself with definiteness and economy in the direction in which it wishes to move' (p. 143).

There is no doubt that Dewey's ideas have been influential in shaping educational reform in the US and elsewhere particularly in the post WWII era. However, since the 1970s any gains that might have been made are currently under threat, and it is in these circumstances that Brosio's book can be seen as an extension of the Dewey project.

Brosio's Method and Pedagogical Approach

In his introductory chapter Brosio sets out his methodological and pedagogical approaches. While drawing on Dewey's methodological categories Brosio's method is more inclusive, encompassing '*interpretative, normative and critical perspectives on education*' (p. 16), and tends to move somewhat beyond Dewey's pragmatic

empiricism. Brosio claims that his method is foundational not only in the sense of being radical, that is, getting to the root of things, but also in the sense that such a form of inquiry is based on the claims ‘that complex phenomena can be explained by reference to base/foundational reality and causality’ (p. 343). There is no hint in the text that Brosio’s foundationalism is a derivative of Marx’s form of critique as expressed in *Capital I* (1954, p. 28). But in specifying some of the issues which, for Brosio, foundational and philosophy of education inquiry must address, such as the reproduction of societal and school stratification to take one example, it is clear that these issues have also occupied Marxist educators, critical theorists and adherents to critical pedagogy.

One other notable feature of Brosio’s methodology is his discursive method which he amply demonstrates as he formulates his thesis. The logic, or in pragmatic terms ‘intelligence’, of his arguments is prefaced on his epistemological and political presuppositions and entails the need publicly to defend them in an attempt to persuade his readers that his point of view is justifiable. In this way his arguments in a sense acquire objectivity.

In support of his arguments he draws on empirical evidence with reference to historical antecedents—the case of Athenian democracy for instance—and a wide range of supportive scholarly arguments in an attempt to justify his thesis and to make it politically, socially and philosophically meaningful as well as universally significant. Issues today which Brosio claims to have been perennial concerns, throughout the history of Western civilisation at least, include the struggle for human dignity and justice (pp. 11-12); the epistemological question of truth certainty; and the debate concerning who in a democracy is or is not qualified to rule.

In terms of method Brosio’s thesis, as already pointed out, is characterised by an eclectic approach as he seeks to incorporate and synthesise a wide range of ideas which, taken within their own contexts, are not necessarily compatible. This may account for some of the contradictions which appear in his text. The stated reason for his choice of philosophers and thinkers is that they belong to a secular tradition which rejects epistemological certainty and that their ideas are among ‘the most promising scaffolding for critical democratic education’ (p. 72). There are also pedagogical reasons. His reference to a wide range of scholarly views is also intended as ‘a

heuristic tool to encourage the reader to inquire deeper, more holistically, and further' (p. XII).

Whatever his intentions a key category which is central to his philosophical inquiry and discourse is 'critique' as a means of reflecting on and evaluating ideas, references to historical antecedents and the consequences of planned action in terms of their possibilities for the realisation of his project. It is the factor which is designed to assist his readers to work their way through the range of philosophical arguments which he presents in his book.

In terms of his construction metaphor Brosio's readers are apprenticed, as it were, to become competent not only in engaging in 'difficult intellectual labor', but also in learning 'some tools of the trade' (p. 34). The justification for this approach is that in societies which claim to be democratic it is the responsibility of all educators and citizens working towards social improvement to participate actively in doing philosophy 'in order to deal with the problems and possibilities of intellectual professional, and overall civic life' (p. 15). Towards this end Brosio's book is meant to assist readers in experiencing some representative arguments that have developed around key, historical, philosophical issues about schools, education and society as well as to provide some background information as readers prepare to carry out the tasks he sets for them in developing their philosophies of education whether as part of a group or as individuals.

The first important tasks appear in his introductory chapter. In the first task readers are invited to organise their thoughts, beliefs, and intellectual positions around two intersecting epistemological and ethical continua. Brosio proposes for instance that epistemologically we are situated along a continuum or axis that is 'anchored at one end by the certainty claimed by revelatory religion and/or idealist philosophy, to realism, pragmatism, existentialism, poststructuralism, constructivism, postmodernism, cynicism and perhaps nihilism on the other end' (p. 13). The purpose of the exercise is that having identified their epistemological and ethical positions they have to determine how they are going to go about grounding their education philosophy and practice in an era when many people find it difficult to adhere to 'orthodox and/or absolutist positions with regard to ethical/moral problems' (p. 14).

The second task requires readers to explain how a K-12 teacher might find it difficult to satisfy the incompatible imperatives of the capitalist economy and democracy where capitalism demands competent but not necessarily critical workers whereas democracy requires critical, broadly educated persons ‘who have the ability to analyze the socioeconomic and political systems in which they live’ (p. 17).

In the rest of the chapter and in an attempt not only to connect theory to the problems and possibilities of education and schooling (p. 21), but also to encourage readers to familiarise themselves with important conversations (p. 15), Brosio sets out some of the issues with which educators are concerned in schooling in the US. Educators must, he emphasises, ‘come to grips with underlying problems such as the reproduction of the present society and school stratification’ (p. 16).

Perhaps most importantly, Brosio goes on, teachers must see themselves as classed workers, part of the vast majority of citizens and part of the complexity that constitutes other identities such as race, ethnicity and gender. As class conscious workers they should enter into broad umbrella-coalitions with other class conscious workers because this strategy provides the best chance of altering the conflicting imperatives of capitalism and democracy. He nominates K-12 public schools as possible sites where the democratic imperative can prevail but only when ‘synchronized action takes place in schools and elsewhere and especially in the capitalist-dominated economy and... [national government]’ (p. 17) (square brackets in the original).

In a concluding section Brosio returns to the main pedagogical task, how would readers go about defending the values of democracy, social justice and diversity ‘in the possible absence of cognitive certainty, objectivity, and/or *terra firma* upon which to stand’ (p. 35). He also summarises the arguments he maintains throughout the book, that there exists a secular tradition which demands that the values of democracy, social justice and diversity must be sought by those who see ‘reality as complex, uncertain, and in need of human interference and ultimate shaping’ (p. 35). He supports this statement with reference to the views of intellectual workers, writers and activists whom he features in his book, views which refers us to his epistemology, that reality is not objective data; that it is neither external to the knower nor unaffected by attempts of human beings to describe and master it if only imperfectly and

temporarily; that reality is in fact shaped by human action; that theory can and must construct a plausible interpretation of social conditions in order to go forward toward change and improvement; that praxis is possible; and that reconstruction is made possible by democratic actors who must see themselves as subjects.

These arguments confirm the important role Brosio's epistemology plays in the construction of his philosophy of education. On this account it is basic to an understanding of his conceptual framework; to the meanings attached to the categories he employs; and in determining the effectiveness of his methodology and pedagogy for the realisation of his project particularly in relation to the totalising effects of capitalism as a social system and its impact on education. An immanent critique, that is one which is not externally applied, must therefore begin with an analysis of his epistemology and its presuppositions.

An Immanent Critique of Brosio's Project

A critique of Brosio's epistemological presuppositions inevitably returns us to the philosophical debates of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century concerning the criteria on which truth certainty could be established. Knowledge by definition requires, of course, objective validation but the criteria on which that validation is established have been the subject of contention since the genesis of philosophical discourse. Factors which have influenced the determinations of the issue of criteria have always been related to socio-political conditions and concerns as well as principles of logic.

With the onset of the modern era the problem had reached crisis point as evidenced in the clash between the rationalists and the empiricists largely because scientific inquiry in an emerging capitalist industrial society demanded empirically based validation. Immanuel Kant (see Hartnack 1968) sought to resolve the epistemological issue by proposing a revolutionary approach. Rather than reference to either rationalist criteria or objective data he claimed that reality can be known and become meaningful to us only if it conforms to certain categories which are integral to our cognitive processes. This meant that we cannot know reality as it is in itself apart from our mental constructs, a conclusion which, while it left the debate unresolved, nevertheless

opened the way for a new formulation of the problem under the rubric of truth certainty vs uncertainty.

On the basis of epistemological uncertainty secular philosophies, including pragmatism, have sought reform by challenging not only the truth claims of epistemological orthodoxies, but also 'grand narratives' such as that presented by historical materialism and Marxism. However, if the truth uncertainty claims are followed through to their logical conclusion the result is relativism and a fatalistic acceptance that capitalism, warts and all, is all there is, a result which of course serves to consolidate for instance the position of those who subscribe to neo-liberal ideology.

In order to avoid this possibility while at the same time challenging the claims of truth certainty Brosio seeks to bridge the gap by adopting a middle position and offering a synthesis of ideas and concepts which he hopes to strengthen by including the notion of critique drawn from 'various Reds'. but which nevertheless does not resolve the truth criteria problem. Instead in order to provide some basis on which truth questions can be determined Brosio shifts the onus of 'proof' as a matter of logic to the socio-political arena.

In Brosio's schema, as we saw, propositions must be justified and publicly defended in a social situation where consensus on important issues is difficult to achieve. Epistemological validation is therefore subject to the arbitration of the democratic 'will of the people', which constitutes an aggregation, if you will, of individual subjective volitions and judgments. Validation therefore is based on socio-political criteria which are variable, mutable and situational, but which above all within the existing social relations of capitalism are subject to differentials in the exercise of power.

Depending on the social relations in some ideal democratic universe, which has yet to be realised, socio-political criteria may be a viable alternative, but in circumstances in which capitalist market relations are embedded in all aspects of social life, shifting the burden of 'proof' to the political arena exposes epistemological validation to manipulation either for personal advantage or in the interests of supporting ruling class ideologies. For example, it provides ammunition for the advocates of capitalism, including propagandists, 'spin doctors' attached to politicians and corporations, and

neo-liberal ideologues, to name a few, by means of which they are able to distort reality and to discredit opponents for their own ends in the name of democracy.

It also has the effect of undermining the necessary solidarity and concerted political attempts seriously to challenge the unfettered rule of market capitalism. In fact, by maintaining ideological divisions over the truth question and the social divisions and inequality of which they are an expression, it can be shown (see Raduntz, forthcoming) that capitalism actually requires and partly flourishes on such divisions. In this divide-and-rule situation it is possible to strike a balance not only between ideological opponents so that one side does not gain traction over the other, but also it might be said, between the imperatives of capitalism and democracy.

Under these circumstances it would be virtually impossible to establish wide consensus as a necessary condition in Brosio's terms to settle questions of truth certainty without working towards changing the nature of capitalism's class relations and establishing the kind of democracy Brosio advocates.

On epistemological grounds these considerations would seem to raise concerns regarding the epistemological adequacy of Brosio's project, in fact his project might even support the status quo. It also calls into question whether Brosio's education construction is sufficiently dynamic to bridge the epistemological divide and so become an authentic force for transformative change. If this is the case it is likely to forfeit any hope of widespread consensus on political grounds alone in the foreseeable future. This prognosis can be confirmed in an examination of the major categories which constitute Brosio's notion of critical democratic education.

Democracy is a major category for Brosio not only as a social formation on which his project depends for its realisation, but also as a means of achieving widespread consensus. In this regard the Athenian participatory form of democracy offers a model because the category refers not only to rule by the people as citizens, but also to a particular set of social relations in which the citizens whether artisans or aristocrats—apart from women, slaves and indigenous people—were economically independent. What this signifies, as Wood (1995, p. 240ff) demonstrates, is that the meaning and function of categories such as democracy are shaped by the social relations of the

society in which they operate. The US form of representative democracy is a case in point, a form of democracy which has now become almost universally established.

On the surface US representative democracy is meant to convey the notion that it entails rule by the people in what is considered to be a largely egalitarian society. In fact, according to Wood (1995, p. 219), as it is drafted in the US Constitution, the representative form of democracy is designed to favour the propertied oligarchy. As a consequence, because the 'will of the people' is filtered through representatives who are deemed most qualified to do so, the 'people' are distanced not only from the political sphere but also geographically from the centre of federal power. The 'people' are no longer defined, like the Athenian *demos*, as a community of democratically participating citizens but as a disaggregated collection of private individuals whose public aspect is represented by a distant central state.

The redefinition of the idea of democracy is, on this account (Wood 1995, pp. 224, 233), related to the social structure of capitalism in which the universality of political rights leaves property relations and the power of appropriation intact. A form of democracy therefore has been constituted in which formal equality of political rights has a minimal effect on the inequalities and relations of domination and exploitation in other spheres, particularly the sphere of the capitalist economy which has acquired a life of its own 'completely outside the ambit of citizenship, political freedom, or democratic accountability' so that inequality and exploitation can exist side by side with political equality and democratic rights.

Nor does the liberal form of democracy improve the situation because, for Wood (1995, p. 234-235), it leaves untouched vast areas of our daily lives which are not subject to democratic accountability but are governed by the imperatives of the capitalist market. This is because liberalism does not recognise the market as a sphere of power and coercion but conceives it as an opportunity, a sphere of freedom and choice, which may require regulation in order to ameliorate the harmful effects of its freedom but without jeopardising that freedom. As Wood goes on, 'In other words, in the conceptual framework of liberal democracy, we cannot really talk, or even *think*, about freedom *from* the market...as a kind of empowerment, a liberation from compulsion, an emancipation from coercion and domination'.

In the contemporary economic situation where the capitalist economy appears out of control and virtually unstoppable in its global reach and in its penetration into all spheres of social life, Wood's arguments are especially apposite and worth elaborating for the purposes of this critique for they highlight what is truly problematic in the relationship between the imperatives of capitalism and democracy in education.

The very condition, she argues (1995, p. 235), that makes it possible for us to define democracy as we do in modern liberal capitalist societies 'is the separation and enclosure of the economic sphere and its invulnerability to democratic power. Protecting that invulnerability has even become an essential criterion of democracy'. It is a definition which allows us 'to invoke democracy *against* the empowerment of the people in the economic sphere', even 'to invoke democracy in defence of a *curtailment* of democratic rights' in other spheres 'if that is what is needed to protect property and the market against democratic power'.

It is against the domestication of the notion of democracy in its representative and liberal forms that Brosio's notion of it must be measured for it becomes evident that unless every person under capitalism can gain economic independence to some degree there is little hope of reclaiming a democracy that roughly conforms to the Athenian experience. It follows therefore that if Brosio's conception of democracy is to conform in some way to the Athenian model it must break free of its current philosophical orientations. If this happens, and it depends largely on his concept of class, Brosio's project is likely to acquire a critical dynamism that takes it beyond a mere program of education and social reform.

Significantly, Dewey rejects class struggle as the agency of transformative change, while for Brosio class constitutes a form of identity, one among others including gender, race and ethnicity. It therefore cannot enjoy a privileged position in his schema. Yet, paradoxically, it is as class conscious workers that he exhorts teachers to work towards altering the contradictory imperatives of capitalism and democracy in favour of the latter (p. 17). Merely altering the contradictory imperatives makes the problem appear as an out of kilter balancing act in need of adjustment, whereas a much more vigorous and dynamic effort is required for the benefit of democracy to dislodge the class relations on which capitalism's imperatives depend.

The importance of class divisions within the capitalist social system carries the category of class beyond that of an identity classification, for as Wood (1995, p. 258) points out, class is by definition a relation of inequality and power. It would be difficult therefore to reconcile it with, and include it as an identity of difference in a vision of an ideal democratic community which unites diverse human beings in freedom and equality without suppressing their differences.

As Wood (1995, p. 262) proceeds to argue, while all oppressions may have equal moral claims, 'class exploitation has a different historical status, a more strategic location at the heart of capitalism, and class struggle may have a more universal reach, a greater potential for advancing not only class emancipation but other emancipatory struggles too'. This assessment returns us to the problem of capitalism and its imperatives. Wood continues. Capitalism is constituted by class exploitation, but it is more than a system of oppression. It is a ruthless totalising process which shapes every aspect of our lives and subjects all social life to the requirements of the market.

It follows then that the power of Brosio's project is severely weakened without an appreciation of the role that class plays in maintaining capitalism's imperatives in education and in society at large to the detriment of democratic idealist imperatives. Of course, Brosio is not unaware of this which can account partly for his efforts to incorporate the category critique drawn from Marx and Marxism into his philosophy of education construction alongside Dewey's pragmatic notion of critical evaluation.

Since Kant the category criticism has entered the lexicon of social reformers and revolutionaries as a mark of their position and identity on the left of the political spectrum and has acquired importance as the conscious exercise of judgement in the formulation of theory in relation to practice. However, like the categories I have so far discussed its meaning too is determined by the philosophical frameworks within which it functions. For the most part it has been regarded in terms of critical reflection on existing situations, but within the tradition of Marx's historical materialism it acquired a dynamism as a force integral to transformative, qualitative or revolutionary social change processes.

I specify the philosophical orientation of historical materialism because outside this paradigm even among the many schools of Marxist thought including dialectical materialism, this notion of critique has become little understood, domesticated and undeveloped, even more so in the hands of those, including Brosio, on the liberal or pluralist left. To appreciate this statement it is necessary to refer to Kant's failure to resolve the epistemological divide, Hegel's determination to resolve it, and the adoption by Marx of Hegel's epistemological principles as the 'rational kernel' of Marx's historical materialist formulation of critique developed specifically for his analysis of capital (Marx 1954, p. 29).

Hegel rejected Kant's epistemology but recognised in the latter's notion of critique its potential as a means of establishing truth certainty on the basis that the only certainty we can rely on is the constancy and 'permanence' in the world of change, movement and development. On this account it is necessary for us to grasp reality as historical, a necessity which has required a break from traditional logic with its one dimensional view of reality, and the formulation of a logic descriptive of a world in constant flux in two dimensional terms.

In order therefore to grasp the things of the world as they are in themselves, Hegel declares (see Kaufmann 1965, p. 368ff), we must conceive each thing or phenomenon not only as a result of a developmental process but also as a process, that is, as a two dimensional whole, totality, or absolute. It is then possible and necessary to grasp its truth critically not only empirically as it appears on the surface, as a result, but also dialectically as we investigate its contradictions which constitute the outward expression of its inner dynamics. A useful analogy is that of a movie as a whole, as a grand narrative so to speak, composed of a process as well as a series of interrelated photo stills, which almost parallels Hegel's aphorism, unity of unity and difference.

Thus, establishing truth certainty within the Hegelian paradigm is a twofold process of recognising that certainty-uncertainty is a contradiction composed of two dialectically related moments of a developmental process in which one side defines and shapes and is defined and shaped by the other. This means that the one side cannot be understood in its entirety without the other.

Therefore in dismissing Hegel because of his so-called absolute idealism, as Brosio has done, is to misinterpret Hegel's historical orientation, the role of critique within it as well as to consider Hegel's aphorism in terms of a synthesis of qualitatively different components rather than as different aspects of the same thing. As a consequence Brosio does not grasp that his synthesis of concepts and ideas does not constitute a dynamic force for changing the capitalism-democracy imperatives, but remains an aggregation of theories bearing little functional relationship to the whole. His construction therefore lacks the 'mortar' of critique in its dynamic sense as the factor mediating the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, as two sides of an organic rather than a mechanical process.

In the development of his critique for capital Marx adopts the historical or dynamic principles of Hegel's dialectic but changes its orientation and its shape to conform to the material contradictions apparent in capitalism, that is, to the subject of his inquiry. This is the essence of an imminent critique. It means that we cannot simply abstract Marx's critique and *apply* it externally to another subject. Rather, while retaining the principles of the dialectic it requires a particular form which is congruent with the particular phenomenon under investigation.

It is evident that in presenting his foundational inquiry as characterised by interpretive, normative and critical perspectives Brosio seeks to construct a praxis methodology, but it is not certain whether he sees these perspectives in pragmatic terms as aggregations or in critical theory terms as interrelated. In Marx's larger historical materialist schema (1964, p. 143; see also Mészáros 1970, p. 101) critique is destined not only to become a weapon in the hands of the working class in their struggle for emancipation from capitalism's exploitation and injustice, but also ultimately in a classless society an all-embracing, effective science incorporating the natural as well as the social sciences as a science of human productive activity, which does not serve, like the sciences of today, the sectional interests of the capitalist social system.

Education in this event is not separate from but an integral part of human productive activity, and its science is shaped by human centred rather than market centred social relations. This leads us finally to a critique of Brosio's category of education.

In this regard I will not recapitulate the critiques of Dewey's education philosophy which Brosio includes in Chapter 4. Suffice it to say that they tend to confirm my contention that based on an examination of their presuppositions the approaches of both Brosio and Dewey to education accept as given the social relations and imperatives of capitalism and that any talk of a democracy and an education that supports democratic empowerment, social justice and respect for diversity is in essence utopian in the sense in which Marx and Engels (1968, pp. 58-61) in their communist manifesto attacked bourgeois and critical-utopian socialism and communism.

On this account Brosio does not appear to recognise, in his book at least, that the incompatible imperatives between capitalism and democracy are symptomatic of capitalism's contradictions in which the actual provision of quality education, particularly in K-12 public schooling, is severely limited by capitalism's demands on education. Nor are there references to any extent to the actual impact of capitalism's market forces on educators' work as these penetrate education and redefine its social relations, an impact under a regime of scientific management which leaves little room or energy for teaching for democracy or for working towards educational change.

Furthermore, it does not boost morale to realise that Dewey's ideas of democratic communities and problem solving strategies have been appropriated, domesticated and internalised within the social structures of education as well as, of course, within other institutions and corporations. In the transition democratic communities have been redefined as communities of practice (see for example Wenger 1998) or work teams, while problem solving strategies have become an important part of a manager's arsenal of management techniques for handling, to take an example, problem educators and students! Together with funding restrictions these factors are likely to place severe limitations on the delivery of quality education, let alone the construction of a critical democratic education.

It has to be recognised upfront therefore that it is far more difficult not only to withstand the psychological, social, as well as the economic pressures, which can be exerted on educators who do not conform to the managerial demands placed upon them. It is also more difficult to unite educators in the common cause of constructing

a critical democratic education in a climate of competition which is being imposed on schools across all sectors and among school staff members.

In the face of these realities of schooling it is appropriate to conclude that a critical evaluation of results or consequences as pragmatism demands, and the justification of assertions based on aims and intentions as Brosio requires are not sufficient to grasp the totality of any problematic without also taking account of the conditions and processes which made it a problem. Nor is merely redefining the problematic the answer. On these matters I will let Hegel have the last word with which Marx would concur. 'The aim, taken by itself', he declares, 'is a lifeless generality; and the tendency is a mere drift which still lacks actuality; and the naked result is the corpse which has left the tendency behind' (Kaufmann 1965, pp. 370, 372).

Conclusion

In this critique I have attempted to demonstrate that Brosio's construction of critical democratic education is possible but only if he first revises his philosophical orientation and consequently his methodology which limits his capacity to recognise and theoretically grasp fully the imperatives of contemporary capitalism. For it is its imperatives which are adversely impacting on and seriously inhibiting not only individual and social development but also the work of educators in providing quality education in pursuit of the values Brosio advocates.

In the particular political and economic circumstances in the US, which find expression in the contradictory demands placed upon educators particularly in the K-12 public school sector of education, it is understandable that Brosio has to be circumspect in his writings in order not to appear to be too revolutionary for his own sake and that of his readers. As with everyone in the US people are caught up in the contradiction characteristic of American life under capitalism between, as some commentator has put it, on the one hand aspirations which are encapsulated in the ideals of the American Dream, and desperation on the other. This, of course, is not to say that people in other nations do not live within contradictions wrought by a totalising capitalist social system. It is merely to say that these contradictions take different forms in accord with the social contexts in which they exist.

What is significant about Brosio's approach is that he employs a recognised, accepted, but effectively neutralised form of protest by adopting a liberal left standpoint in which drawing on pragmatism and Dewey's educational progressivism provides his 'radicalism' with an aura of respectability. In his society as a whole such a protest is tolerated and internalised within US capitalist social structures and is contained within a socio-political sphere marked by representative democracy. In consequence 'umbrella-coalitions', which Brosio regards as the best strategy in which to alter the capitalist-democratic imperatives, can rise and fall on the back of identity politics without threatening the imperatives of capitalism. Nor within a culture of pluralism is there a danger of these coalitions coalescing into a formidable force for transformative change.

However, while the political and economic landscape may appear bleak at this moment in history, the truth certainty about capitalism is that it is a historical not a normative phenomenon; that therefore it has a limited shelf life so to speak; and that its inherent contradictions are guaranteed not only to provoke socio-political protests, but also to generate economic crises of increasing severity throughout the world. The current threat of terrorism, ecological vandalism and national insurgencies are symptoms of these crises.

What has to be done therefore is to concentrate on formulating a practical theory that has transformative change and the institution of democracy, social justice and respect for diversity in its sights, but which in the first instance concentrates on a rigorous critical analysis of contemporary capitalism's contradictions of which the conflict between the imperatives of capitalism and those of democracy within education is an expression. In this project one could do worse than refer to Marx's analysis of capital (see Harvey 1982) and the critical method he employs particularly in Part I of Volume 1 (Marx 1954).

To the educators at the K-12 public school chalkface wherever they are located it may appear to be a tall order, but as Brosio himself says, we have to situate our localised experiences within the totality of capitalism's operations.

To this end the above critique is intended to be a necessarily partial contribution which has sought to demonstrate that Brosio's 'construction' of a critical democratic

education is possible if he and others can *develop*, rather than 'construct', a theory that studies the imperatives of capitalism and democracy as an interactive, yet contradictory relationship, a task which would entail an epistemological shift in orientation.

In the meantime his book can provide an extremely powerful pedagogical starting point for the main task of critique.

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