

Building a Society of Solidarity Through Critical Pedagogy: Group Teaching as a Social and Democratic Tool

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Abstract

Against the menacing shadow of neoliberalism, which promotes individualism and competition, the author illustrates in this paper the need for group teaching. Group teaching as a method of instruction and learning fosters community bonds, solidarity, and is more effective teaching. Group teaching is a democratic tool necessary for society to promote a new community for the people.

Keywords: group teaching, neoliberalism, community, solidarity, democracy.

Introduction

Peoples of the world, together
Join to serve the common cause!
So it feeds us all for ever
See to it that it's now yours.
.....
Forward, without forgetting
Till the concrete question is hurled
When starving or when eating:
Whose tomorrow is tomorrow?
And whose world is the world?
(Solidarity song- Bertolt Brecht)

In the late 1970s, there was a "regime change" involving capitalism around the world, with the development of *neoliberal* capitalism. One thing to admit is that capitalism is always capitalism. No matter the label, no matter the extension, the same exploitation of human labour-power and the same oppressive results exist: human suffering. But neoliberalism is a more intense and at the same time "sophisticated" capitalism, in the

sense that through the power it has exerted, the “hard disc” of values and knowledge available to society have overall been reconstructed. By that it has destroyed much of prior social significations and has installed in the soul of many, a rage to acquire what is in each one’s sphere, or appears within reach. As Polanyi (1957) maintains, the establishment of the market economy implied sweeping aside traditional cultures and values and replacing the values of solidarity, altruism, sharing, and co-operation with the values of individualism and competition as the dominant values. New modes of subjectivity and citizenship are forged through a social mandate to provide for one’s survival solely through individual “choice,” leading to an “instrumentalism of existence” (Habermas, 1986). Capitalism has replaced the value of human quality by the value of human quantity; one who owns more material is valued in society more than one who demonstrates high human values such as a sense of compassion, love, solidarity, generosity, altruism. As a result, people are brought together in competition rather than in cooperation to make their living. The prevailing motto derived from neoliberal global capitalism is to consume, compete, and win at any cost. Democratic control over what goes on in the schools is harshly curtailed, if not eliminated entirely (Nikolakaki, 2011).

The question that arises is how can education contribute to counterbalance or contest neoliberalism? Since neoliberalism has been globalized, a global response is required. In order to resist this brutality against humanity, a new social administration is needed; and there is, and will be in the future even more, a need for unity of peoples around the world—since all peoples have been attacked¹. Solidarity and mutual assistance are essential components to be cultivated for this endeavour. The next question to arise then is: what should be the role of education in this new society of solidarity that is needed and how can critical pedagogy contribute to that. Education and social movements are significant sites for this struggle, both having profound impact on society. And this reality needs to be recognized by educators across the world.

Teaching in groups is a *potential* means for community building through education. An essential step to take towards building a community within society that will negate

¹ Out of 193 countries of the UN, 192 are in debt.

or counteract individualism is to develop in students a desire for social solidarity and group working. The aim is how the individual “I”s can become a “we”, not only in parallel action but unified in a sense of belonging. In this paper I argue that group teaching can promote a teaching culture that can potentially foster the development of a young generation with a community sense of belonging. Specifically, in order to examine a counterbalance of the erosion of societal bonds that neoliberalism has led society and the educational system to, I use an analysis of literature to investigate the potential of group teaching as a basic element of an anti-oppressive and communitarian education. The conclusions suggest that teaching in groups should be considered as a tool for a social change through education.

The context of group struggle: Neoliberalism as social dislocation through the ideology of competition and individualism.

Neoliberalism has transformed our lives, since society is an image of the marketplace, and the state itself is now marketed. The domination or “control of the economic system” by the markets is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organization of society: it means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of the economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system (Polanyi, 1957). Citizens have been transformed to become consumers since the market mechanism, by promoting individualism, and by assuming social and political determinism² have installed a market dialogue in every aspect of human activity as the most “efficient” and “rational” tool to construct human agency. This enormous anthropological mutation, according to Castoriadis (1995) can be elucidated and understood, not explained.

According to Wood (1995), “Capitalism, then, made it possible to conceive of ‘formal democracy,’ a form of civic equality which could coexist with social inequality and leave economic relations... in place.” The combination of the above two conditions, “representative democracy” and neoliberal capitalism, the two pylons of the West according to Badiou (2011), has led to social dislocation, and neo-miseration, peaking in the capitalist crisis we are living. It is apparent that the dominant social

² The “TINA” argument was used by the system for this.

paradigm of neoliberalism promoted by mass media and other cultural institutions expresses the values and beliefs of the ruling elites, which have a vested interest in the reproduction of the existing institutions of capitalism that secure the reproduction of their own political, economic and social power.

Under these devastating conditions, society's survival depends on both the assertion of effective power and the articulation of a new democratic political discourse as an alternative to traditional state control and the market. Castoriadis asserts that the market has to be put in its place. This is an upside down world; more specifically, the market should be there to serve society, not to dominate it. This dynamic is a part of a bigger picture that includes ever increasing environmental problems due to overuse of resources, deforestation, and pollution. Thus, because of human transgressions, the world might not only *not* be better tomorrow, but it might not be liveable unless there is collective action. According to Castoriadis (1995), society needs to transform from a heteronomous condition to an autonomous one. More specifically, Castoriadis (1995) asks:

What is a free, or autonomous, society? It is a society that itself gives to itself, effectively and reflectively, its own law, knowing that it is doing so. What is a free, or autonomous, individual, once we recognize that this individual is conceivable only in a society in which there are laws and power? It is an individual that recognizes in these laws and this power is its own laws and its own power—which can happen without mystification only to the extent that this individual has the full and effective possibility of participating in the formation of the laws and in the exercise of power.

This concept suggests that society at large, rather than passively accepting the dictum of the ruling elite, has to become proactive and self-determining so that the members of society make their own decisions freely without external pressures.

According to Alain Touraine (2001), “the triumph of capitalism has been so costly and intolerable that everyone, on all sides, is trying to find a way out of the `neoliberal transition’”. And Touraine stated that before the onset of the current crisis! The dominant social paradigm promoted by mass media and other cultural institutions expresses overwhelmingly the values and beliefs of the ruling elites, who have a vested interest in the reproduction of the existing institutions of capitalism for the reproduction of their own political, economic, and social power. According to Aristotle, (in *Politics* 1252a16. —T/E), the core of the idea of democracy is the

possibility of collective decision-making about collective action for a common good. This is the opposite of the concept found in popular consciousness today, which defines democracy as the freedom of individuals to decide on their own about actions to pursue their own (material) purposes.

Critical pedagogy as a democratic endeavour

The goal of democratic education is to empower young people to be autonomous, responsible members of their community and the larger world (Nikolakaki, 2011). Democratic education is rooted in challenging the learner in meaningful ways while also being responsive and relevant to the larger community. It celebrates the adventure of learning, while cultivating personal and social responsibility. It helps individuals and communities find their voices (Nikolakaki, 2011). According to Castoriadis, “the existing state of affairs is self-destructive politically. It produces a growing glacier of privatization and apathy; it dislocates the social imaginary significations that hold institutions together. An apathetic and cynical society cannot maintain for long even the few institutions existing today. And a society of social institutions based upon the relentless pursuit of individual self-interest is sheer nonsense.” Instead, Castoriadis claims, “one who wants to institute a people has to change the mores of the people.” In order to become humanized again, as Paulo Freire (2004) suggests, a renegotiation of human values needs to occur. Through individualism and competition people in a society are marginalized, disempowered, and manipulated. However, communitarian values, solidarity and “responsibilization,” for individual and community autonomy need to be fostered (Nikolakaki, 2011).

As for the radicalization of individual agents and the building of a communitarian society, education is a site for struggle. According to Freire, “If education alone cannot transform society, without it society cannot change either” (Freire, 2004, p. 47). Meanwhile, children and teachers increasingly report feelings of isolation, alienation, and hopelessness (Sergiovanni, 1996). Because this condition is certainly not “god-given” but is man-made, it is up to the people to challenge it. This realization is the starting point of hope. Action has to be taken urgently to reclaim our humanity, and education is the sphere for re-humanization. This situation is not an

individual's task to undo, but needs collective action. But how do we overcome the individualization and competitiveness to which we have surrendered to during these last decades? This is where Critical Pedagogy enters the stage. Pedagogy in the *critical* sense illuminates the relationship between knowledge, authority, and power (Giroux, 1994, p. 30). It is at this place where group teaching within a critical pedagogy framework becomes an important vehicle for social transformation.

On the one hand, critical pedagogy is about political pedagogy. If education aims at creating the suitable citizen of the future, by definition this is a political act. Under neoliberalism, Joe Kincheloe writes (2011), "students are transformed from citizens into consumers, capable of being bought and sold." So the question that arises is what kind of citizen do we want as a society and how do we create her? Does society need or want a passive citizen to be controlled by the markets, or an active citizen that contributes to the future developing along with societal needs? There are no in-between situations: either you surrender or you claim for your rights. Claiming rights involves what Freire called conscientization. Freirian conscientization is a joint project; it takes place within a person among other people, united in their action and in their reflection upon that action and upon the world and leads to critical awareness: "Awareness of the world, which makes awareness of myself viable, makes unviable the immutability of the world. Awareness of the world and awareness of myself make me not only a being in the world, but one with the world and with others. It makes me a being capable of intervening in the world and not only adapting to it." (Freire, 2004).

Critical pedagogy attempts to disrupt the effects of oppressive regimes of power both in the classroom and in the larger society. The classroom is a site where new knowledge, grounded in the experiences of students and teachers, alike, is produced through meaningful dialogue. Critical pedagogy also has to move beyond the classroom. Pedagogy is a means of enlightening people, connecting the individual with the political. So critical pedagogy cannot be enshrined into the "fetichization" of teaching methods (Aronowitz, 2012), which by no means demonstrates that it is not connected to teaching. How we teach is obviously determined by our pedagogical theory, whether explicit or implicit. Freire says, "The educator with a democratic vision or posture cannot avoid insisting on the critical capacity, curiosity and

autonomy of the learner in his teaching praxis” (Freire, 2001, p.33). But how can we contribute to the building of a social bonding and connection that will bring us united against the de-humanization in progress? How can we apply as teachers the pedagogy for the cultivation of a communitarian ethos? We must think of ways to pedagogically contribute to the creation of a human being who reflects social solidarity and responsibility, and who is more humane, with a sense of autonomy and dignity that negates every dehumanizing practice (Nikolakaki, 2011).

Joe Kincheloe (2011) defined central aspects of critical pedagogy as following:

- Grounded in a social and educational vision of justice, equality and the belief that education is inherently political;
- Dedicated to the alleviation of human suffering, takes first hand knowledge into consideration, prevents students from being blamed for failing;
- Based on generative themes (reading the world and the word in the process of problem solving);
- Positions teachers as researches, as learners. Authority is dialectical; focuses on facilitation and problem solving.

In addition, learning is co-constructed through social interactions. Learning takes place collectively and is directly linked to the shared experience, happening most effectively within critical, authentic dialogue (Freire, 1970, Vygotsky, 1978).

In a critical pedagogy for a community building school with solidarity, attention must be paid to the child as a member of the group, to the group, to the group life, and to the organized school community. Cooperative learning in groups can contribute to the democratization of the society that is supported by all democratic teachers, from Dewey, to Freire and their followers, who believe that the democratization of society remains a constant pursuit, and they claim that the school has a duty to contribute toward this goal. Because they conceptualize democracy as a process of negotiation between equal members in order to identify the problems and the possible options to resolve them, cooperation as a procedure fosters the skills and attitudes that democratic negotiation requires (Joyce, Weil, & Showers, 1992; Matsagouras, 2000) and challenges the area action out of the individual limits, what Vygotsky (1997) called the zone of proximal development.

Group teaching through critical pedagogy

Group teaching is any form of teaching that is implemented by dividing students in a classroom into groups, or, indeed, having them work as a group, and these groups investigate a whole theme or project, or part of a topic and/or search for and establish arguments to support opinions either in favour or against of other groups. Group teaching is not a method but a form of teaching, and it depends on the method the teacher selects, whether the teaching will be indirect or direct; that is to say, teaching might be teacher centred, and the allocation of tasks might be group. But group teaching as a pedagogy is not enough. Group teaching has to be implemented through critical pedagogy, which has a transformative potential. If human agential change is possible then knowledge of what is to be changed must be at the forefront of attention. In other words, *critique* of authority and power must be central to any pedagogy that claims to be critical. Secondly, the privileging of process naturalizes process and makes it an end in itself. Such privileging ignores the possibility that bad (ideological) lessons can be taught really well (even via group work). There is the danger that group teaching can be employed to advance neoliberal, anti-collectivist and socially conservative agendas. Group teaching as suggested in this paper, promotes critical awareness and conscientization, according to Freirian terminology. According to Giroux (2008),

The questions we need to be asking ourselves extend beyond how we proceed with competent and effective economic reform. There is a neoliberal logic that extends beyond the economic. We must also consider how we dismantle the culture of fear, how we learn to think beyond the narrow dictates of instrumental rationalities, how we decriminalize certain identities, how we depathologize the concept of dependency and recognize it as our common fate, how we reclaim the public good, how we reconstitute, in short, a viable and sustainable democratic society.

In this paper group teaching describes a child-centric teaching attitude, where the students collaborate in groups, making decisions and learning through their actions and the teacher is there to support any inquiries that arise. But this child-centrism in critical pedagogy, while respecting the autonomy of the child, works for the promotion of a collective critical identity. It is in contrast to the individualistic heteronomous forms of education that the neoliberal agenda promotes.

Proponents of group teaching accept that collaboration creates a developmental dynamic that allows the members of the group to transcend their individual limits of thought and action (Vygotsky, 1997). In other words, the collaborating members can develop collective forms of thinking and action its members could not develop outside the group. However, as they move in common action, apart from their individual limits, they familiarize themselves with the new and superior forms of thinking and action, and after a period of collective action, they finally internalize these skills. Slavin (1996) claims that students who participate in a cooperative group use a “third-level thinking” as they are called to reorganize their thoughts and to explain them to the other members of the group. Many positive skills and attributes can be cultivated through group teaching and learning. By the same token, intellectuals who aim to achieve the social reconstruction of education support the concept of group learning. It is at this point, that critical pedagogy as an emancipatory, revolutionary pedagogy has a historical role to play. According to Freire (1996:84), “The fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of domination, which implies for its opposite, liberation, as the objective to be achieved.”

In order for a cultural and political revolution to take place, we must take into consideration what Cornelius Castoriadis referred to as the self-institution of society. In other words, society alone has to decide the form it wants to take, without impositions from above. Revolution does not signify only the attempt at explicit reinstitution of society. Revolution is this reinstitution by the collective and autonomous activity of the people, or of a large portion of society. Now, when this activity unfolds, it always exhibits a democratic character. Thus, collective communication and work become a context for growth of speech and thought (Bershon, 1995; Matsagouras & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1999) and are rendered as the embryonic stage of personal growth that progressively leads to individual completion and autonomy.

Why group teaching is suggested

Drawing from the research and the literature that has been written, in this section of the paper, I analyse the arguments made for group teaching that contribute to the thesis of this article. Specifically, group social organization of the classroom can

contribute effectively toward the creation of a communitarian and democratic citizen because:

- **It reduces the authoritarianism of the teacher and the subordination of the pupil.**

One of the major issues in the application of teaching is the division of power. In practical terms, group teaching facilitates the decentralization of the teacher's power, and the group takes responsibility for its members so that all children will be able to express themselves and work together in collaborative projects. In group teaching, where the group plays a dominant role, the teacher is required to combine individual autonomous work in group-settings for the profit of the group. The pupils, by taking different roles within the group, facilitate the functionality, efficiency, and communication within the group and contribute to build its consistency (Cohen, 1994; Slavin, 1995). Roles are switched between group members so that everyone has to go through all roles and all the collective responsibilities, which decentralize the teacher's power (Matsaggouras, 2000).

The teacher's role is to monitor the interaction of students and to intervene whenever necessary in order to improve communications skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Krol, Slegers, Veenman, & Voeten, 2008). The module depends on the teacher taking into account the interest and needs of pupils. A friendly teacher attitude and the tendency to accept the students' opinions help students to express their views freely, thus effortlessly creating a positive climate in the classroom. Effective group teaching combines the knowledge objective with the preferences of the learners (Hijzen, Boekaerts, & Vedder, 2006).

- **It replaces student competition and rivalry with collaboration and self-improvement.**

Even in the processes of everyday routine in schools today competition is dominant, for example, when the schoolteacher asks the students to answer a question but has the choice of choosing only one of them, thus disappointing the rest. The element of competition characterizes school more generally (Kagan, 1995). Cooperation fosters

students' engagement for the success of the group, their own success within the group, and thus success for the common good. Students who work within a cooperative frame show an increased tendency to participate in discussions, are involved in more useful behaviours for the benefit of their group, and they present higher levels of deliberation and communication skills in comparison to their peers who do not work cooperatively (Shachar & Grill, 1994; Gillies & Ashman, 1998; Gillies, 2006). Students who participate in group cooperative learning learn how to participate in common activities, where the uniqueness of each student and each student's special faculties are recognized and where students interact better with their schoolmates (Gillies & Ashman, 2000). The effectiveness of the group is the sum of the individual record of each student who is a member of the group, and this dynamic plays a decisive role in the total learning records of the group (Shea & Guzzo, 1987; Van den Bossche, Gijselaers & Segers, 2006).

The members of the group depend on each other so that they can achieve the learning goals they have been assigned. Effort of all members of the group is required, and it is essential for the success of the group that every student contributes to the fulfilling of the group's goals. When one member fails, this failure is not individual but collective, and it has an impact on the group as a total. The performance of a student is triggered by the performance of the group, and the performance of the group is the result of the cumulative contributions of all students. This collective process strengthens the personal responsibility of each member. All members of the group are considered in charge of the assigned activity, and all members of the group are responsible for pulling it through (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Responsibility is not a condition but a procedure. This "responsibilization" is regarded an important trait to fight injustices in that it leads to solidarity, an important concept for human survival in the New Dark Ages society is experiencing under the neoliberal agenda (Nikolakaki, 2011). Besides, responsibilization makes us feel that we are an organic part of what is going on around us, that we are equally liable for the injustices being done in this world, unless we speak up and strive for their elimination. According to Freire (2004:99), "if I lack responsibility, I cannot speak of ethics or of hope". Responsibilization, though, is not founded on a ground of guilt. Guilt immobilizes the individual, neutralizes every tendency for freedom, overshadows and numbs human feelings.

- **It replaces rejection and criticism with acceptance, encouragement, and mutual support, in addition to providing positive learning experiences to weaker students, thus fostering positive self-concept and self-esteem.**

Group learning strengthens self-confidence of the individual in that it provides motivation for participation in the learning experience (Panitz, 1999). Children who participate in group learning for a long period have more positive feelings for their classmates than the students of a traditional class (Slavin, 1995). Indeed, they feel they have better relations with their peers, that they are themselves more likable, and that they do better in class and thus increase their self-esteem (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Group cooperative learning contributes to the creation of a moral identity. As Johnson and Johnson report (2000), children create positive relations with their peers, and they see themselves as moral persons with character who act with integrity.

It has been observed that the members of groups feel better when they are called to express their opinion in small groups rather than in view of the entire class. The small group gives students confidence to express their own opinion (Pimple, 2002). Weaker students change their behaviour progressively through relations of mutual support, encouragement and confidence, exchange of information, and feedback that is developed in the groups. They acquire self-confidence and participate in the training process, and consequently their grades also improve (Putman, 1997).

- **It involves energetic learning processes that result in the increase of knowledge and skill acquisition and thus the maximization of intellectual growth.**

Substantial academic learning is found in cooperative learning in addition to the interpersonal relations mentioned above (Dune & Bennett, 1990). Group learning allows children to work together on an exercise to arrive at a solution. In other words, group facilitates analysis of the problem, and the group members reach the solution together through fertile dialogue and collaboration among the group members. Thus, the students transform from passive receptors of information and knowledge to energetic students and critically thinking individuals who invoke metagnosis and not a

mere application of strategies when they are asked for the resolution of problems (Smith & MacGregor, 1992).

In the cooperative frame of teaching, learning depends on the use of the existing cognitive dynamic of the student (Webb & Farivar, 1994; Hoek et al., 1999; Van Boxtel et al., 2000). Dynamics are created in the frame of the development of common work that allows the group members to exceed their individual limits of thought and action and to move on to collective forms of expression that none of the members could develop individually (Vygotsky, 1997; Matsagouras, 2000). In this process of learning, the members externalize their thoughts, and they familiarize themselves with new forms of thinking and action, and after a time of collective action, they finally internalize them (Bershon, 1995; Matsagouras & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1999).

School attendance and time spent by students on the group project result in conditions that encourage higher forms of learning with the consideration that in group learning superior operations of thinking are activated (Good & Brophy, 2000). Johnson and others (2000), in an analysis of 164 research study results, found that students who work in cooperative classes present increased academic records in comparison to the students who study in traditional class formats and who work individually in competitive environments. Saran (1980) and Johnson and others (1981) have concluded that cooperative learning is superior to individual learning as far as acquisition of academic knowledge is concerned. Slavin (1995) reports that from a total of 63 researches, students in cooperative classes have considerably higher academic records than others who participated in classes where they followed traditional practices. For Cohen (1994) cooperative teaching is the method of teaching that involves learning benefits and helps more generally in the growth of superior intellectual skills.

- **Group learning protects the students from the stress of competition.**

The pleasant climate that is created among the members of the group can function as a catalyst for the removal of stress, failure, disapproval, and rejection that weak students experience (Johnson & Johnson, 1994) and can lead to the increase of self-

cognition and the reclaim of their self-esteem, thus leading to positive attitudes toward learning (Slavin, 1985, 1996). In cooperative learning students communicate with one another in a simple verbal way by being interested mainly in the content of the message rather than in how it is articulated (Anagnostopoulou, 2001).

This approach makes it possible for children who are non-native dominant language speakers and children who are members of minorities or students with modest socio-economic background to express their thoughts with greater comfort (Meyer, 1987). The friendly behaviour of the teacher and his or her tendency to accept the group proposals are presented as assisting the students to express their opinions freely and effortlessly, creating an atmosphere distinct from learning intensities and negative sentiments in the classroom (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). This been said, it is of importance that groups do not compete in any manner but collaborate to achieve the learning goals.

- **It obstructs the antisocial behaviour of students with difficulties of socialization and inclusion.**

The social form of organization of cooperative learning has also an impact on discipline. Here the group functions positively and facilitates the definition of rules as well as the acceptance and respect of them from its members. Group learning promotes freedom: freedom of action, freedom of speech, and freedom of thought. In freedom, autonomy is cultivated. Autonomy according to Castoriadis is not hedonic fulfillment of desires: to do what one wants whenever one wants to do it. The word is a combination of the Greek words *auto-* (self) and *-nomos* (law). Yes, there is a law, but the question is who enforces it. Group learning aims to assist the subject to be as autonomous as possible in a collective autonomy. As Freire commented “it is necessary for the child to learn that her own autonomy can only attain legitimacy as it observes the autonomy of others.” In other words, the common value system needs to be agreed upon collectively through autonomy and constant negotiation (Nikolakaki, 2011).

Researches have shown that students who work in groups are more receptive to applying rules of discipline than students in a traditional classroom setting. A factor

that contributes to the direction of discipline is the engagement of students in the formulation of rules of behaviour of the group members but also of the groups more generally. This dynamic helps the class to function better in anticipating situations that otherwise could result in problems. The engagement helps the students to identify themselves more with the shared system of behaviour, to decrease infringing behaviours, to have a higher sense of responsibility and to understand consequences in a potential infringement (Matsagouras, 2000). The children who exhibit problems in their behaviour change their attitude more easily when the regulations emanate from the group than when these are imposed by the schoolteacher (Kanakis, 1987). In group teaching the students feel freer, and they act on their own, and this sense of autonomy within the group releases them from passive learning, the immobility and the malaise, while at the same time it maintains, to a large extent, their attention (Kreie, Headrick, & Steiner, 2007).

Students learn how to listen to one another, how to appreciate the discussions of the group, how to express their opinion, and how to resolve conflicts within the group. They learn to express their opinion freely, to exchange opinions, to prompt other students, and to accept the benefit of help (Cohen, 1994; Webb & Palincsar, 1996; Hijzen, Boekaerts, & Vedder, 2006). Through various activities, students, apart from other skills, learn how to have reciprocal discussions. Each question of the students in the class gives a new motive for comprehension, for learning, for enlargement of thinking. In the cooperative class, this approach becomes one more tool in the hands of children that helps them feel capable and acceptable and exceed the insecurity and their refusal to participate in groups (Kagan, 1985).

- **It renders the individual capable of participating actively in the decision making process that affects the group and democratizes the individual with the distribution of power.**

According to Castoriadis, the goal of emancipation is individual and social autonomy. In order to achieve an autonomous society, autonomous activities within collectivities are required. At the individual level, a democratic ethos needs to be cultivated. What is needed is a pedagogy in the classroom that facilitates cultivation of the democratic ethos of the student and setting the conditions for a citizen through conscientization to

struggle for a just world. In the context of such an emancipating pedagogy, egocentrism, narcissist certainties, and accumulation of experiences are put into question. Instead, communitarian values are more likely to be developed (Nikolakaki, in press).

In group cooperative learning the students develop and cultivate social and communication skills, practice to resolve conflicts, record more successes, develop self-monitoring morals, critical thinking, and the assumption of duty and responsibilities (Berry, 2003). The students who learn to solve conflicts in the group work classroom are likely to use these skills later in life as democratic citizens. When they learn to take on responsibilities and duties through sharing, they acquire attitudes that can also be used in other forms of their social, family, and labour life (Sapon, 1992). Students who experience a group cooperative class continue to want to work in and be an integral part of a group environment (Van den Bossche, Gijsselaers, & Segers, 2006).

Cohesion is a multidimensional creation. A lot of different forms of cohesion exist. Among them the *cohesion of work* and *social cohesion* stand out. Cohesion of work refers to the reciprocal engagement and the collective effort of members of a group toward the achievement of a common goal. *Social cohesion* in turn, concerns the nature and the quality of the emotional bonds of the members of a group, such as friendship, caring, solidarity, and one's interest in interpersonal relations between the students. Even more importantly, the members of a group experience collective responsibility, even if they remain the ones in charge of their own piece of work in the frame of cooperation with their schoolmates (Felder & Brent, 2007).

The education of students within group processes also offers circumstances of equal participation for problem solutions within the group or the entire class. It is an exercise of students in the skills of participation and in the process of decision making, an exercise in democracy as supported by Dewey (1982) because, first of all, it is necessary for students to learn to communicate with one another to experience authentic circumstances of democratic behaviour. These experiences help the children to comprehend how the social system functions and that each one of them can, as tomorrow's citizen, influence the existence or improvement of the system.

- **It reduces social elitism and serves social justice by assisting all the students independently of their social and national origin to develop intellectually and socially.**

In the group class, acceptance of difference is increased, and students with learning or behavioural problems are more easily incorporated (Slavin, 1995). These children perform better in a group where there are also children with higher academic achievement because they benefit from observing the learning strategies these students employ. In a traditional class in which the prevalent feature is competition, students with training difficulties and poor academic performance usually constitute the epicentre of comments, criticism, and they may experience negative attitudes from their schoolmates. In a cooperative class, the weaknesses of students leave the limelight, and access to collaboration is given, in the frame of which each student finds space to offer.

This fact limits the probabilities of rejection and increases the possibilities of acceptance. The students who learn to work in non-homogeneous groups remove biases and stereotypes, accept the students who do not have the same origin, the same nationality, or come from different cultures or grow up in families with a different religion (Slavin, 1996). Children from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds feel incorporated more easily in the group. Those children declare that in groups they learn how the others face similar problems and feel that the place of origin is not as important as the fact that they all together discover and discover knowledge (Kelly, Cunningham, McCalister, Cassidy, & MacVicar, 2007). Studies have shown that children from different cultures and different backgrounds learn the language that is spoken in class more easily through collaboration, and relations are also strengthened between peers (Johnston, Tulbert, Sebastian, Devries, & Gompert, 2000; York-Barr, Ghere, & Sommersness, 2007). In an organized environment of cooperative learning, the students in the frame of the group provide information to their schoolmates, and they participate in discussions of their group with other members, a fact that helps the children to profit cognitively (Gillies, 2006; Gillies & Ashman, 1998; Ross, 2008).

Conclusions

Group teaching within a critical pedagogy context is essentially energetic, student centred and society oriented with a critical approach in order to achieve social justice. There are other, liberal-progressive uses of group teaching, used as a method of 'giving students voice', but in liberal progressive forms of group teaching there is not necessarily any critical component of emphasis. And there are also vocationalist and neoliberal uses of group teaching, to develop group working skills for the labour market. Again, this can be devoid of any critical intent or effect. One lesson that through group teaching students can learn is that they have the potential of being in charge of things and that they can effect change. At the same time, it refers to group working with mutual support and solidarity instead of rivalry and competition between individuals. Because the agents of the traditional school system consider learning an individual affair and ignore schools' social dimension and because they regard competition a study motivator for students, it more often than not implies practices of competition instead of collaboration.

To counter neoliberalism, schools need to cultivate a communitarian ethos (Nikolakaki, 2011). The conclusion to be drawn from the analysis presented here is that group teaching can be regarded as a tool of communitarianism and solidarity and is necessary to assist the teachers to connect educational ideas to social action. Schools can become inclusive communities where differences are brought together into a mutually respectful whole [but] schools must first become places where members have developed a community of mind that bonds them together in a special way and binds them to a shared ideology (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. xvii).

Since critical pedagogy is political pedagogy, a teacher must be cautious to reflect and relate group teaching to the wider social-economic-political environment and the oppression that people in general but students in particular suffer from. Mutual assistance without struggles against the de-humanization in progress is philanthropy and in some way, it is what the system is seeking for; that we all take care of each other and leave them alone. So a basic element needed is also for critical pedagogy to focus on those who oppress and leave peoples to live "naked lives" that is lives with diminished rights, diminished future, and diminished space to comfort. For that

conscientization is needed, and for critical pedagogy conscientization has always been a basic focus.

In this paper I have examined the contribution of group teaching to this conscientization and presented arguments for teaching in groups. It is true that there are many dangers in group teaching; one might be that the weaker students may rely on the stronger ones to “do the job,” thus not gaining anything significant from the group work. This is a responsibility of the teacher to note and to rectify. But the gains from group teaching are so important for social cohesion and power distribution that it needs serious consideration; the shift of the locus of the learning process from the teacher to the student means that critical pedagogy signifies an altered power relationship, not only in the classroom but in the broader social canvas as well. This purpose is inextricably linked to the fulfilment of what Paulo Freire (1970) defines as our "vocation" - to be truly humanized social agents in the world.

Global capitalism and the class war that has been declared need collective re-organization of societies. At the same time, Global Awakening is an optimistic basis of hope, for a eu-topia³, (Eftopia: eu=good, topos = place), which means a good place. A good place is democratic, communitarian, with solidarity and collective decisions made by the people and most of all it is feasible; at least in the eyes of a critical pedagogue.

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³ In Greek, utopia is a non place (ou=non, topos=place).

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