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Education and Social Change: A Theoretical Approach

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Education has long been a tool of the state wherein the ideology of the day has manipulated and controlled the policy and curriculum of schooling (see for example Dewey, 1997; Gatto, 2009; Giroux, 2001; Giroux, 2011; Leonardo, 2006; Macrine, 2009a; McLaren, 1995; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007). The situation, many believe, cannot continue if we are ever to gain control over our own lives and social relations locally, nationally and globally. This has led to a new movement where the pedagogical has become the essence of the movement, a turnaround from protests and demands to a new awakening of critical consciousness where knowledge has become the movements and education forms the basis of a new pedagogy where people are the project rather than the resource of human experience and social production. This movement can inform resistance education at all levels.

In this chapter, I shall explore the ideas about education for social change and how this thinking can inform those at grass roots level hoping to re-engage with a system of schooling that is failing their children. This exploration will cover theories of critical pedagogy and the idea of emancipatory education, including the collective and individual responses and responsibilities that are needed to ensure the best for our children and to turn schools around. The chapter will not cover individual models of schooling as that can be found elsewhere in this volume, but will, however, suggests aims of

education and where this matches with models, they will be indicated.

It is important, then, to understand what is meant by education as resistance outside the context of these solely political movements and into the classrooms and communities around the country, and indeed the world. In finding this explanation it is useful to turn to the theories of critical pedagogy to explore how these battles outside the classroom can be useful to those concerned with the conditions inside. The first task is to question the purpose of education and to dispel the myth of full employment on acquisition of GCSE's or 'A' levels, or even higher education qualifications (Jones, 1992) and begin a process of the reimagining of education as a form of resistance against the injustices and inequalities that exist in society and that education can reproduce and perpetuate (Gatto, 2009; Harber, 2004).

So what and how should we resist? Our resistance needs to be a resistance of the brutality of the systems of social relations under which we live (Allman, 2001; Giroux, 2001; Holloway, 2005; Holloway, 2010; Macrine, 2009b). But also, and most importantly for our purpose here, resistance to the forms of education which attempt to produce people who, whether it suits them or not, are required to 'fit in.' To fit in to the social structures that reproduce, and often extend, the inequalities and social roles 'expected' of them because of their 'starting points,' both inside the education system and beyond. In other words, resistance to the violence of capitalist schooling (Harber, 2004). Illich (2011) comments that within our system, young people are taught to substitute hope with expectation, and for some young people those expectations can be set pretty low, whether they are capable of more or not. Hope is a powerful tool of resistance (de Ruyter, 2006; Freire, 1998; Freire,

2007) and turning around this replacement of expectation for hope is one of the cornerstones of this kind of resistance.

For a long time the Right have understood the power of education, and it seems have been very successful in utilising it as a tool of subjugation and control (Apple, 2000; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Heaney, 2000; McLaren, 1998). It seems that the Left have not caught onto this until recently, this catching on however has not come from the institutions of mass education (with a few exceptions, for example see Neary, 2012), but from small groups of people and collectives who are taking it upon themselves to become educated for themselves (see for example Bigelow, 2011; Coté et al., 2007; Neary & Amsler, 2012; Neary & Winn, 2012). We have much to learn from them as education practitioners, theorists and communities of parents and concerned individuals in all levels of educational provision. We also need to take their theoretical explorations and adapt them for the introduction of a new paradigm in schooling.

First we need to identify the damaging, or potentially damaging discourses contained in our schooling system (Apple, 1979; Gatto, 2009; Harber, 2004), especially when those discourses are presented as promoting inclusion and 'equality'. One of these discourses is that schooling asks the obviously unequal to fit into their 'system of equality' (Coleman, 2006; Schostak, 2011), can there be anything worse in education than trying to make the obviously unequal equal? Which is where, perhaps, our discourse should begin to move away from that of equality toward a discourse of educational justice, otherwise, the discourses in equality can become what Paulo Freire termed 'cultural invasion':

“Cultural invasion, which like divisive tactics and manipulation also serves the ends of conquest. In this phenomenon, the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own

view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression” (Freire, 1993: 133)

In other words, the ‘equality of opportunity’ that we have long been promised in education can be seen as a form of cultural invasion, in that, where ever you begin, educationally speaking, you have the same, standardized opportunities. This is perhaps most famously evident in the cultural and class bias of I.Q. tests or the 11+ examinations of the grammar school era (Greenfield, 1997; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). So in order to fight the cultural invasion in our school system and move toward a discourse of social justice we need a re-evaluation of what education is and what its purposes are. This will then enable us to begin to change the vast inequalities and low expectations that our education system produces.

The idea of finding an educational model that ‘fits all’ is at best problematic and at worst just another form of cultural invasion. Any ‘one size fits all’, standardising model, becomes a form of repression to those who are not ‘standard’ for that model. So choosing the most flexible model of schooling becomes paramount. It is important to remember that the purposes of education are by no means agreed or incontestable (Dadds, 2001: 48), which gives educators and parents a mandate to reinvent education for the better. Another essential criteria when thinking about the most appropriate form of education is that “humans are emotional beings and the emotions are central to any learning process” (Ollis, 2012: 216), especially if one wishes to create an education that re-organises social relationships in order to establish a more collective and communitarian outlook in those experiencing that system of education. Therefore, any ‘model’ of education you may wish to apply to your context must consider this essential understanding. Perhaps then, it is acceptable to argue for a model of education that

is emancipatory, as this should allow the emotive nature of students to come through and allow them to learn 'to be' in a way that is not only good for them, but also good for society. Certainly, from a critical education point of view this stands, as, "an emancipatory education is essential not only to empower people, but also for them to become subjects of their world" (Cho, 2013: 127). In fact, the ultimate aim of any emancipatory pedagogy is to *change the world* through emancipatory education, this is an agreed goal in many forms of critical education, as it is often felt that individual emancipation and empowerment is not enough. Individual emancipation and empowerment can serve to increase feelings of displacement and disillusion, as, if we are not also changing the world through the emancipation of those who are currently subjugated, then these people will 'mis-fit' for yet another reason. In this case we may be creating, even more, a class of people who, although they have a voice, they have no one to hear it and are therefore emotionally displaced within society. At first glance this seems to support the 'building bridges to nowhere' criticism, as discussed by Illich (2011): the criticism goes as such; if we create thinking, critical young people, individually empowered and emancipated, without first changing the political and economic system in order for them to 'fit' into a pre-existing structure that tolerates such amazing people, then we are 'building bridges to nowhere'. However, Illich's answer to this criticism is that the asker is underestimating the fundamental political and economic nature of schooling as well as the political potential inherent in any change to it. Further to this, Holloway (2010: 12) tells us that

"social change is not produced by activists, however important activism may (or may not) be in the process. Social change is rather the outcome of the barely visible transformation of the daily lives and activities of millions of people. We must look beyond activism, then, to the millions and millions of refusals and other-doings, the millions and millions of cracks that constitute the material base of possible radical change"

In this sense, education becomes one of the 'refusals', the 'other-doings' of Holloway's argument. It is arguable whether any activity that promotes social change however big or small should or should not be called 'activism', but that is for a different discussion. The point is that political activism *alone* may not change society in any fundamental way and that it is the responsibility of every person to live their life in opposition, or in refusal of the things that they see as harmful to their quality of life and opportunities for personal growth.

My question, therefore, to those who criticise in this way, would be who is going to change the political and economic system *for* these young people? And what do we do in the meantime? Keep selling them short? Conditioning them out of criticism and imagination? Keep telling them they will never amount to anything so that they passively accept their fate when they leave school?

Apple et al. (2009: 3, original stress) insist that

“in order to understand and act on education in its complicated connections to the larger society, we must engage in the process of *repositioning*. That is, we must see the world through the eyes of the dispossessed and act against the ideological and institutional processes that reproduce oppressive conditions.”

There are many strands in all our lives where we can actively resist oppressive conditions, and education is one of them. The education of our children and young people and the education of ourselves (I will return to the education of ourselves later). However, this is only true if young people are not subjugated within the education or schooling system employed, as Apple et al. state, so it is to this 'repositioning' which we must now turn.

To be effective, any model of education that claims emancipation and justice as its goal has to be cooperative, collective or community minded and therefore must discourage forms of, particularly aggressive, competition. In order to achieve these forms of collectivism, cooperation and community, democratic models of schooling and education are indicated. As Jeffs and Smith (2005; 43) suggest, “a democratic system at least holds out the promise that people can collectively come together to reduce or perhaps even eliminate inequalities”. This is because in a democratic model of schooling, any discourse of inequality can become a discourse of justice (as discussed earlier) because all the voices in the group can be heard through the democratic mechanisms employed. In turn, democratic education suggests a repositioning from the traditional ‘teacher centred’ forms of pedagogy to more dialectic ones. Dialectic education can come in several forms, most usually posited as ‘problem-posing education’ (see for example Bahruth & Steiner, 2000; Freire, 1985; Freire, 2008; Shor & Freire, 1987). Problem posing education allows young people to explore their subjective realities in an objective way and understand the conditions of their own lives and those of the wider world. This is achieved by, instead of being given information masquerading as ‘knowledge’, often called the banking method of education (Freire, 1993), young people are posed questions about the world and their place in it in order to explore relations of power and the normalisation of ‘the way things are’. The traditional ‘banking method’ of education assumes that “students are identical empty vessels” (Bahruth & Steiner, 2000: 120), and that that is “not only erroneous, but punitive to students who have non-mainstream backgrounds”. Freire puts it this way:

“Whereas the banking method directly or indirectly reinforces men’s [sic] fatalistic perception of their situation, the problem

posing method presents this very situation to them as a problem. As the situation becomes the object of their cognition, the naïve or magical perception which produced their fatalism gives way to perception which is able to perceive itself even as it perceives reality, and can be critically objective about that reality". (Freire, 1993: 66)

Problem posing education sits neatly into an overarching democratic educational model as it allows for a mature positioning of the young people's views, needs and desires, which allows them to make critical decisions and moral judgements (Giroux, 2011) in a democratic forum. This will also enable young people to understand the relationship between knowledge and power; "by asserting that knowledge is intrinsically interwoven with power, critical pedagogy adamantly and steadfastly dismisses the mainstream assumption of knowledge as objective and neutral" (Cho, 2013: 71). This means that once young people have accepted that knowledge is not objective and is therefore not only contextual and subjective in nature but that knowledge is a useful tool in personal and community empowerment and success, then young people should become more active and engaged learners. This is only the case if the system of schooling proactively engages this understanding of subjective knowledge and ensures that the connections between knowledge and power, and the deconstructions of the current, dominant use of 'powerful knowledge', are a central part of the education received. This is another example of where the process of substituting hope with expectations mentioned earlier, can be reversed, as with the understanding that there is a relationship between knowledge and power, coupled with the realisation that *any* knowledge, if used and posited correctly, can be powerful, including previously subjugated knowledge, young people can start to see the point in learning. This

also could go a long way to counter-act the 'not cool to be clever' attitude held by so many young people, as intelligence becomes, for them a more effective form of resistance against the injustices they experience than rejection of learning. In other words, school becomes the ally in their emancipation rather than their oppressor. This is particularly achieved through a critical pedagogy within schools due to the tenet that critical pedagogy not only replaces ideology with discourse, allowing subjugated forms of knowing to have a space to flourish, but also because one of its central aims is to construct counter-hegemonic forms of knowing and knowledges with the aim of changing power forms and patterns (Cho, 2013).

This change in the perception of knowledge and ways of knowing, will lead to an eventual change in society because as Jeffs and Smith (2005: 44) remind us, "democratic systems require an educational infrastructure. Their survival, in part, depends on the existence of an informed and committed electorate". Therefore, if that educational structure is already democratic and practices a critical form of pedagogy, you will turn out young people who are indeed an informed and committed 'electorate' and have an intrinsic understanding of democratic mechanisms and the central importance of democracy for a cohesive and just society.

However, this does *not* mean that we should just change the school system and sit back with our fingers crossed. The change in society cannot come from education alone. We cannot sit back and say, 'let it be the young people's responsibility to clear up the mess that the generation before them left'. It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that these young people - educated in a more critical, more

just system of education - are greeted by a world outside that celebrates them, instead of forcing them to fight to stay off the scrap heap of history. As McLaren (1995: 9) insists, what educators and indeed parents, need to realise is that “a New World Order cannot be realistically achieved without creating a new moral order at home first”, and that means in the classrooms *and the living rooms* of the nation. We cannot sit back and expect that schools will do the job of bringing up, in a holistic way, our children to be better adults and better stewards of a just social order than we have been. Teachers are human too and are just as much victims of the current crisis of justice and identity as the rest of us and part of their conditioning comes from their teacher training. This is where parents, governors and the local community have an active role to play. Not to struggle with teachers, but to constantly strive for the education they want to see teachers deliver, which means resisting parts of the National Curriculum as an ideological strategy: “because schools are in part sites of ideological reproduction and production, they are contested because ideologies themselves are contested and continually struggled over” (Au & Apple, 2009: 87). It may be wise to choose a model of schooling, then, that is democratic, dialectic (or problem posing) and that is able to reject the National Curriculum, as many Free Schools are. Then what are you to teach in your new school? According to Blakemore and Firth (2005: 141) “Many years of research have shown that people are able to learn more information in the absence of information”. So one could teach anything and see that a valuable and large quantity of knowledge has been gained, although what Blakemore and Firth were actually alluding too was that the sourcing of information teaches a person more than being handed that information. This has echoes of Dewey’s (Dewey, 1965; Dewey, 1997) laboratory schools in the United States. Dewey set up a school in which the children decided everything and were merely

facilitated by their teachers. For example if they wanted to build a table, they were to understand through research the form and functions of tables. They would then go on to decide through discussion what was the most appropriate material and design, where to source the materials and what tools they would need to build the table. Then they would set up the workshop to build the tables of their designs. Every step of the process was a journey of discovery in which they learnt not only, how to measure, design and build a table, but also about the social relations inherent in sourcing wood or metal, the sociology of tables; what form or function depended on your life-style and why you might want a table (For more information, see among others Žižek, 2008; Žižek, 2013). Included in this process was maths, geometry, cooperation, communication skill and so on. The laboratory school has the absence of information, which Blakemore and Firth spoke of and that lack became the learning experience, closely, but without becoming authoritarian, facilitated by teachers. Even if this does not happen in schools, there are opportunities for the learning at school to be supplemented by this type of learning at home. However, this type of schooling should not be confused with critical pedagogy as that would be to subsume critical pedagogy into a liberal agenda of self-sufficiency and transferable skills. It must be remembered that “critical Pedagogy – and critical educational studies in general – broadly seeks to expose how relations of power and inequality, (social, cultural, economic) in their myriad forms combinations, and complexities, are manifest and are challenged in the formal and informal education of children and adults” (Apple et al., 2009: 3) it “involves the fundamental transformations of the underlying epistemological and ideological assumptions that are made about what counts as ‘official’ or legitimate knowledge and who holds it.” So it is about more than learning through doing, it seeks interruption

of the normative ways of thinking. “It is also grounded in radical shifts in one’s social commitments. This involves a commitment to social transformation and a break with the comforting illusions that the ways in which our societies and their educational apparatuses are currently organised can lead to social justice” (Apple et al., 2009). This does not, of course, exclude the realm of experiential learning for young people, as long as that is framed in a radical political project. This project may not be completely explicit in the classroom, especially for younger children, although it needs to become more and more so throughout the educational experience, but it must be key in the organising principles of any model of education if we are to elicit real, fundamental change.

The change in education must come from all quarters, be supported by anyone and everyone who has a vested interest in the future and as Holloway (2010: 56) assures us, “seizing the initiative means moving beyond confrontation: we determine our action according to our own needs. Let capital and the state run after us, let it try and co-opt or repress us”. The time is passed now to make demands for change from a state that is hell bent on cuts to education and other social enterprise. Holloway is correct in his statement that seizing the initiative, and seize it we must, will lead us beyond confrontation. We do not wish to confront those in power, we only wish to make that kind of coercive, at best, and repressive, at worst, power redundant.

Holloway (2010: 18-9) implores us to review real examples of where this has happened. He cites the story of a group of teachers in Puebla, Mexico:

“The government announced in 2008 the creation of a new scheme to improve the quality of education by imposing greater individualism, stronger competition between students, stricter measurement of the outputs of teachers, and so on, the teachers said, ‘no, we will not accept it.’ When the government refused to listen, the dissident teachers moved beyond their mere refusal and, in consultation with thousands of students and parents, elaborated their own proposal for improving the quality of education by promoting greater cooperation between students, more emphasis on critical thinking, preparation for cooperative work not directly subordinate to capital, and began to explore ways of implementing their scheme in opposition to state guidelines, by taking control of the schools. Here too the initial refusal begins to open towards something else, towards an educational activity that not only resists but breaks with the logic of capital”

Maybe we should take a lesson from the story of Puebla. There is a way to change and it starts with a refusal to accept the way things are. So, let the young people of today become the generation who really changes things, with our preparation, of course. Let them spend time in schools imagining a better world so that one day they may continue our project to create it. Let them understand their potential as beings-in-the-world. Let them be the project not the resource of human experience. This may sound like a utopian project, but maybe we need to reinvigorate the use of utopian thinking, as Cho (2013: 122) says, “utopian pedagogy is a broad idea to help us pursue alternative thinking and models, beyond what seems common and feasible”. This is what is needed to educate counter to the logic of capitalism, so that our young people are able to succeed in a world that wants and allows them to, whoever they are and whatever their starting points.

Teachers are in a strategic position to assume organic leadership as public intellectuals. Leonardo (2006: 95) supports this by saying that “they comprise a critical mass of intellectuals who function as social critics, as provocateurs of what Gramsci (1971: 59) called ‘passive revolution’”. But teachers alone cannot change the culture and educational paradigms of all young people, that has to come from all the walks of life that young people engage with. As McLaren stated earlier, the change has to also be in our ‘living rooms’. Which means that parents must educate themselves in the ways of critical education, develop what Freire (1993) calls their ‘epistemological curiosities’ and they too must learn to question everything, alongside their children and young people. They must learn, however, not only to question, but to collectively find answers, to problematize those answers and then to seek solutions to those problems. The culture in the home relationships must match that of the relationships at school in order to prevent young people from living a contradiction. The school ethos of democratic, emancipatory, critical pedagogy must be supported and actively experienced outside, with those who insist every morning that their child must attend school. This idea is supported by Freire (1998: 58):

“to be in the world without making history, without being made by it, without creating culture, without a sensibility towards ones own presence in the world, without a dream, without a song, music, or painting, without caring for the earth or the water, without using one’s hands, without sculpting or philosophising, without any opinion about the world, without doing science or theology, without awe in the face of mystery, without learning, instruction, teaching, without ideas on education, without being political, is a total impossibility”

Young people have knowledge outside of what is packaged and handed to them in schools and this creates their personal and

emotional biographies, the experiences that will stick with them their whole lives. Biographies that should be explored in schools to create other ways of knowing, bringing the context of the individual into the consideration of the collective.

As Allman (2010: 150) suggests, “critical education on its own is not capable of bringing about the transformation of a society; on the other hand, it is impossible to see how a society that is capable of guaranteeing a better future for humanity will ever come about without critical education”. The transformation of our society from the current one, characterised by oppression, racism, sexism, homophobia and intolerances of many kinds, into the kind of society we would all like to live in, which is yet to exist, and in that sense exists not-yet, through our utopian impulses, can be encouraged by critical education in our schools, colleges and universities. Alongside our efforts in other realms of life. In this sense I agree with Allman (2010: 150), in that the approach to critical education that I advocate is “not only intended to prepare people to engage in social transformation, but it is also meant to serve as a prefigurative experience of the type of social relations that would lie at the heart of a transformed society”. In other words, what we see in our schools today, is what we will see reproduced in our society tomorrow; including inequalities and injustices, or, thinking, critical citizens collectively striving to create on a daily basis the kind of just society where everyone does, indeed, fit in.

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