

Editorial Statement

Understanding Critical Pedagogy and Peter McLaren in the Age of Global Capitalism

Peter McLaren is a teacher, a poet, a revolutionist, a theorist of the revolutionary critical pedagogy, and a critical ethnographer of capitalist relations and reproductions in public schools. McLaren is an intellectual and political risk taker; he is willing to go outside of the field of education and confront challenging new theories, and fight against conservative and neo-liberal political attacks and agendas. He is not a “Homegrown Democrat... who supported Bush’s war...who wait(s) to see which way the wind is blowing before they commit a political act requiring honesty and courage...who think(s) the good Democrat is homegrown.” (Denzin, 2005, p.47). His body of work embodies commitment to human well being, the search for truth, respect for other views, and the obligation to defend the weak and the poor. His writing style is not content with the standard academic format. He writes not just as a radical philosopher of education, but also as an international activist and a visionary dreamer.

McLaren's work is embedded in a rich and deep literature. He draws from the work of such radical progressive theorists as Paulo Freire, Karl Marx, Che Guevara, Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, Raya Dunayevskaya, Erich Fromm, G.W.F. Hegel, John Dewey, Antonio Gramsci, and many other theorists of Marxist and progressive political philosophy.

For the last three decades, McLaren has made important contributions to the field including his elaboration of an ethical basis for critical pedagogy and radical politics; his view of the impact of global capitalism and postmodernity on human identity and collective struggles; his ethnographic exploration of schooling and the key concepts of ritual, liminality, and enfleshment; and his notion of critical or revolutionary multiculturalism and pedagogy as the political basis for a radical transformation of education and society.

First, his notion of “enfleshment”, the process by which the body is inscribed or colonized by certain dominant interests and becomes the site through the rituals of schooling maintain the status quo, provides an important dimension to our understanding of the processes of reproduction and resistance in schools (McLaren; 1991). McLaren's analysis of the role of rituals and the body in these processes provides another important avenue for educational research and theory (McLaren; 1986).

Another key contribution is the relationship between multiculturalism and radical social transformation. Following Freire (1970), McLaren (1997) has stressed the importance of understanding students' culture and developing a student-centered educational process while, at the same time, recognizing the crucial role of teachers in helping students become critical thinkers and activists. McLaren (1995) contrasted critical multiculturalism and those forms of multiculturalism that do not challenge the capitalist system, including conservative, liberal, and left-liberal versions. According to McLaren (1997), critical or revolutionary multiculturalism emphasizes the primacy of cultural differences, but it recognizes that such differences, including our representations of race, class, and gender, have to be viewed as part of a larger social struggle over meanings in a social system of unequal power and class relations. Differences are socially and historically produced; they are not based on trans-historical essences. From this perspective, the purpose of recognizing difference is not a mere celebration of diversity, but creating the conditions for a multicultural coalition that can bring social transformation. For McLaren, the revolutionary multiculturalism challenges the racist, sexist and oppressive foundations of schooling and urban education. McLaren seeks to inspire teachers, students, and parents to work within a revolutionary pedagogical framework.

McLaren's revolutionary pedagogy seeks a theoretical perspective that can deconstruct and grasp both the broad dynamics of capitalism as a global system and the unique nature of local struggles regarding various forms of oppression: race, class gender, and sexual orientation (McLaren, 2004;

2005a). On the other hand, McLaren (2003) rejects ludic forms of postmodernism as incapable of providing a theory and practice of revolutionary social change. In his view, postmodernism's focus on fragmentation, exchange, discursive incommensurability, and difference moves critical analysis away from capitalist exploitation. McLaren is not satisfied with either an identity politics based on cultural differences or a limited economic reformism that does not challenge capitalist hegemony. He recognizes that cultural diversity and economic transformation must go hand in hand.

In his recent writings, McLaren (2000; 2004; 2005a,b; 2006a,b) has firmly embraced a revolutionary pedagogy based on Marx's notions of praxis and historical materialism. McLaren has increasingly urged a return to Marx and historical materialism as part of developing a revolutionary critical pedagogy and a utopian vision of a non-oppressive society. His revolutionary critical pedagogy theorizes the liberating potential of Marxist humanism by bridging the gap between the individual and the collective through a revitalized theory of praxis. For McLaren (2006b),

Revolutionary critical pedagogy works within a socialist imaginary, that is, it operates from an understanding that the basis of education is political and that spaces need to be created where students can imagine a different world outside of capitalism's law of value (i.e., social form of labor), where alternatives to capitalism and capitalist institutions can be discussed and debated, and where dialogue can occur about why so many revolutions in past history turned into their opposite. It looks to create a world where social labor is no longer an indirect part of the total social labor but a direct part of it (Hudis, 2005, 2005a) , where a new mode of distribution can prevail not based on socially necessary labor time but on actual labor time, where alienated human relations are subsumed by authentically transparent ones, where freely associated individuals can successfully work towards a permanent revolution, where the division between mental and manual labor can be abolished, where patriarchal relations and other privileging hierarchies of oppression and exploitation can be ended, where we can truly exercise the principle 'from each according to his or her ability and to each according to his or her need', where we can traverse the terrain of universal rights unburdened by necessity, moving sensuously and fluidly within that ontological space where subjectivity is exercised as a form of capacity-building and creative self-activity within and as a part of the social totality: a space where labor is no longer exploited and becomes a striving that will benefit all human beings, where labor refuses to be instrumentalized and commodified and ceases to be a compulsory activity, and where the full development of human capacity is encouraged. (pp.34-56).

While seeing Che Guevara and Paulo Freire as exemplars of a Marxist humanist position that is at the heart of revolutionary critical pedagogy, McLaren (2000) called for a commitment to working class struggle which is the heart of revolution.

It is my pleasure as managing editor to dedicate this special issue on Peter McLaren's work and the future of the critical pedagogy, which has been and will be shaped by McLaren's revolutionary vision.

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