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CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Critical pedagogy is an approach that enables pupils and students to confront and question structures, processes of domination and related attitudes, assumptions, myths and specific social constructions of reality – all of which constitute 'regimes of truth'. All involve critical scrutiny of crucial aspects of dominant hegemonic relationships. It is a pedagogical process targeted at the development of a critical consciousness.
According to one of its major exponents and founding figures, Henry A. Giroux, it attempts to:

- create new forms of knowing;
- pose questions concerning relations between margins and centres of power;
- encourage readings of history…that tackle issues of power and identity in connection with questions of social class, 'race'/ethnicity, gender, colonialism;
- refute the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture with a view to developing a curriculum that connects with people's lifeworlds and everyday cultural narratives;
- give importance to a language of ethics throughout the educational process [1].

Henry Giroux is from the USA, as are most of the major exponents of this area of pedagogy who appear in the relevant literature. The area therefore has a USA ring to it. The issues it confronts, however, are widespread, concerned with the relationship between education and power. It sees education not in reductively instrumental terms but according to the broader view of its contribution to the development of a healthy democratic public sphere where questions are raised and assumptions

1 H. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*, Continuum/Bloomsbury, NY and London 2011.

are challenged. It connects with the quest to challenge the mantra of there being no alternative to the present Neoliberal scenario governed by the ideology of the market and which spreads throughout all aspects of people's lives. This is a universal concern as mainstream education is being transmitted worldwide according to the technical-fix model, using the centuries-old approach of colonizing people's ways of learning and attempting to ride roughshod over Indigenous ways of learning, knowing and interacting with the environment.

Despite the North American orientation, the movement draws on a writer from the South who speaks to the global south, one whose ideas, in the pursuit of learning through *conscientização*, are at the furthest remove from the instrumentalist notion of education. This is Paulo Freire who had spent time in exile in different places, forced to leave his native Brazil by an authoritarian military regime precisely for his propagation of a politically democratic approach to education at odds with the type of instrumental education favoured by the country's rulers. His pedagogy of the oppressed was meant to contribute to the democratization of Brazilian society. It can therefore be argued that Critical pedagogy draws from a Southern perspective. Freire's exposition of his pedagogical views in the acclaimed book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was a source of influence. Ironically one of his places of exile, and precisely the place where he had this book translated from the original Portuguese, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, was the USA. This is where he came in contact with USA-ensconced academics and activists and where the basic elements of his radical pedagogy began to creep into USA and Canadian thinking, allied as they were with those that belonged to the Deweyean tradition in this part of the world. It also drew on European intellectual traditions, especially the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, although this raised questions regarding emancipatory politics in view of the 'negative dialectics' of some of its major exponents. Within critical theory, it drew on Jurgen Habermas' view of communicative action and deliberative democracy. It drew insights concerning power/knowledge and moral regulation from Michel Foucault and of course it built on the notion of hegemony at the heart of education and vice versa from Antonio Gramsci. While often open to the criticism of being somewhat Eurocentric, critical pedagogy, often owing to the presence of students from Southern diasporas in the

North, broadened its areas of concerns. The influence of the Jamaican born Stuart Hall and Afro-Americans such as Angela Davies began to be felt. One of the foremost Afro-American exponents of Critical Pedagogy is bell hooks whose early work such as *Talking Back. Thinking Feminist Thinking Black* drew substantially from two major early works by Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Education for Critical Consciousness*.

The more the parameters of critical pedagogy began to be broadened the more one drew on other figures of inspiration from different parts of the world. To give one example, I would argue that radical Italian educators such as don Lorenzo Milani can be regarded as key figures who anticipated many insights associated with critical pedagogy as well as critical sociology of education. The issue of citizenship and people exercising the 'right to govern' rather than simply be governed, either in a heavy handed manner or through moral regulation and governmentality, as argued by Foucault, was given ample treatment by Milani and the students at Barbiana. This and other aspects of Milani's proposed education and critique of public schooling makes him and his ideas congenial to a critical pedagogy. Equally congenial is the work of another Italian, Ada Gobetti[2], and her notion of emancipatory education pronounced by a person who dedicated her life to teaching after years of engagement as a partisan fighting Nazi-fascism. One can go on and include people such as Maria Montessori, who, while not overtly professing a critical pedagogy and the notion of education as political, had her schools closed by the fascist regime. The kind of education these schools promoted and personality they helped develop were considered anathema to those desired by the regime. One can also refer to Aldo Capitini and his notion of grassroots democracy (Omnicrazia) and Danilo Dolci, with his view of learning through collective community action, into the equation. This goes to show that critical pedagogy is not something new and confined to a specific context. Italy, like many other nations, has had its fair share of those who would qualify as critical pedagogues[3]. Different contexts

2 A. Marchesini Gobetti, *Educare per emancipare: scritti pedagogici 1953-1968* (Educate to Emancipate: Pedagogical writings 1953-1968), Piero Lacaita Editore, Manduria 1982.

3 M. Tarozzi, *Prefazione (preface),* In: P. Mayo and P. Vittoria, *Saggi di Pedagogia Critica. Oltre il Neoliberismo. Analizzando Educatori, Lotte e Movimenti Sociali* (Essays in Critical Pedagogy. Analysing Educators, Struggles and Social Movements), SEF, Florence 2017.

have their own traditions in this regard. People living within them can draw from other different contexts provided that they do not transplant ideas and projects but reinvent them, as per Freire's own words.

The strands and influences are, therefore, many. However, the common goal is social justice. I would summarise by saying that critical pedagogy exists in the context of the collective struggle for social justice and the dismantling of structures of oppression. It entails reason, emotion, imagination. According to Peter McLaren, emphasis is placed on the centrality of politics and power. One cannot see critical pedagogy as simply an individualising approach. It has to be seen in a wider global context characterised by social and human–earth differences and North-South imbalances and exploitation.

Some argue for a political economy approach to studying education to understand how schools and the rest of the educational system function. The Marxist influence has been very strong here and one can highlight the contribution of Peter McLaren and his colleagues from the UK (Dave Hill, the late Joyce Canan, Sarah Carpenter and Mike Cole in particular). Following on Gramsci and others, some argue for a focus on the state and education, even allowing for challenging the current mantra that, in this globalising world, the state has receded into the background. This view has been criticised on the grounds that the state plays a central role in this neoliberal period. It paves the way for the mobility of capital and serves to police the victims of neoliberalism's excesses, pouncing on them rather than the structuring forces at play in these contexts.

Others have focused on textual representation and the construction of the students' subjectivity[4]. The manner in which mainstream education contributes to 'otherising' has become a main concern of critical pedagogy which broadens the area of enquiry to view education and pedagogy in its broader contexts including different forms of public pedagogy such as advertising, entertainment (especially the film industry), all forms of mass popular culture, elite culture and activism. One area of great concern is pedagogy within social justice oriented social movements, and here the challenge has also been posed with regard to

4 P. McLaren, *Life in Schools*: *An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*, Longmans, Sydney 1994, p.167.

developing a non-monolithic and non-western-oriented notion of social movements. The domain of popular culture also brings into focus the strong relationship that exists between critical pedagogy and cultural studies in terms of how, in the words of Raymond Williams, cultural products and ideas connect with 'a whole way of life' and with a people's 'structure of feeling' which is felt but is not always articulated by everyone. The realms of complex relations between education and power are infinite and this is the domain of critical pedagogy which can be enriched by the ever important contributions emerging from different contexts including those of 'food production' in say India, the struggle against epistemicide and 'decolonisation of the mind' in the Global South and the context of 'settler colonialism' and Apartheid in Palestine[5]. It often foregrounds the work concerning people living a bicultural existence and hence the relationship between culture and language, as foregrounded by the Puerto Rican scholar, Antonia Darder[6], the lead editor in a compendium bringing international perspectives from different parts of the world into critical pedagogy[7]. It also foregrounds the Neoliberalisation of Higher education[8] and New Fascist politics in the age of populism - populism has taken different forms throughout history and in different contexts which also includes left wing populism, much augured by the likes of Chantal Mouffe. It foregrounds education against the culture of militarization[9] [10] and the New Right amalgam of Neoliberalism and traditional values in the USA[11] and more recently Turkey[12]. The list is not exhaustive.

5 N. Silwadi and P. Mayo, *Pedagogy Under Siege in Palestine: Freirean Approaches,* in "*Holy Land Studies"*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2014, p. 71-87.

6 A. Darder, *Culture and Power in the Classroom,* Paradigm, Boulder 2012.

7 A. Darder, P. Mayo and J. Paraskeva (eds.), *The International Critical Pedagogy Reader,* Routledge, London and New York 2015.

8 H. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education,* Haymarket Books, Chicago 2014.

9 H. Giroux, *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial- Academic Complex*. Paradigm, Boulder 2007.

10 L. Milani, *A just war no longer exists: The teachings and trial of don Lorenzo Milani* (J. Burtchaell ed.), University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana 1994.

11 M. Apple, *Official Knowledge:Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*, Routledge, New York and London 2000.

12 G. Gezkin, K. Inal and D. Hill, *The Gezi Revolt: People's Revolutionary Resistance Against Neoliberal Capitalism in Turkey,* The Institute for Educational Policy Studies, Brighton 2014.

The last mentioned highlights the critical pedagogy work of educators in Turkey who place their jobs on the line because of their stances, including editors of journals in Critical Pedagogy; critical pedagogy has quite a following in Turkey. Turkish critical pedagogues certainly 'place their money where their mouth is' as manifest by the presence of several of them in the 2013 Gezi Revolt in Istanbul. The different international learning experiences of Occupy Movements provide much grist for the mill of a critical pedagogy, well captured in the slogan 'Occupy Knowledge' promoted by Greek scholar and activist, Maria Nikolakaki who directs an international higher education cooperative which has critical pedagogy as one of its main programmes.

Taking my cue from Michael W Apple, who identifies more with critical education than with critical pedagogy (more a question of personnel involved than any substantial difference in conceptualisation), and his work on the Curriculum[13] [14] [15] , a series of questions emerge These can be posed regarding a variety of forms of textualisation, not only curricula, to include museums, films, documentaries, re-enactments etc. Who benefits? Who suffers? Who is included and who is excluded? Which culture is valorized and at the expense of which other cultures? How are people represented? This represents a call for educators to take sides and not remain indifferent. As Lorenzo Milani would argue: better a fascist than indifferent, of course not to be taken literally[16]. Likewise, we have Gramsci's statement "odio gli indifferenti" (I hate those who are indifferent) which connects with Freire's well known statement that being neutral is tantamount to siding with the dominant.

Furthermore, while not eschewing individual learning, critical pedagogy primarily promotes collective learning and action. As Freire[17] would argue, people liberate themselves not on their own but in concert with others. Everything is also to be read 'against the grain', through the dif-

13 M. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, Routledge, New York and London 1990.
14 M. Apple, *Education and Power*, Routledge, New York and London 1995.
15 M. Apple, *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*, Routledge, New York and London 2000.
16 C. Borg and P. Mayo, *Public Intellectuals, Radical Democracy and Social Movements: A Book of Interviews*, Peter Lang, New York 2007.
17 P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, New York 1993.

ferent liminal spaces available (see the late Roger I Simon's 1992 classic). Gramsci's and Milani's readings of Italian history, against conventional sanitized interpretations, are cases in point. What is not said in texts is as important as what is said. What is intimated or possibly understated is just as important, if not more, than what is explicitly stated. Here the work of Palestinian Edward Said and the notion of 'contrapuntal readings' becomes relevant. While highlighting different forms of culture there is the important caveat that none of these should be romanticized. Critical pedagogical work needs to be open to the criticism regarding its own absences and occlusions.

There is one final point which needs to be made. While the ideological bases of all kinds of knowledge should be unmasked, one ought to be careful not to shortchange learners. One of the challenges, in my view, is to grapple with the task of imparting and learning what Young and Muller[18] call 'powerful knowledge'. There are echoes of Gramsci and his idea of the Unitarian School here. The concern is with a type of education that does not sell the subaltern short in comparison with the ruling classes who can still obtain these skills, irrespective of whether they are offered by established educational institutions, through their materially rewarding cultural capital and what are nowadays referred to as 'invisible pedagogies'. The School of Barbiana's exposure of the situation concerning the Giannis and the Pierinos, sons of peasants and middle class persons respectively, underlines this.

Critical pedagogy can ill afford to avoid the challenge posed by the need to acquire 'powerful knowledge', which is, after all, the political pedagogical challenge also posed in the 1930s by Antonio Gramsci, and much later, in curricular circles, by the likes of Lisa Delpit[19], with regard to Afro-American schooling in the USA, and Michael Young in the UK. On the other hand, it has much to offer in terms of complementing this rigour and mastery of powerful knowledge through its emphasis on the politics of education. One can impart this knowledge differently from the way it has been conventionally taught. The classic example

18 M. Young and J. Muller, *Three Educational Scenarios for the Future: lessons from the sociology of knowledge, in "European Journal of Education"*, 45 (1), 2010, p. 11-27.

19 L. Delpit, *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children*, in "*Harvard Educational Review*", 58 (3), 1988, p. 280-298.

concerns how to deal with the colonizing language within a politics of decolonization and provide cognitive justice[20] to that which is Indigenous. It would be foolish to throw away the colonizing language, say English, given its current hegemonic status, a point stressed by the rulers of Guinea Bissau, with respect to Portuguese, to Paulo Freire[21]. Hegemony contains the elements of change within its own interstices. In this case, the dominant colonial language needs to be taught and learnt not in a simply technical manner but in a way which involves questions of its role in global politics and social stratification, and as a colonizing force. These issues cannot be avoided in a genuine attempt at a critical pedagogy. The knowledge denounced as 'colonial' or 'hegemonic' can serve as an instrument of political empowerment in a globalizing world. Not learning it would, as Gramsci argued, maintain people in a politically and economically marginalized state[22]. Critical pedagogy, no matter how internationally relevant and context conscious, should safeguard against the danger throwing out the powerful knowledge baby with the ideological bathwater.

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