

Abstract

Teacher education in the United States is historically grounded in a nineteenth century conception of education, influenced to some degree by social Darwinism, and based on an efficiency, scientific deterministic model of teaching and learning.

Using several examples of critical and emancipatory pedagogy drawn from the accounts of school teachers such as Warner, Brown, Searle, Shor and Freire, the author argues that through the study of these teachers, the methodologies and the lessons they teach, teachers receive what they need most — “a for instance.” These accounts can help all teachers make sense of, and hopefully envision and ‘play with’ ideas as they create, teach and reflect on their own lessons.

Résumé

Historiquement, la formation à l'enseignement aux Etats-Unis trouve ses racines dans une conception de l'éducation du 19^e siècle qui est influencée, dans une certaine mesure, par les théories sociales de Darwin et qui est fondée sur un modèle déterministe et scientifique de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage.

En se servant de plusieurs exemples de pédagogie critique et émancipatrice puisés à l'expérience d'enseignants tels que Warner, Brown, Searle, Shor et Freire, l'auteur soutient que c'est en étudiant les méthodes et les leçons de ces derniers que les enseignants trouveront ce dont ils ont le plus besoin: des exemples concrets. Ils y trouveront aussi l'inspiration nécessaire à tout travail de création et d'enseignement.

Beverly M. Gordon*

THE USE OF EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGY IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Introduction: The Social Darwinian Past vs. a Democratic Future

The recent report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* attempts to grapple with the crisis in American education while overlooking some of the most critical and central issues. For although the report wrestles at great length with the ill-defined but politically explosive issue of school success or failure, this fundamental question cannot be examined at any significant depth without an understanding of the problematic nature of both the knowledge purveyed in the traditional school curriculum and the socio-economic and political role of schooling in our society. Henry A. Giroux focused on the implications of the failure of the educational community to come to terms with these issues, and advocates an overhaul of the American educational paradigm.¹

* Professor, College of Education, Columbus, Ohio

Why do we educate our children? What are schools for? What is it that we expect to “happen” in schools to prepare children for the responsibilities and privileges of adult life? More specifically, what kind of knowledge is being purveyed in our schools in support of what kinds of future roles for which — and whose — children? And whose interest is this whole educational system really designed to serve? The current crisis in American education demands that the attention of teacher educators also be focused on these central issues, and that the methods and the knowledge content of teacher education programs be re-examined.

If we as educators are truly concerned with providing the American citizenry with the critical and reflective skills necessary for a full and meaningful participation in society, we must begin to question whether our educational system is truly designed to achieve this goal. It is this author's contention that the knowledge presently disseminated in teacher training programs is problematic and must be critiqued, because it is designed to legitimate and perpetuate the unjust hierarchial structuring of our society; and that the fundamental paradigm employed in today's teacher education programs must be overhauled, because it rests on an undemocratic and unscientific 19th-century psychological and administrative model which reflects 19th-century social Darwinist thought and social engineering theory.

Teacher Preparation and the Issue of Knowledge

Educational policy based on social Darwinist thought, social engineering philosophy, and administrative psychological approaches to education has been under attack by progressive elements in the educational community since this insidious phenomenon first began to take hold in this country.² The insidious paradigm underlying these policies prescribes, on Spencer's pretended “scientific” basis, an educational system designed to produce and maintain a social hierarchy which relegates ascribed categories of individuals to different caste roles in society. The educators Judd, Thorndike, and Snedden's models of societal stratification according to levels of natural cognitive abilities also rest on the sociological theories of Spencer's disciple William Sumner.

It is essential to remember, however, that Spencer's *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* (1885)³ arrived in this country in the late 1890's — after the collapse of Reconstruction, during a period of intensified racism, black urban migration and ghettoization, and the continuing pauperization of the black masses, and during a period of massive immigration of Eastern and Southern European peasants. Seen within this historical context, the acceptance of the Spencerian education paradigm and Sumner's sociology were — at best — attempts to rationalize the American urban socio-economic status quo. The differentiated curriculum approach outlined by Franklin Bobbitt and W.W. Charters, based on Thorndike's principles of “intelligence testing,” can thus also be seen in context, as the “logical” way to put social Darwinist theory into educational practice. City planners as well as educators of that era recognized the potential role of the schools in societal development.⁴

In 1895, the *Report of the Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education*,⁵ in the section dealing with teacher education, described psychology, methodology, “school economy,” and the history of education as the components of the science of teaching, and observation and practice as comprising the art of teaching. The *Report* then proceeded to debate the value of the history of education in teacher education programs, as well as the issue of professional versus academic studies, and the relationship between theory and practice. From today's perspective, however, the

most striking aspect of the *Report of the Committee of Fifteen* is its overwhelming similarity to the discussions about today's educational situation. It is shocking to realize that neither the philosophy nor the methodology of teacher training has undergone any fundamental change in 89 years — i.e., that contemporary teacher training, and educators' theories and paradigms about the educational process and the preparation of the teachers, have not significantly changed or advanced since the 1890's. In the 1980's, teacher educators can no longer afford to resist examining alternative educational paradigms which go beyond the 19th-century "social efficiency"/educational psychology model of education as a system for reproducing the socioeconomic status quo.

Introducing Emancipatory Pedagogy Teacher Education Programs

It is true that a variety of obstacles confronts us in the field of curriculum reform. For one thing, as Rosario and Lopes' study⁶ of stability and change in a middle school indicates, the burdens of routine daily management and the demands of school discipline have relegated curriculum reform to low priority status for both administrators and teachers. It is also somewhat difficult to teach any innovative theory to young and unsophisticated students at the preservice level. Furthermore, at the inservice level, very few of today's public school teachers, however well trained and motivated, as yet have an adequate working knowledge of what emancipatory pedagogy might actually look like in an American classroom setting. It is also quite likely that emancipatory pedagogy would be completely unacceptable in certain milieux, and even where given fair consideration it would be perceived as a low priority item compared to other pressing curriculum concerns.

These potential obstacles, however, can be overcome; and the effort to implement such curriculum reform in teacher training programs would yield a number of significant benefits. First, the methods of emancipatory pedagogy will provide present and future teachers with the heuristic tools they need to analyze the crucial dynamics of the relationships between students and their teachers, including the problems of student/teacher conflict and student resistance.⁷ Second the newest critical pedagogy would also provide student teachers with an opportunity to experience and experiment with a new critical perspective on education and a new intellectual awareness of their role as teachers which they would be able to convert into pedagogical materials and classroom activities and experiences. In essence, the critical perspective can become an alternative paradigmatic framework or "lens" through which teachers can re-examine and recreate the practice of teaching; and it can enable teachers to call upon their own newly-developed internal resources to develop workable solutions to some of the most basic and most profound problems of present-day education.

A third benefit to be obtained by introducing emancipatory pedagogy into existing teacher training programs is that it offers us a new epistemological perspective. As an alternative or competing paradigm which views conventional classroom knowledge itself as problematic, critical and emancipatory pedagogy also poses key questions about the classroom and its place in our society. This new paradigm requires us to become more aware of the socio-political-economic context of the classroom, and raises the question of whether our societal attitudes and values might not be shaped to a large extent by the *social and institutional structure* of our society — rather than the other way around.⁸ This kind of gestalt not only enhances our social consciousness; it can also prove to be the first step in a paradigmatic overhaul or "revolution"⁹ in social science theory.

There are several examples of critical and emancipatory pedagogy in the literature which could be used effectively in preservice teacher education programs. The richest sources can be found in

the writings of a number of "master teachers," who made innovative changes in their classroom pedagogy and struggled to make schoolwork meaningful to their students and useful within the context of the students' lives. These writings provide student teachers with concrete examples of how to generate a curriculum based on the social realities that confront teachers and their students; and they also present clearly the analytical tools and skills necessary to understand and implement their ideas.

Most of these master teachers in emancipatory pedagogy worked with poor or working-class groups within their own societies. Sylvia Ashton-Warner's work with Maori children in New Zealand;¹⁰ Chris Searle's work with poor, working-class, and "coloured" children in the East End of London;¹¹ Cynthia Brown's work with poor, working-class, and minority children in Berkeley, California;¹² Ira Shor's work with working-class adults at Staten Island College, CUNY,¹³ and, of course, Paulo Freire's work with Brazilian peasants¹⁴ are among many examples of a growing body of literature which integrates emancipatory theory and its quotidian classroom praxis.

It is critical to recognize that these master teachers are neither wild-eyed ideologues nor communists, and to note that they do not spend much time criticizing the schools for reinforcing class distinctions or perpetuating the societal status quo. Instead, working in the field, with students ranging from the primary grades to adult literacy classes to community colleges, their work and their thinking grows out of the hermeneutic demands of classroom praxis. They approach education creatively and, purposefully, and they respect education as a life-long and two-sided process — i.e., they view themselves as both teachers and learners.

One of the best known advocates of emancipatory pedagogy is Paulo Freire.¹⁵ His writings describe the development of educational pedagogies designed to promote critical consciousness, to enable students to become critical thinkers and active societal participants, and to give people the emancipatory capability of redefining the nature of their own lives.

Freire's advocacy of education for critical consciousness and his model of emancipatory pedagogy for oppressed groups together heighten our awareness of the inherently and inescapably political nature of curriculum. His writings have also raised some fundamental questions which have enabled curriculum theorists to look anew at their role in the educative process. Freire stands fundamentally opposed to the positivistic rationality, which views the goal of schooling as merely facilitating the adaptation of students to the state's conception of reality.¹⁶ To Freire, adaptation is a primary skill of the animal world — but it is not the proper goal of education.¹⁷ Freire's thinking is sympathetic to reconceptualist criticisms of schooling, which regard positivism as a dehumanizing influence on society; but Freire's work also adds a global perspective which demonstrates that positivism is not an exclusively Euro-American rationality. American curriculum reconceptualists and public school teachers engaged in collaborative research efforts can benefit from Freire's insights. Freire's contention that adaptation is not the proper goal of education is also supported by this author's research,¹⁸ which shows how students become alienated by the schools' attempts to "socialize" them and to push them into roles or categories they cannot accept, and how they develop various ways of resisting school pressures.

This author believes that Freire's theories help to illuminate the true nature and proper function of education in society, and that his methods of implementing emancipatory pedagogy in Brazil can offer our student teachers an important and unique perspective on the American school experience and its problems.

While Freire worked primarily with adults, the pedagogy employed by Brown, Warner, and Searle presents new ways in which teachers can work with children. Cynthia Brown used Freire's methodology with American primary school children. Sylvia Ashton-Warner talks about the organic vocabulary and learning that children bring with them into the classroom and shows how to tap into the "cultural capital" of the children and use it as a bridge to the more formalized knowledge that the schools wish the children to acquire.

Searle's use of the newspaper in his classroom of poor, working-class, and "coloured" students provides another example of how teachers can translate the critical perspective and analytic study into classroom activities meaningful to children, offering them an opportunity to learn and to use their reading and writing skills, as well as their analytical skills and aesthetic sensibility. Searle's pedagogy, geared toward societal participation, also provided his students with a sense of contributing to the "creation" of culture, an aspect which Freire also emphasizes; and it provided a transitional vehicle for demystifying the creation and dissemination of conventional classroom knowledge and the media by helping children to understand that what they read in school or see in the media is not necessarily true or "objective" — that it is not eternal truth engraved in stone, but merely someone else's necessarily subjective and selective perception of natural, scientific, political, social, economic, moral, or aesthetic phenomena. In essence, Searle does for his children what Freire did for the Brazilian peasants: he empowers the students with a sense of confidence in their own experiences and perceptions, with a sense that they can gain control over their own destiny, and with the rudimentary tools to start working towards a just society.

This kind of emancipatory education goes beyond using curriculum "relevance" for motivational purposes only, and actually helps students begin to deal with real-world issues that they face in their daily lives. In the emancipatory classroom, students begin to participate as an active citizenry and to overcome their feelings of despair and hopelessness, apathy and alienation.

Freire's and Searle's accounts of theory in action — of actual classroom praxis — provide concrete models of activities and experiences in which children can actively participate. Their accounts also show why these master teachers believe that reading is power, and that educating someone is an awesome responsibility and an unavoidably political act.

Another readable example of critical and emancipatory pedagogy, focusing on yet another clientele, is found in the work of Ira Shor. Not only is Shor's work illuminative and instructive for those already interested in incorporating emancipatory pedagogy, but it also deals with other themes and issues in present-day teacher education programs.

Working with adult students at the community college level, Shor used the critical issues in the lives of his students as the starting place for the educative process. By focusing discussions on the situations, circumstances, and contradictions in the daily lives of his students as they struggled to get an education, Shor developed and enhanced the students' critical awareness. His writing, in turn, enhances our understanding of how cultural and conceptual literacy can flow from social critique.

On another level, Shor's analysis demonstrates that in working-class colleges (which are, for the most part, the community colleges and technical institutes), the curriculum is designed to force students to commit intellectual suicide, in a false and unnecessary dilemma. The student is told, in effect, that s/he must choose between making a living — through skill development or vocationalism — and learning how to think critically (through liberal education). And then, "from

these bottom (vocational) tracks of the school universe, worker-students get sent into the bottom levels of the job market".¹⁹ The parallels between Shor's view of community college "vocationalism" and present-day teacher education programs are uncomfortably close! Vocationalism, Shor contends, leads to the stifling of the human potential and to the creation of a non-critical (non-political?) work force which effects, unfortunately, we also find among too many teachers and even teacher educators.

Using provocative, participatory, and open dialogue among educator and students instead of the traditional unidirectional lectures and "directed discussion" — this is the critical first step in the classroom implementation of an emancipatory paradigm (which Shor calls "liberatory" education). This method is emancipatory in two senses: because it makes learning a mutual and reciprocal process between educator and students, it liberates both from their traditional roles and because its object is the liberated creative intellect of free men. Far from being communist-inspired the methods and goals of emancipatory pedagogy bear a striking resemblance, respectively, to the Socratic method of provocatively questioning the conventional wisdom in order to reach more fundamental truths, and to the Western ideal of liberal education designed to create an enlightened and responsible, enfranchised citizenry. The differences between the modern American version of liberal education and emancipatory pedagogy are due partly to the erosion of the liberal tradition in our colleges; but more importantly, the differences occur in the emphasis in emancipatory pedagogy on using the indigenous cultural resources of the students instead of the "classical" curriculum materials of the dominant culture.

Implications of Critical and Emancipatory Education for Teacher Preparation

The implications of a critical and emancipatory curriculum and pedagogy in both the teacher training classes and elementary/secondary school classrooms are only now beginning to be addressed. In spite of today's overwhelming school discipline and management problems however, and in spite of the shrinking educational job market, the question, "Education for what?" remains the central question in both teacher education and in American schoolrooms. This basic question also forces us to focus on the many areas of contestation, conflict, and contradiction in our society and in the real lives of students. A fresh critical perspective in education could reawaken the thrust towards social reform, with the same enthusiasm Dewey had when he reconceptualized the role of schooling in the face of the scientific determinism and social efficiency movements of his time, in *The School and Social Progress*.²⁰

Teacher education today is trapped in a "deceptive paradox",²¹ or, in Kuhn's terms, a crisis.²² While teachers are a part of the larger societal community and share "a very real need on the part of all socio-economic classes to learn about and transform the nature of their existence",²³ they are also part of the educational mechanism and its power structure. But it is precisely because teachers are of both worlds that they hold the key to transforming both worlds.

Our late-20th-century education system is in crisis and chaos in large part because it is based on teacher education paradigms which reflect 19th-century concepts of social efficiency and scientific determinism, and which employ 19th-century psychological models of authoritarian teaching and passive learning. If teacher education is to move forward, it must begin to re-examine the most fundamental questions concerning the goals and purposes of education, the nature of the learning process, and the role of teachers and schools in society. Then we must redesign teacher education methods and materials in accord with today's objectives and today's realities.

A critical and emancipatory perspective as one alternative model of teacher education merits serious consideration by teacher educators for three reasons. First, as practicing scientists, professional educators must continually look beyond and challenge the conventional wisdom; new paradigms must be debated in the educational scientific research community and must be allowed to stand or fall under the rigor of scientific scrutiny. Second, this particular alternative paradigm, which emphasizes critical thinking and awareness, provides student teachers with unique heuristic tools which will enable them to reflect critically on the values, meanings, and beliefs that they bring with them to their profession, and will help teachers to better understand their role in the teaching/learning process. Third, emancipatory pedagogy can help children become critical thinkers and constructive, creative, active citizen participants, capable of creatively redefining the nature of their future adult lives.

Emancipatory pedagogy does not afford teachers the comforts of naivete or selective amnesia or a pretense of non-involvement concerning the social and political dimensions inherent in the act of educating people. Instead, it implores them to think about and act on their ethical, moral, and social responsibilities and commitments, and to work towards increased opportunity for social justice and economic equity in society. Our present education system is floundering and foundering partly because it rests on a false premise of being politically "neutral." Only by re-examining the fundamental place of schooling in our society can teachers and teacher educators begin to participate constructively and effectively in the ongoing social debate about the state of education and directions for educational policy.

NOTES

¹ Henry Giroux. "Public Philosophy and the Crisis in Education." *Harvard Educational Review*. Vol. 54, No. 2, May 1984: 186-194.

² Carter G. Woodson. *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861 (Orig. 1919)*. (New York: Arno Press, 1968). See also Benjamin Bowser "The Contribution of Blacks to Sociological Knowledge: A Problem of Theory and Role to 1950." *Phylon*. Vol. 42, 1981:180-193.

³ Herbert Spencer. *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical*. (New York: John B. Alden, Publisher, 1885).

⁴ Robert Park. "The Bases Of Race Prejudice." *The Annals*. Vol. CXXXX, November, 1928:11-20; Robert Church. *Education in The United States*. (New York: Free Press, 1976); David Tyack. *The One Best System*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

⁵ National Education Association. *Committee of Fifteen: Report on Elementary Education*. (New York: The American Book Company, 1895).

⁶ Jose Rosario and Lawrence Lopes. *Mechanisms of Continuity: A Study of Stability and Change in a Public School. Final Report: The Workings of Process and Order*. (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1983).

⁷ Beverly M. Gordon. *A Study of Conflict/Resolution in School-Community Relations. Final Report*. (Columbus: The Ohio State University & Teacher Corps Project. September, 1982(b)). See also Rosario & Lopes, *Mechanisms of Continuity*.

⁸ David T. Wellman. *Portraits Of White Racism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁹ Thomas Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹⁰ Sylvia Ashton-Warner. *Teacher*. (New York: Basic Books, 1964).

- ¹¹ Chris Searle. *Classrooms of Resistance*. (London: Writers & Readers Publishing Corp., 1975).
- ¹² Cynthia Brown. *Literacy in Thirty Hours*. (Chicago: Alternative Schools Network, 1973).
- ¹³ Ira Shor. *Critical Teaching And Everyday Life*. (Boston: South End Press, 1980).
- ¹⁴ Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1970). Also see, Paulo Freire. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Henry A. Giroux. *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981): 21(p. 143) 23(p. 143).
- ¹⁷ Freire. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. p. 4.
- ¹⁸ Beverly M. Gordon. *The Educational History of Nine High School Dropouts*. Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1979.
- ¹⁹ Shor. *Critical Teaching*. p. 24.
- ²⁰ John Dewey. "The School and Social Progress" (1896). Excerpted in *John Dewey On Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald Archambault. (New York: The Modern Library-Random House, 1964).
- ²¹ Giroux. *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling*. p. 143.
- ²² Kuhn. *Scientific Revolutions*.
- ²³ Giroux. *Ideology*. p. 143.