

## **Why a Critical Pedagogy? What is Critical Pedagogy?**

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Critical pedagogy takes as a central concern the issue of power in the teaching and learning context. It focuses on how and in whose interests knowledge is produced and passed on and views the ideal aims of education as emancipatory. [Critical] pedagogy . . . signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities. . . . Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power. (Giroux, 1994, p. 30, cited in Martin, 2000)

Furthermore, the critical pedagogy tradition begins from a very different starting point. It regards specific belief claims, not primarily as propositions to be assessed for their truth content, but as parts of systems of belief and action that have aggregate effects within the power structures of society. It asks first about these systems of belief and action, who benefits? The primary preoccupation of critical pedagogy is with social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations. Indeed, a crucial dimension of this approach is that certain claims, even if they might be true or substantiated within particular confines and assumptions, might nevertheless be partisan in their effects. Assertions

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that African-Americans score lower on IQ tests, for example, even if it is a fact that this particular population does on average score lower on this particular set of tests, leaves significant larger questions unaddressed, not the least of which is what effect such assertions have on a general population that is not aware of the important limits of these tests or the tenuous relation, at best, between what IQ tests measure and intelligence. Other important questions, from this standpoint, include: Who is making these assertions? Why are they being made at this point in time? Who funds such research? Who promulgates these findings? Are they being raised to question African-American intelligence or to demonstrate the bias of IQ tests? Such questions, from the critical pedagogy perspective, are not external to, or separable from, the import of also weighing the evidentiary base for such claims (Popkewitz and Higgs, 1997, cited in Martin, 2000).

Moreover, critical pedagogy considers how education can provide individuals with the tools to better themselves and strengthen democracy, to create a more egalitarian and just society, and thus to deploy education in a process of progressive social change (Kellner, 2000, cited in Critical pedagogy...).

Darder (1995) asserts that:

The fundamental commitment of critical educators is to empower the powerless and transform those conditions which perpetuate human injustice and inequity (McLaren,

1988, cited in Darder 1995). This purpose is inextricably linked to the fulfillment of what Paulo Freire (1970, cited in Darder 1995) defines as our "vocation" - to be truly humanized social agents in the world. Hence, a major function of critical pedagogy is to critique, expose, and challenge the manner in which schools impact upon the political and cultural life of students. Teachers must recognize how schools unite knowledge and power and how through this function they can work to influence or thwart the formation of critically thinking and socially active individuals.

"Unlike traditional perspectives of education that claim to be neutral and apolitical, critical pedagogy views all education theory as intimately linked to ideologies shaped by power, politics, history and culture. Given this view, schooling functions as a terrain of ongoing struggle over what will be accepted as legitimate knowledge and culture. In accordance with this notion, a critical pedagogy must seriously address the concept of cultural politics by both legitimizing and challenging cultural experiences that comprise the histories and social realities that in turn comprise the forms and boundaries that give meaning to student lives. (Darder 1991, p. 77)" (Darder, 1995, cited in Critical pedagogy...).

The critical question here is whose future, story, and interests does the school represent. Critical pedagogy argues that school practices need to be informed by a public philosophy that addresses how to construct ideological and

institutional conditions in which the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of student becomes the defining feature of schooling.

According to Giroux (cited in Williams, 1999) critical pedagogy attempts to:

1. create new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplines and creating interdisciplinary knowledge.
2. raise questions about the relationships between the margins and centers of power in schools and is concerned about how to provide a way of reading history as part of a larger project of reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories of race, gender, class, and ethnicity.
3. reject the distinction between high and popular culture so as to make curriculum knowledge responsive to the everyday knowledge that constitutes peoples' lived histories differently.
4. illuminate the primacy of the ethical in defining the language that teachers and others use to produce particular cultural practices.

Critical pedagogy has grown out of the critical theory of the early Frankfurt School and has evolved through the influences of the emancipatory work of Paulo Freire, the influences of the Postmodern theories, and has expanded from a focus mainly on class issues to a broader theory encompassing such issues as race, gender, ability, age, sexual preferences, religion, ethnicity and language.

In addition, critical pedagogy is concerned with the elimination of oppression, the resurgence of hope and possibility -- in short, with the making of a better world in which to live. A better world for all.

Entering the 21st century, critical pedagogy has turned to address the impact of globalization, mass media, multiple literacies, particularly critical media literacies, as these developments change our world before our very eyes. Critical pedagogues analyze the effects of the changes on individuals and various groups while simultaneously seeking areas for opposition and opportunities for change. Their goal is the achievement of a democratic society in which all individuals have a voice - a just world free from oppression and suffering (What is...).

On the whole, three assumptions serve as organizing principles for critical pedagogy. These assumptions are that: (1) Education is not neutral; (2) Society can be transformed by the engagement of critically conscious persons; and (3) Praxis connects liberatory education with social transformation (Boyce, 1996, p.2).

### **Philosophical Foundations of Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy**

The philosophical foundations flow chart provides information regarding the philosophical and socio-historic roots of critical theory and critical pedagogy (What is...):

#### **Philosophical Foundations of Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy**

Plato

Aristotle

429-347 BC	435-350 BC
Inventor of philosophic argument	Student of Plato Concern for intense detail of natural phenomena, including those of thought, language and psychology
Otherworldly, formal and a priori concept of knowledge	Concern to protect knowledge of the plural and multifarious world we live in Like Kant, lover of categories - laid down division of the sciences we use Laid down categories that have organized virtually all subsequent philosophical thought (substance/accident, potential/actual, matter/form, and categories of causes)
"Patron saint of transcendental theories of knowledge and especially ethics"	

Rene Descartes

1596-1650

French mathematician and founding father of modern philosophy

"I think therefore I am"

Cartesian dualism - separation of mind and matter

(criticized by Kant)

Immanuel Kant

1724-1804

German philosopher and founder of Critical Philosophy; made first decisive break with empiricism (empiricism ties knowledge to experience; no a priori knowledge)

A priori

Categories of the mind

Idealism - reality is fundamentally mental inn nature

Considered the greatest philosopher of last 300 years

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel  
1776-1831

German philosopher

Self-consciousness

Foundation for social philosophy (alienation, master/slave morality)

Logic (dialectic materialism)

Freedom

History

Contradiction

History is progress toward freedom

Primary influence on Engels and Marx

Friedrich Engels  
1820-1895

German social philosopher

Collaborator of Marx

Born to prosperous,  
factory-owning parents

Collaborated with Marx on  
*The Communist Manifesto*  
(1848)

Credited with shaping two  
major philosophical  
components of Marxism:

Karl Marx  
1818-1883

Founder of  
revolutionary  
communism

Introduced concept of  
alienation

*The Communist  
Manifesto* (1848)

*Capital* (three volumes  
in 1867, 1885, 1893)

Base and superstructure

<p>Historical materialism and Dialectical materialism</p> <p>Main supporter of Marx and his family</p> <p>Editor of Marx's works</p> <p>Wrote <i>Anti-Duhring</i> (1878), a materialist rebuttal of the work of Eugene Duhring, one of Marx's rivals for influence in German socialist circles</p>	<p>Dialectical materialism</p> <p>Historical materialism</p> <p>Labour theory of value</p> <p>Marxism - a commitment to the exploited and oppressed classes, and to the revolution that should better their position</p>
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<p>Edmund Husserl 1859-1938</p> <p>German mathematician Principal founder of Phenomenology Attempted to reconcile the subjective or psychological nature of mental life with the objective and logical content Moved to form of transcendental idealism Bracketing</p>	<p>Martin Heidegger 1889-1976</p> <p>German existentialist Social critic Educated in phenomenological tradition of Husserl <i>Sein und Zeit</i> (1927) translated to <i>Being and Time</i> (1962) Freedom Existence in the world Inauthenticity Dread, guilt, destiny</p>	<p>Sigmund Freud 1856-1939</p> <p>Viennese founder of psychoanalysis Postulated that an active process of repression needed confronting and disarming Model for the dynamics of the mind (ego) Methods/theories adopted as official of the Frankfurt School</p>
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### The First Critical Theorists - the Frankfurt School

<p>Max Horkheimer 1885-1973</p> <p>Director, Frankfurt School, 1930-late</p>	<p>Theodor W. Adorno 1903-1969</p> <p>German sociologist and political thinker</p>	<p>Herbert Marcuse 1898-1979</p> <p><i>One-</i></p>	<p>Leo Lowenthal</p> <p>Pioneer in developm</p>
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<p>60s <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i></p>	<p><i>The Authoritarian Personality</i> (1950) Philosopher and musicologist <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i></p>	<p><i>Dimensional Man</i> (1964) <i>Eros and Civilization</i> (1955) "Father of the New Left"</p>	<p>ent of a sociology of literature Critic of mass culture</p>
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<p>Eric Fromm 1900- Psychoanalyst <i>Escape from Freedom</i> (1941) <i>The Sane Society</i> (1955)</p>	<p>Henryk Grossman 1934- Economist</p>	<p>Freidrich Pollock 1894-1970 Economist</p>	<p>Antonio Gramsci 1891-1937 Italian communist Social theorist <i>Prison Notebooks</i> Humanist Marxism Hegemony (Gramsci was not a member of the Frankfurt School, although he lived at the same time. He did have a major impact upon critical pedagogy.)</p>
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<p>Paulo Freire 1921-1997 Brazilian educator Phenomenologist Literacy training 'Conscientization' - consciousness-raising Education - "banking concept"</p>	<p>Jurgen Habermas 1929- Most eclectic modern Marxist - Marxism, speech act theory, hermeneutics, Piagetian-Kohlbergian developmentalism, Chomskyan linguistics, psychoanalysis 3 interests rooted in human nature: 1. technical 2. practical</p>	<p>Raymond Williams 1921- Foremost Marxist literary historian of his generation Open communication &gt; genuine community Adult education Educational system perpetuates class system Hegemony</p>
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## 3. emancipatory

**Critical Pedagogues – following in the steps of the Critical Theorists**

<p>Henry Giroux</p> <p>Educational critical theorist</p> <p><i>Living Dangerously - Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference,</i> 1993</p> <p><i>Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling,</i> 1981</p> <p><i>Critical Pedagogy, the State and Cultural Struggle,</i> 1988</p> <p><i>Theory and Resistance in Education,</i> 1983</p> <p><i>Education Under Siege,</i> 1985</p> <p><i>Postmodern Education,</i> 1991</p> <p><i>Border Crossings,</i> 1992</p> <p><i>The Hidden</i></p>	<p>Michael Apple</p> <p>Educational critical theorist</p> <p><i>Ideology and Curriculum,</i> 1979</p> <p><i>Education and Power,</i> 1982</p> <p><i>Cultural and economic reproduction in education: essays on class, ideology and the state,</i> 1982</p> <p><i>Official Knowledge: democratic education in a conservative age,</i> 1993</p> <p><i>The Curriculum: problems, politics and possibilities,</i> 1988</p> <p><i>Ideology and practice in schooling</i></p> <p><i>Teachers and Tests: a political economy of class and gender relations in education,</i> 1986</p> <p><i>Schooling and the rights of children,</i> 1975</p>
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<p><i>Curriculum and Moral Education</i>, 1983</p> <p><i>Education Still Under Siege</i>, 1995</p>	
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Peter McLaren

Douglas Kellner

Carlos Torres	Kris Guitierrez
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Adapted from What is "Possibilities"? ([www.vms.utexas.edu/~possible/flow.html-23k](http://www.vms.utexas.edu/~possible/flow.html-23k))

### What are the Key Terms and Concepts in Critical Pedagogy?

Djkruger (2002) suggests the followings as the key terms and concepts in critical pedagogy taken from Heaney's glossary (cited in Djkruger, 2002):

**Antidisciplinarity:** Organizing courses around questions whose answers oblige one to rethink the framework within which the questions were formulated.

**Borderlands:** (Described by Henry Giroux) are spaces crisscrossed with a variety of languages, experiences and voices. For the Chicana feminist poet Gloria Anzalda borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other; different races, lower, middle and upper classes touch.

**Culture:** We need to understand culture as a process of meaning making and we need to give attention to the power

relations that set boundaries to those processes.

**Cultural Studies (CS):** Cultural studies foster the interdisciplinary investigation of culture as a dynamic organization of resources, peoples, artifacts, and power. The field draws together marxism, feminism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, popular culture and media studies, the study of minority and emergent literatures, and gender studies.

**Hidden Curriculum:** The unstated norms, values and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure of meaning and in both the formal content and the social relations of school and classroom life. These can precipitate the backfiring of even the most carefully formulated strategies for egalitarian dynamics of communication. The prior inculcation of the student with assumptions of all sorts means that a crucial component of the learning experience is that of unlearning the hidden curriculum.

**Praxis:** Praxis is a complex activity by which individuals create culture and society, and become critically conscious human beings. Praxis comprises a cycle of action-reflection-action which is central to liberatory education. Characteristics of praxis include self-determination (as opposed to coercion), intentionality (as opposed to reaction), creativity (as opposed to homogeneity), and rationality (as opposed to chance).

**Public Intellectual:** An important task of the academically-trained and university-based public intellectual is to work as a kind of translator: To make

insights and perspectives of professional work accessible, meaningful and relevant to as broad an audience as possible.

**Predatory culture:** This term comes from Peter McLaren's 1995 (cited in Djkruger, 2002) book entitled "Cultural Pedagogy and Predatory Culture". It has been steered in the ominous direction of the social logic of production and consumption. Buyers are beginning culturally to merge with their commodities while human agency is becoming absorbed into the social ethics of the marketable. Social impulses for equality, liberty, and social justice have been flattened out by the mass media until they have become cataleptically rigid while postmodern images threaten to steal what was once known as the soul. Predatory culture, therefore, is a field of invisibility - of stalkers and victims - precisely because it is so obvious. Its obviousness immunizes its victims against a full disclosure of its menacing capabilities. In predatory culture identity is fashioned mainly and often violently around the excesses of marketing and consumption and the natural social relations of post-industrial capitalism. Predatory culture is the left-over detritus of bourgeois culture stripped.

The social, the cultural and the human has been subsumed within capital. McLaren offers examples of life in this predatory culture including the Marc Lepine shooting in Montreal, Gulf War cards, Jeffrey Dahmer T-shirts, OJ Simpson's starring role in predatory culture, etc.

**Transformative intellectual:** The term transformative

intellectual was coined by Henry Giroux (1988, cited in Djkruiger, 2002). It simply means for our purposes that teachers possess the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to question, understand, interrogate and eventually act as change agents of structural inequities in their place of employment.

### **Using Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom**

Critical pedagogists Henry Giroux and bell hooks have written about the ways that they use the elements of critical pedagogy in their own classrooms. Critical theory can be a catalyst towards liberating students' imaginations regarding who they are, what they can do, even what they can dare to dream. Giroux believes that when students are empowered (and not merely humanized) they can not only understand the world they live in, but they can participate in it. Dewey also considered this very important. However, the critical theorists take the idea a step further. As society becomes increasingly fragmented, it also becomes less equitable. Giroux and hooks wish to see students become functional, critically aware citizens who have the ability to transform the world into an egalitarian and fully democratic society. They believe that students have a chance of achieving this through finding their location, or place in history and being able to see beyond the often stiffing and oppressive dominant symbols and texts in our culture. The critical discussion of student's current lives and the imagery, text, and media that surround them are taken seriously as objects to discuss. This approach is probably

much more meaningful to students lives and development than standardized tests. But the struggle for critical pedagogy can not exist, much less succeed, without students having a sense of hope. If they have lost that in the schools that are failing, then their resignation will serve for compliance when standardization and back-to-basics move in (Using a critical...).

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