THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN CRITICAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The text addresses the challenges that are currently present for the construction of democracy in education. It is pointed out the need to seek two dispositions so that democracy can be lived: that there is a repositioning, that is, that the world must always be seen from the perspective of the dispossessed; and that the world should be seen in a relational way, that is, to seek to analyze and understand the relations of power and the contradictions that structure institutions and societies. The article ends by emphasizing that the constant struggle for the experience of democracy in education is what keeps subjects vigilant against narratives that point to conservative perspectives as inevitable.

Keywords: Democracy. Critical education. Power.

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A LUTA PELA DEMOCRACIA NA EDUCAÇÃO CRÍTICA

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RESUMO

O texto aborda os desafios que atualmente se fazem presentes para a construção da democracia na educação. É apontada a necessidade de que se busque duas disposições para que a democracia possa ser vivida: que haja um reposicionamento, ou seja, que o mundo seja visto sempre pela perspectiva dos despossuídos; e que o mundo seja visto de forma relacional, ou seja, que se busque sempre analisar e entender as relações de poder e as contradições que estruturam as instituições e sociedades. O artigo termina enfatizando que a luta constante pela vivência da democracia na educação é o que mantém os sujeitos vigilantes contra as narrativas que apontam as perspectivas conservadoras como inevitáveis.

Palavras-chave: *Democracia. Educação crítica. Poder.*

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LA LUCHA POR LA DEMOCRACIA EN LA EDUCACIÓN CRÍTICA

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Resumen

El texto aborda los desafíos que actualmente están presentes para la construcción de la democracia en la educación. Es apuntada la necesidad de que se busque dos disposiciones para que la democracia pueda ser vivida: que haya un reposicionamiento, o sea, que el mundo sea visto siempre por la perspectiva de los desposeídos; y que el mundo sea visto de manera relacional, o sea, que se busque siempre analizar y entender las relaciones de poder y las contradicciones que estructuran las instituciones y sociedades. El artículo termina enfatizando que la lucha constante por la vivencia de la democracia em la educación es lo que mantiene los sujetos vigilantes contra las narrativas que apuntan las perspectivas conservadoras como inevitables.

Palabras clave: *Democracia. Educación crítica. Poder*

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1 SEEING CONTRADICTIONS

I want to begin this article with a story about the complex realities involved in the struggle for critical democracy in education.[i] For a number of years, my wife Rima and I spent time working with activists, community groups, the ministry of education, critical educators, and others in one of the more progressive states in India. Its high rates of literacy were well known. The left-leaning government was expressly dedicated to improving the economic and political lives of the population, especially those at the bottom of the class and caste structure.

The ministry of education had been influenced by critical pedagogical theories and practices, including the powerful work of Paulo Freire as well as my own work. It had also developed connections with groups engaged in movements such as "people's science" and similar local critically oriented educational strategies that were building "counter-hegemonic" educational programs from the ground up as well as from the top down.

One of the commitments that were very visible was to improve the lives of young women and girls, an initiative that was of considerable interest to Rima as well as myself, since Rima is a well-known historian of women's health. We wanted to see how this actually went on. Seeing things close up is crucial to us. We've had too many experiences of rhetorical reforms—including supposedly quite radical policies and programs--that sound so very good when seen from afar, but the words were often very different than the realities.

A primary initiative involved giving much more access to technological skills and knowledge in schools that served poor and marginalized students and connecting these skills and knowledge to the daily lives of oppressed people. It was thought that this emphasis would have benefits not only for poor children but for women as well, since they were doubly marginalized, not only by class and caste but profoundly by gender and by the patriarchal norms that were still so present in their communities.

Communities and social movements were consulted about the new programs. Even with the real scarcity of resources in education, the ministry worked hard to ensure that schools in these areas were given large numbers of computers. Time was set aside for their use and integration into the daily activities of the schools. Curricula were prepared that urged teachers to

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connect these new skills with the everyday experiences of the students and their lives, one of the key elements in critical pedagogy.

Having already written about the worries I had about "technological fixes" for educational inequalities (APPLE 2014), I was prepared to be somewhat skeptical about all of this. But Rima and I had learned to trust that the ministry and the activists working with them were serious in their conscious attempts to interrupt the role of education in reproducing social difference. Thus, we went in with an open mind that combined solidarity with the critical and progressive commitments that had been taken seriously by the ministry before and yet we still had some questions about the curriculum and the reliance on technology.

What we saw pushed us even further toward understanding the complex contradictions that can be present in critical education, contradictions that refocused our attention not only on the curriculum and pedagogy in the school, but even more on the material realities of gendered specificities in daily life.

The sun beat down on us as we walked from the car to the school. The temperature was nearly 40 (C) degrees with humidity nearly as high. There was little respite from the heat inside the school. Computers lined the walls of the classroom. The teachers were hard at work with groups and individual students, most of whom were between the ages of 11-14.

The students soon were at the computers. At first glance, even with the oppressive heat and humidity, everything looked fine. But after a while of watching and then interacting with teachers and students, Rima and I looked at each other and recognized that we both had come to the same realization of what was happening underneath the progressive aspects that were visible. Now the story gets more substantive about contradictions and the politics of intersecting dynamics of power in daily life. Understanding these contradictions is absolutely crucial if we are to interrupt the power of dominant ideological groups.

What we had nearly simultaneously come to realize was that almost all of the students working so diligently and cooperatively at the computers were the boys. This was not "planned". It wasn't because the teachers were sexist in the usual sense of that word. It was more complicated than that.

In this school, there were no clean toilets for the girls. Boys faced a similar situation, but the boys could go behind the school buildings and urinate, something they regularly did. This was an act that had very different meanings and implications for the girls. To publicly urinate in an "open space" was to risk not only being seen as "dirty" but also to be seen as sexually "available". The dangers associated with this in a climate of male dominance and female subordination—even with a government deeply committed to interrupting this—were not abstract. They were very real and based on all too many experiences, given the fact that sexual violence both as a threat and a reality was an ever present danger. A serious connection to what the government and many activist groups believed was popular knowledge was not possible for the girls.[ii]

Because of this, in order to "protect their modesty," many girls did not attend school. The girls who did come to school tried very hard to not drink anything during the school day so that they would not have to urinate. With the heat and humidity so very high, many of the girls had no energy or even fell asleep at their desks.

None of this was planned. The ministry, in association with activists and critical educators, had correctly prioritized a process of schooling that was meant to interrupt dominance and to provide a curriculum and a set of tools that led to more democratic outcomes for poor and marginalized students, and that was overtly aimed at radically changing the lives of girls and young women. Very real economic sacrifices had been made to provide the students with the technology, the curriculum, and the teacher skills to give the youth experiences that were simply taken for granted by affluent parents and communities. In class terms, this was indeed progressive. Yet students have *gendered bodies*. The politics of bodies, built into the materiality of physical environments, powerfully interrupted the official attempt at interrupting dominance. "Simple" things like toilets and the gendered dynamics of schools and daily life contradicted the very well-intentioned class and caste based policies of a ministry that was trying so very hard to live out its commitments and to democratize the processes and outcomes of education.

I began with this story not to make us cynical. Cynicism has no place in the struggles to create an education that is consciously aimed at challenging dominant power relations that are reproduced in schools, the media, and elsewhere. Rather my aim is to remind us that reality "hits

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back" and that we need to be conscious that building a lasting critically democratic education requires us to understand that doing so will at times be filled with tensions and contradictions. I also begin with this story to stress the fact that issues of "the popular" must start closer to everyday life—with violence against women, with racist and anti-immigrant violence, with the "symbolic violence" and discrimination in education that destroys the cultural and linguistic traditions of an increasingly diverse population in many nations—and with the daily realities of *multiple* relations of power. The politics of this will be complicated. It will involve a combination of joy over partial victories and sometimes sorrow at the fact that the victories may not go far enough or that even reproduce other forms of dominance and subordination. Ignoring all of this won't make it any easier. We are talking about the real lives of teachers, students, communities, and so many other groups of people who have so much to lose in a society that is all too often organized to destroy their hopes and dreams—and even their very lives not only through "symbolic violence" (BOURDIEU, 1984), but actual physical violence as well.. (Think of the murderous attacks on indigenous people and environmental activists and its causes and its relationship with neoliberal policies. Neoliberal polices themselves should also be understood as forms of violence). As much as we might wish it wasn't the case, we can't hide from the visible and invisible politics, and the conflicts these entail, involved in building and defending a truly critical education.

At the very root of these concerns is a simple principle: In order to understand and act on education in its complicated connections to the larger society, we must engage in two sets of understandings. The first involves us in the process of *repositioning*. That is, we must see the world through the eyes of the dispossessed (in the case I just discussed, the impoverished girls and young women) and act against the ideological and institutional processes and practices that reproduce oppressive conditions (APPLE, 2012).

Second, we must also think *relationally*. That is, understanding education requires that we see it as fundamentally a political and ethical act. This means that we situate it back into both the unequal relations of power in the larger society and into the relations of exploitation, dominance, and subordination–and the conflicts--that are generated by these relations (APPLE, 2004). These sets of understanding provide the very basis on critical pedagogy.[iii]

2 DEMOCRACY AND A TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

The story with which I began this essay has serious implications for why I have chosen a key word in the title of this discussion. The struggle for democracy in education has been and still is exactly that—a *struggle*. It has a long and valued history. This history encompasses multiple movements to transform educational and other institutions so that their means and ends respond to the lived needs and aspirations of that ongoing experiment of creating critical and knowledgeable citizens who take control of their lives. This has rightly required that we take seriously the demands of those who do not benefit from the ways our societies are currently organized—those "marked" by dominant understandings of class, race, gender/sexuality, disability, immigrant status, and so much more[iv]. It has also required a constant critical interrogation of who the "we" are in the first place. All of this places an ethical and political, as well as educational, set of responsibilities on those who care deeply about the role of education in the larger society, a set of responsibilities that are even more compelling for those of us who are committed to serious social transformation.

In *Can Education Change Society?* (APPLE 2013),[v] I argue for an activist role on the part of educators. In the process, I detail a number of tasks in which critically democratic educators should engage as "public intellectuals." While I'll say much more about this later in this article, among them are: bearing witness to negativity—that is, telling the truth about what is happening in education and the larger society; showing spaces of possibility where critically democratic policies and practices might be successfully put in place; and acting as critical secretaries of the actual realities of these possibilities as people build these more progressive policies and practices in the real world. As I showed in that book, there have been and are victories in many nations, including in Brazil.

However, one of the most important things we must face is the fact that while we need to be optimistic about the possibility of creating lasting transformations, we should not be romantic. Critically democratic educators and progressive movements and community members are not the only individuals and groups who are acting on this terrain. As I demonstrate at much

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greater length in *Educating the "Right" Way* (2006), neoliberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populist religious movements, and new managerial regimes of authority are also working hard to change education so that it meets their own needs.

In essence, there is an ongoing contest over different versions of "democracy". "Thick" understandings of democracy that seek to provide full collective participation in the search for the common good and the creation of critical citizens are constantly being attacked by "thin" neoliberal market-oriented ideologies of consumer choice, possessive individualism, selfishness, and an education that is valued largely as a tool for meeting a set of limited economic and ideological needs as defined by the powerful (GUNTER; HALL; APPLE, 2017). This has important implications for those of us who are committed to more robust forms of democracy and for an education that is richer in its visions of what education is for.

This requires us to be honest that this is a time when rightist ideological visions, assumptions, and commitments are powerfully present, are well-funded, and increasingly have become core parts of the prevailing common sense in so many nations of the world. In a social context such as this, certain questions become even more essential. Can thicker forms of critically democratic education remain true to their values and principles? Can they last? What does the reality of this "democracy" look like? What forces are at work to challenge it? What compromises have been made? And what can we learn from these conflicts and compromises? This is especially important right now in nations such as Brazil and elsewhere. Large numbers of people have risen up once again to challenge the economic, political, and ideological power of rightist groups. Gains are being made, many of them because people like many of you and others once again have worked so very hard to create the possibilities of a more critical and responsive "thick" democracy.

Because of this long tradition of activism here, this makes it even more important that we continue to ask the questions I just raised above. But, in answering these questions, we don't want to simply rely on political slogans. While it pains me to say this, all too much of the existing international literature in critical education and "critical pedagogy" has been overly rhetorical. It is almost as if the realities of actual schools and actual policies might serve as a threat to theoretical purity. Powerful theory is important of course. But it is most influential when it is

organically connected to the realities of schools, political and pedagogical actions, and the lives of individuals and groups trying to deal with the ways in which a socially critical democracy is contested. And it is best when it is connected as well to the victories and sometime losses that accompany these actions. Let me return to a personal story to make a number of points about this.

3 CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND THE CURRICULUM

From the time I began my teaching career in the inner city schools, and then rural schools, in very poor areas of the United States, I have been deeply concerned with critical pedagogy and with what counts as "legitimate knowledge" in schools, who decides this, and what the social and political effects of these decisions are[vi]. Let me give a concrete personal example.

During my last years of teaching in public schools, I was a sixth grade teacher in a small town in a largely rural area. At that time, I was also president of a teachers union during a period when teacher unions were under attack if they supported critical education or strongly defended teachers' rights. (This is one of the reasons that for decades I have acted in solidarity with the teacher unions, progressive members of PT, and other educational activists here in Brazil.) The town I taught in had a history of conservative ideologies and ultra-conservative religious sentiments, as well as a history of informal and formal racial segregation. When I arrived there, the school district had a number of very dedicated teachers, but by and large the curriculum was still the standardized textbook.

From my earlier years of teaching in very poor schools in impoverished slums, I had already gained a good deal of experience in more critically democratic models of curriculum and teaching and had sought to go beyond such standardized textbooks as often as possible. In many ways, what I did was similar to the kinds of things that the social and educational activists in Porto Alegre and other places have attempted here. I again sought to do the same in this more conservative environment.

The state curriculum guidelines for the sixth grade level provided space for such action. One of the major goals was community study. I did not want to use the textbook that had been used before, one that talked generally about communities of various kinds and ignored the history

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and current struggles over poverty, racism, and immigrant lives and cultures. Instead, I wanted my students to understand their community close-up. We went to the local museum and historical archives to do research on the history of the town and its surrounding areas. What we discovered was powerful. There had been active Ku Klux Klan chapters in the area—and one in the town itself. (This is a very violent racist group with a long history in the United States.) There had also been repeated instances of racist violence and overt efforts to keep the town "white and ultra-conservative" in religious beliefs. While less powerful, there also had been conflict over this and resistance to such practices by a small group of people in the community.

The discussions among the students about all of this, about the public face of the town and about what was missing in the "facts" that the students usually learned about this community and its surrounding area, were powerful and very thoughtful. These kinds of racist things were "not supposed to happen in the North of the United States." The students published a class newspaper about what they had found and about the questions that it raised. The newspaper was sent home—and then the explosion occurred. The leaders of a number of the most conservative groups were outraged. This was "un-American". How dare I have my 12-14 year old students learn such things and raise such questions? There were attempts to have me fired.

In the end, the other teachers, the school principal, and many community members refused to allow the conservatives to destroy the possibility of building a more critically democratic education. But this entire experience has always stood as a cogent reminder to me that what is taught and what is not taught is part of what Raymond Williams (WILLIAMS, 1961) called the *selective tradition*. It is the result of what is often a complex hidden process in which some groups' understanding of the world is given the imprimatur of "truth". How this goes on, and how textbooks have become the prime arbiter of such "truths", is too often still hidden from view[vii].

This personal story makes it clear that struggles inside our schools, over teachers' rights, and over the curriculum are essential to building thick critically democratic education both in the content of what is taught and how it is taught, as well in who makes the decisions about these issues. This is certainly the case in Brazil with the recent struggles over state control of the curriculum and the attempts by rightist groups to make the curriculum supposedly "neutral," the

history of the Citizen School and participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre and elsewhere, the continued vitality of powerful teacher and community activism, and the important growth of Afro-Brazilian movements around the politics of recognition in schools, the media, and the entire cultural apparatus.

This emphasis on the actual content of schooling is a continuation of gains that have been made over many decades of dedicated work by critical educators and writers, librarians, community activists, and social movements at all levels. Indeed, one of the most significant advances that have been made in education is the transformation of the question of "What knowledge is of most worth?" into "Whose knowledge is of most worth?" This rewording is not simply a linguistic issue. While we need to be careful in not assuming that there is always a one-to-one correspondence between "legitimate" knowledge and groups in power, changing the focus of the question asks that we engage in a radical transformation of our ways of thinking about the connections between what counts as important knowledge in educational institutions, in the media, and in other institutions in the larger society and the existing relations of domination and subordination and struggles against these relations. This has crucial implications for what we choose to teach, how we teach it, and what values and identities underpin such choices (APPLE, 2014).

Just as importantly, the question also demands that one word in the final sentence be problematized—the word *we*. The word—*we*—is one of the most dangerous word in our language. Who is the "we"? What group arrogates the center to themselves, thereby seeing other groups as The Other? That word—"we"—often symbolizes the manner in which ideological forces and assumptions work inside and outside of education. Especially when employed by dominant groups, "we" functions as a mechanism not only of inclusion, but powerfully of exclusion as well. It is a verb that masquerades as a noun, in a manner similar to the word "minority" or "slave." No one is a "minority." Someone must *make* another a minority; someone or some group must *minoritize* another person and group, in the same way that no one can be fully known as a slave. Someone or some group must *enslave* someone else.

Ignoring this understanding cuts us off from seeing the often ugly realities of a society and its history. Perhaps even more crucially, it also cuts us off from the immensely valuable

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historical and current struggles against the gendered/sexed, classed, and raced processes of dehumanization. By severing the connections between nouns and verbs, it makes invisible the actions and actors that make dominance seem normal. It creates a vacant space that is all too often filled with dominant meanings and identities. These understandings too are among the key building blocks of critical pedagogy.

These points may seem too abstract. But behind them is something that lies at the heart of being critical educators. A major role they (*we*) must play is to articulate both a vision and the reality of the fully engaged critical activist educator, someone who refuses to accept an education that doesn't simultaneously challenge the unreflective "we" and also illuminates the path to a new politics of voice and recognition in education. The task is to give embodied examples of critical pedagogies and of a more robust sense of socially informed educational action as it is actually lived out by real people. This includes committed educators and cultural workers in the complex politics at multiple levels of education, even when there predictably are tensions and contradictions (APPLE; et al., in press).

As I noted above, this concern is not new. Teachers, social activists, and scholars in multiple disciplines have spent years challenging the boundaries of that usually unexamined space of the "we" and resisting the knowledge, perspectives, epistemological assumptions, and accepted voices that underpin them. There was no time when resistance, both overt and covert, was not present (BERREY, 2015). This is especially the case in education, a field where the issues surrounding what and whose knowledge should be taught and how it should be taught are taken very seriously, especially by those people who are not included in the ways in which dominant groups define that oh-so-dangerous word of "we" (APPLE, 2013, APPLE; AU, 2014, AU; BROWN; CALDERON, 2016, WARMINGTON, 2014). This has a very long and extremely valuable history in an extensive number of nations and regions, one that is even more significant today.

It is crucial to realize that this history of critical educational action has parallels in many other nations in addition to Brazil. Indeed, throughout almost every region of the world, there are powerful movements and examples of radical pedagogic efforts both within the formal educational sector as well as in community literacy programs, labor education, anti-racist and

anti-colonial mobilizations, women's movements, peace activism, environmental struggles, disability activism, and others (APPLE, 2010). For example, as some of you may know, in South Korea during the first half of the 20th Century, evening schools were established to counter the colonizing efforts of the Japanese occupiers. These counter-hegemonic practices have continued through the efforts of the Korean Teachers Union, the emerging policies by progressive government officials that seek to interrupt the growth of elite schools there, and by other educational activists to build curricula and models of teaching that are based on critical democratic principles. These efforts have had to overcome years of government repression (KO; APPLE, 1999)[viii]. Similar tendencies have recently been seen in Turkey, where the government attempted to declare the largest teachers union illegal because of the union's commitment to both a more culturally responsive pedagogy and a critical position on neoliberal policies in education and the economy (EGITIM SEN, 2004) and where repression has gotten even worse with many critical educators and journalists losing their jobs and being arrested. There have also been ongoing struggles over the education and the liberation of the Buraku population in Japan, reaching back into the 19th century, as well as ongoing struggles over the education of other minoritized populations there (TAKAYAMA, 2016)

Struggles over legitimate knowledge and "historical amnesia" can also go on in other spaces besides schools. The example in South Korea of buses with seated representations of "comfort women" (women forced into sexual slavery) provides a very interesting instance of the ways in which public spaces can counter the Japanese government's continued refusal to take full responsibility for its waging of war on Korean women's bodies (MCCURRY, 2017).

There is another reason that the issues surrounding the curriculum are central here. For all of the well-deserved attention that is given by critical educators to neoliberal agendas and policies, to privatization and choice plans, to oppressive forms of management and standardization, we must continue to pay just as much attention to the actual knowledge that is taught—and the "absent presences" (MACHEREY, 2006) of what is not taught—in schools, as well as to the concrete experiences of students, teachers, administrators, school counselors, cooks, janitors, school secretaries, parents, community members and volunteers, to all who live and work in those buildings called schools. Documenting and understanding these lived realities

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are crucial to an interruptive strategy and to making connections between these experiences and the possibilities of building and defending something so much better. All of these people can be activists in the struggle for an education that demands a more democratic voice. But let me stress one of these groups—students and youth.

Think of the Korean students who struggled against the murderous military regime-- many of whom lost their lives in the Gwangju uprising. Think as well of the youth in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and so many other nations who historically have resisted the symbolic and physical violence of neoliberal policies and the loss of the collective memory of popular struggles against oppression. This history is not only in the past. Among the most important actors in many nations right now continue to be students and youth, even in the face of examination driven educational realities. Their mobilizations and leadership in places right now such as Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Spain, and elsewhere is rightly based on the larger issue of the destructiveness of neoliberal "reforms" in education, the economy, and the government. But in many nations the radical changes that conservatives want to make in the actual subject matter that is being taught and not being taught also drives the students to act. Clearly, then, again the curriculum itself can be and is a primary focus of educational struggles.

This is something that is very visible in the United States. A good example can be seen in the struggle by African American youth involved in the critical mathematics program called the Algebra Project. This is a project that teaches important mathematical knowledge to marginalized students, but in ways that connect to their lives in poor communities. In the city of Baltimore, the teachers and students mobilized against government plans to build another prison for impoverished youth from oppressed communities. They used that critical mathematics project and its knowledge to gain critical understandings of the unjust process where Black young men and women were arrested and put in prison. They showed that this was indeed unjust and also that statistically a new prison was not needed. The youth then mobilized and went on to build broad alliances with critical journalists, progressive unions, community and youth activist groups, and others. They all worked together and successfully stopped the building of the new juvenile prison there. A form of knowledge (mathematics) that was usually seen by marginalized students as "useless" and simply the knowledge of elites was connected to the lived realities of oppressed

Black youth in a manner that enabled them to become activists of their own lives (APPLE, 2013). In many ways, this represents a Gramscian strategy where elite knowledge is redefined for use in the ongoing struggles over dominance.

The implications of this story are crucial. A broad social movement was formed that had a major impact on the real lives of real youth and communities, especially since police violence against Black communities in the United States is a very serious issue. There can be no "neutral" understanding for the youth in these communities when they are often subjected to such violence and when they are put a jail for minor offenses, while "White" youth doing exactly the same things are not jailed. By building a broader alliance against the policy of building more prisons, the group forced the government to radically change its policies so that the money that would have been used to build the prison was instead used for more progressive programs within the community. This teaches us that progressive social movements often form around issues that are central to people's identities, cultures, and histories (GIUGNI; MCADAM; TILLY, 1999, APPLE, 2013)[ix]. More attention to how such struggles are formed in Brazil and elsewhere could provide more significant knowledge of the ways in which movements that interrupt neoliberal agendas and conservative ideological forms of curricula and teaching have been and can be built (APPLE, 2013). This would be important to the mobilizations in education and the larger society as well (APPLE; et al., in press).

In doing these kinds of analyses and raising these kinds of questions about the curriculum and pedagogy in schools, we must still place them in their larger context. It is still very important to constantly remember that there is *systematic* oppression. This requires fundamental transformations both of the national, regional, and local institutional structures and practices of a racist and racializing state[x] of the gendered and sexed nature of state policy (FRASER, 2013), of an economy and its paid and unpaid labor system that continues to create lasting inequalities—and of a war machine that threatens millions of people throughout the world..

Recognizing and being honest about this larger system of domination can, however, make it all too easy to throw up our hands in despair and to neglect the role of schooling in supporting these structures—and very importantly to minimize the significance of the dedication

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all of those who are working so hard in contributing to a better understanding and interruption of these structures and processes. There are things that can and should be done in education (APPLE, 2013, APPLE; et al., in press).

If you will forgive the military metaphors, what I am advocating is what Antonio Gramsci (1971) called "a war of position." This is a set of counter-hegemonic actions in which *everything* counts. Critically democratic action in education, in health care, in community lives, in paid and unpaid workplaces, in the family, in the struggle for peace--*all* of these are significant. Action against dominant relations involving gender and sexuality, race, class, ability, age, environmental degradation, and peace all count. The task is to then work hard to *connect* these actions to each other and to build alliances across our differences so that the "we" is broader and more mutually supportive. Thus, the local counts, not only the regional and national. In Nancy Fraser's words, the politics of recognition and of representation are crucial, as well as a politics of redistribution (FRASER, 1997, 2013).

This process of connecting many struggles together is not new. In fact, it is exactly what the Right has been doing for decades. The Right clearly recognizes the importance of winning at multiple levels and then connecting those victories to each other. The battles the Right continues to fight were and are over multiple issues—shrinking the state, reducing taxes on the affluent, destroying the power of unions, instituting neoliberal and neoconservative policies at every level, attacking progressive curricula, and so much more.

The Right knows that the struggles have to be fought in multiple sites, using multiple strategies—in public meetings, in door to door campaigns, in electoral campaigns for positions at all levels, and profoundly in the media. It is as well extremely creative in its linguistic politics, thereby providing a pathway for people to enter into their alliance even when they may not agree with all of the Right's positions.

As my co-authors and I document in more detail in *The Struggle for Democracy in Education: Lessons from Social Realities* (APPLE; et al., in press), what we need then is a politics that is both vertical and horizontal. Vertically, each level has significant actions that need to be engaged in, with the aim of ultimately connecting these levels to each other as part of a larger movement to build and defend critical ways of participating in the building and defending

of more critically democratic spaces. Horizontally, at each level there are multiple dynamics of power that need to be considered, with substantive actions to support movements and to search for and build intersecting alliances around the politics of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Class, gender/sexuality, race, ability, age, peace, environmental degradation, and other forms of "difference" are then seen not as divisive, as impediments, but as resources that can be *jointly* mobilized through hard work whenever possible. The fact that there are examples of this being built all over the world should give us hope. Victories in all of these areas are being won, even in the face of well-funded media attacks on movements and individuals, and the creation of a climate of fear—and in some places the jailing and murder of activists.

4 THINKING LONG-TERM

There are many important lessons to be learned from this. But one of them that stands out is that victories can be temporary. Cementing them in place requires that the long-term mobilizations and hard practical work that created them must not stop. This point is absolutely crucial right now in Brazil. Rightist attacks, fiscal crises, managerial initiatives, privatizing and marketizing pressures, ruling class strategies—all of these will not cease on the day that we declare "we won" in this school, in this curriculum conflict, in this electoral campaign, in this fiscal battle, in this union campaign, in this anti-racist mobilization, in this policy arena. Exactly the opposite is usually the case. The Right *learns* from each of its campaigns. It widens its discourse to take account of what did and did not succeed and so that more groups find "answers" under its umbrella of leadership. They are always in it for the long term[xi].

The story of Porto Alegre in Brazil provides us with an important example. As Luis Armando Gandin and I show in *Can Education Change Society?* (2013) and in *The Struggle for Democracy in Education*, it is a city that established critical pedagogy as the fundamental structure of an entire city's public schools. Decades of social and educational activism from below led to changes in the state and its political, economic, cultural, and educational policies and practices. This led to truly fundamental transformations in the daily life of schools and in the relationship of the school to its community. The development in Porto Alegre of the Citizen

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School and participatory budgeting provided a model of thick democratic educational and social reforms not only on Brazil but in many places throughout the world.

But as is increasingly visible, conservative forces in Brazil have not rested. They have constantly attempted to limit the sphere of these reforms, to make them more rhetorical than embodied in real schools and communities, and to make them "safer". Yet these thick democratic policies and practices have still lasted in many spaces because of the continuing hard work and sacrifices of teachers, community members, and social movements. This is an ongoing dynamic, one that never ceases.

In saying these things and pointing to these lessons, my aim is once again decidedly *not* to increase cynicism. Nor is it to make us doubt the importance of the critically democratic "thick" values and the policies and practices that stem from them. Rather, I am asking educators, communities, and activists in the labor, peace, women's, disability, environmental, and so many other movements to be honest about what can and does happen—to face the complex realities and power relations in the real world. This means that we need to think simultaneously about both the past and the future. What has happened in the past when such thick critically democratic policies and practices have been pushed forward? And what must be done in the long term to *defend* these policies and practices if dominant groups occupy the space of reform for their own purposes, and just as importantly when the Right responds, as they most surely will (MAYER, 2016, MCLEAN, 2017)?

5 EXPANDING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Throughout this essay, and overtly in the final paragraph of the previous section, I raise the issue of "what must be done." Earlier in this discussion, I pointed to three of the tasks of the educator who is deeply committed to building and defending thicker forms of critical democracy. But the number of responsibilities does not end there. Because of this, in this section, I want focus on one specific group—people who see themselves—as they should—as involved in critical pedagogy. I want to ask the following question. If critical educators at colleges and universities are part of the "we," what are our responsibilities? Drawing upon what I say in *Can*

Education Change Society? (APPLE, 2013), I want to argue for an even more activist role on the part of educators like myself and many others who may be reading this article. Let me enumerate a wider range of tasks in which critically democratic educators should engage as "public intellectuals" in supporting and participating in these transformative movements.

In the process, I argue for a policy of what I call *decentered unity*--a substantive and much more inclusive expansion of the "we"—and for an expansion of the groups who can act as our teachers about the tactics of interruption[xii]. Such expansion is even more crucial today if we are to more fully participate in building answers to the question of "What is to be done."

This expanded range of tasks draws upon what Michael Burawoy has called "organic public sociology," arguing that this model provides key elements of how we might think about ways of dealing with a politics of interruption. In his words, but partly echoing Gramsci as well, in this view the critical sociologist (and in my mind, the critical educator, what I call the *critical scholar/activist*):

> […] works in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local, and often counter-public. [She or he works] with a labor movement, neighborhood association, communities of faith, immigrant rights groups, human rights organizations. Between the public sociologist and a public is a dialogue, a process of mutual education […] The project of such [organic] public sociologies is to make visible the invisible, to make the private public, to validate these organic connections as part of our sociological life (BURAWOY, 2005, p. 265).

In general, there are nine tasks in which critical analysis (and the critical analyst) in education must engage in creating and defending these organic connections.

1. It must "bear witness to negativity." That is, one of its primary functions is to illuminate the ways in which educational policy and practice are connected to the relations of exploitation and domination—and to struggles against such relations—in the larger society.

2. In engaging in such critical analyses, it also must point to contradictions and to *spaces of possible action*. Thus, its aim is to critically examine current realities with a conceptual/political framework that emphasizes the spaces in which more progressive and counter-hegemonic actions

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can, or do, go on. This is an absolutely crucial step, since otherwise our research can simply lead to cynicism or despair.

3. At times, this also requires a broadening of what counts as "research." Here I mean acting as critical "secretaries" to those groups of people and social movements who are now engaged in challenging existing relations of unequal power (APPLE, 2012)[xiii]. Some examples of this kind of work are worth noting. The first is "Community of Research on Excellence for All" (CREA), an interdisciplinary research center at the University of Barcelona. It is a model of how to build a research agenda and then create policies and programs that empower those who are economically and culturally marginalized in our societies[xiv]. The second is the deeply committed work carried out by Kathleen Lynch and her colleagues and students at the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice at University College, Dublin. Although some of its counter-hegemonic programs have recently been under attack, it too has been at the center of research and action that stresses not only poverty and inequality, but movements towards equality[xv]. There are of course many other programs that can give us hope of course. For example, in the process of illuminating the role of the arts in promoting community and social justice in Finland, the ArtsEqual research project and a number of the researchers affiliated with it have documented important examples of on-the-ground counter-hegemonic successes, while extensively broadening our understand of who the "we" are (see, e.g., Kallio 2016, Laes 2017). The continuing struggles in South Korea to build more democratic Hyukshin schools and to challenge elite schools also have considerable potential.

Yet again, documenting these gains still requires that we continue to be unromantic, to be fully cognizant that we are not the only actors on this terrain and that it is not necessarily the case that "thick" visions of critical democracy will prevail. Thus, it is important to again take very seriously that this is a time when rightist ideological visions, assumptions, and commitments are powerfully present, are well-funded, and increasingly have become core parts of the prevailing common sense in so many nations of the world. In a social context such as this, rhetorical responses are simply not sufficient. Certain questions like the ones I raised earlier become even more essential. When victories are indeed won, can these thicker forms of critically democratic education remain true to their values and principles? Can they last? What does the

reality of this "democracy" look like? What forces are at work to challenge it? What compromises have been made? And what can we learn from these conflicts and compromises? These questions are complicated, but documenting answers to them is of great significance right now (see also Lim and Apple 2016; Gunter, Hall, and Apple 2017), especially in nations such as Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and many others in this region where the battle over these policies is going on right now.

4. When Gramsci (1971) argued that one of the tasks of a truly counter-hegemonic education was not to throw out "elite knowledge" but to reconstruct its form and content so that it served genuinely progressive social needs, he provided a key to another role "organic" and "public" intellectuals might play. Thus, we should not be engaged in a process of what might be called "intellectual suicide." That is, there are serious intellectual (and pedagogic) skills in dealing with the histories and debates surrounding the epistemological, political, and educational issues involved in justifying what counts as important knowledge and what counts as an effective and socially just education. These are not simple and inconsequential issues and the practical and intellectual/political skills of dealing with them have been well developed. However, they can atrophy if they are not used. We can give back these skills by employing them to assist communities and movements in thinking about this, learning from them, and engaging in the mutually pedagogic dialogues that enable decisions to be made in terms of both the short-term and long-term interests of the dispossessed.

5. In the process, critical work has the task of keeping traditions (plural) of radical and progressive work alive. In the face of organized attacks on the "collective memories" of critical social movements, attacks that make it increasingly difficult to retain academic and social legitimacy for multiple critical approaches that have proven so valuable in countering dominant narratives and relations, it is absolutely crucial that these traditions be kept alive, renewed, and when necessary criticized for their conceptual, empirical, historical, and political silences or limitations. This includes not only keeping theoretical, empirical, historical, and political traditions alive but, very importantly, extending and (supportively) criticizing them. And it also involves keeping alive the dreams, utopian visions, and demands for real reforms that are so

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much a part of these radical traditions (APPLE; AU; GANDIN, 2009, APPLE; BALL; GANDIN, 2010).

6. Keeping such traditions alive and also supportively criticizing them when they are not adequate to deal with current realities cannot be done unless we ask "For whom are we keeping them alive?" and "How and in what form are they to be made available?" All of the things I have mentioned above in this list of tasks require the relearning or development and use of varied or new skills of working at many levels with multiple groups. Thus, journalistic and media skills, academic and popular skills, and the ability to speak to very different audiences are increasingly crucial (APPLE, 2006, BOLER, 2008, DEL GANDIO, 2008, DEL GANDIO; NOCELLA II, 2014). This requires us to learn how to speak in different styles and to say important things in ways that do not require that the audience or reader do all of the work.

7. Critical educators need also to *act* in concert with the progressive social movements their work supports or in movements against the rightist assumptions and policies they critically analyze. This is another reason that working in critical education implies becoming an "organic" or "public" intellectual. We must not "live on the balcony," disconnected from the mobilizations that are going on against dominance. Rather, being in critical pedagogy requires that we must participate in and give one's expertise to movements involved in both a politics of redistribution and a politics of recognition and representation. It also implies an active willingness to *learn from* these social movements (ANYON, 2014).[xvi].

8. Building on the points made in the previous paragraph, the critical scholar/activist has another role to play. She or he needs to act as a deeply committed mentor, as someone who demonstrates through her or his life what it means to be *both* a serious researcher and a committed member of a society that is scarred by persistent inequalities. She or he needs to show how one can blend these two roles together in ways that may be tense, but still embody the dual commitments to socially committed research and participating in movements whose aim is interrupting dominance[xvii]. As I noted above, it also requires that we constantly seek to put ourselves in a position to be taught how to do this by others. It should be obvious that this must be fully integrated into one's teaching as well.

9. Finally, for those of us who are lucky enough to have paid positions, participation also means using the privilege one has as a scholar/activist. That is, each of us needs to make use of one's privilege to open the spaces at colleges and universities and elsewhere for those who are not there, for those who do not now have a voice in that space and in the "professional" sites to which, being in a privileged position, you have access. This can be seen, for example, in the history of the "activist-in-residence" program at the University of Wisconsin Havens Center for Social Justice, where committed activists in various areas (the environment, indigenous rights, housing, labor, racial disparities, education, the arts, peace, and so on) were brought in to teach and to connect our academic work with organized action against dominant relations. Or it can be seen in a number of Women's Studies programs and Indigenous, Aboriginal, and First Nation Studies programs that historically have involved activists in these communities as active participants in the governance and educational programs of these areas at universities.

This list of course is only a beginning and needs to be constantly expanded. And none of the activities will be easy. All will involve personal and academic risks as the "we" gets larger and more inclusive and as the struggles for a truly democratic society and the building of the institutional conditions that support it continue and the spaces of interruption widen.

6 HOPE AS A RESOURCE

As many of you know from personal experiences l, and as I also know from my own and many of my friends struggles and at times arrests, there are very real risks in engaging individually and collectively in the actions I've listed above. There can be little doubt that the Right will act back against those of us who engage in them. Yes, there will be very real risks in doing these things. But if we are not willing to take risks, how can we criticize others for not doing this?

Thus we must continue to act. The Right will respond of course. But, the fact that the Right will be forced to respond should actually be seen as a positive sign. *It means that they realize that our actions can lead to the increased possibility of major gains*, and that they realize that they may have to retreat on crucial issues. But if we are to continue to successfully challenge

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the Right in education, in paid and unpaid workplaces, in the media, in the government—everywhere—certain things must be continue to be done now.

Raymond Williams reminds us that creating and defending a fully participatory critical democracy requires providing the conditions that make it possible for all people to actually fully participate (WILLIAMS, 1989). It is exactly this more "full" participation, and what that actually means in all its contradictions, that is one of the main political, ethical, and educational foundations for a truly critical pedagogy. Yet looking around us in all too many nations, it is more than a little visible that these conditions are increasingly difficult to build and sustain. In my own nation, for example, the economic conditions experienced by so many people, the racist rates of incarceration, the defunding of absolutely necessary health centers for poor women and women of color, the destruction of communities, the loss of safety nets, the attacks on paid and unpaid labor, the defunding of education at all levels, the massive amounts of money spent on the war machine—and the list goes on and on—all of this is real and truly damaging. This can only be described as a national disgrace.

Thus there is much to do and many places where it needs to be done. There is growing recognition that truly radical changes in our structures, policies, and common sense are essential. The task seems so big. This can be disheartening, and even paralyzing. But we must start somewhere. We need to actively resist the all too widespread assumption that education is not powerful as a transformative agent, that it can only change after "society" is transformed. Educational institutions and the people who work in it are key parts of society. Struggles there are essential parts of the war of position (APPLE 2013). Chantal Mouffe makes a key point when she states that "now we first need to restore democracy, so we can then radicalize it" (quoted in JUDAS, 2016, no pages). The act of restoring democracy is where we can start in education, a beginning that is already happening here.

Thus, despite what we know about the forces of dominance that we face and about the tensions and contradictions that are visible in the story with which I began this article, we continue the struggle for thick democracy inside and outside of the institutions of education that seem so very important to the project of social empowerment to us and to so many millions of

people in the world. Indeed, Brazil is one of the countries where this struggle is going on right now and many people throughout this nation are actors in this ongoing struggle.

One of the best statements of the importance of such continued work and commitment is made by Erik Olin Wright when he says that:

> The best we can do, then, is treat the struggle to move forward on the pathways of social empowerment as an experimental process in which we test and retest the limits of possibility and try, as best we can, to create new institutions which will expand these limits themselves. In doing so we not only envision real utopias, but contribute to making utopias real. (WRIGHT, 2010, p.373)

In his detailed arguments for what he calls "real utopias," Wright reminds us that "Social institutions can be designed in ways that eliminate forms of oppression that thwart human aspirations towards living fulfilling and meaningful lives. The central task of emancipatory politics is to create such social institutions" (WRIGHT, 2010, p. 6).

My own position, and that of so many other committed people in Brazil and elsewhere, can perhaps be characterized as optimism with no illusions whatsoever. Thus, we can be and frequently are disappointed in the results of the hard work of building an emancipatory politics in and through education. But we must *actively refuse* to be disillusioned. Raymond Williams again provides wise words. As he says, "We must speak for hope, as long as it doesn't mean suppressing the danger" (WILLIAMS 1989, p. 322). As he goes on to say,

> It is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begins to alter. Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we can begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope. If there are no easy answers there are still available discoverable hard answers, and it is these that we can now learn to make and share. This has been, from the beginning, the sense and impulse of the long revolution (WILLIAMS 1983, pp. 268-269.)

The struggle for critical democracy in education is a key part of challenging the "inevitabilities." Let us continue to act. The future of our nations depends on it.

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Notas

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[i] This article is based on a longer discussion in Apple, Gandin, Liu, Meshulam, and Schirmer (in press).

[ii] For more on gender and critical education in practice, see Verma (2016).

[iii] See, for example, Freire (1971) and Apple, Au and Gandin (2009).

[iv] See Apple, Au and Gandin (2009) and Apple and Au (2014)

[v] This book has recently been published in a Brazilian edition. See Apple (2017).

[vi] See Apple (2014), Apple (2004) and Apple (1996)

[vii] See, for example, Eagles (2017) and Apple (2014)

[viii] See also Kang (2016) and Sung (2016)

[ix] See also Binder (2002)

[x] See, for example, Joseph (2016) and see also Rothstein (2017)

[xi] See Hall (2016)

[xii] See, for example, Nancy Fraser (1997) and Honneth (2016).

[xiii] See also Apple and Beane (2007); Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009)

[xiv] See Soler (2011)

[xv] See Lynch, Baker and Lyons (2009); Lynch, Grummell and Devine (2012)

[xvi] See also Bourdieu (2003) and Eagleton (2011)

[xvii] See Winn and Souto-Manning 2017