

You Can't Criticize What You Don't Understand: Teachers as Social Change Agents in Neo- Liberal Times

Michael O'Sullivan
Brock University

Abstract

Despite the existence of success stories of individual teachers and even school-wide groups of teachers successfully teaching from a global perspective, this paper raises a basic question: to what extent can the average teacher be an agent of change in the tradition of Dewey, Freire, and Giroux? The questioning of this role arises from the observation that many teachers are high achieving graduates of the very school system to which they have returned; and, as a result of spending their formative years in largely untroubled middle-class circumstances, are steeped in the dominant neoliberal ideology and consumer-orientation of the global market society. The author implicitly raises the issue, especially given his concerns about the power of the dominant ideology, as to just how critical and how transformative the actual classroom practice of global education and global citizenship education is or has the potential of being.

“Our knowing is deeply intertwined with our world views, with our histories, our families, our social groups, our experiences.” D. Flannery (2002, p. 112)

Introduction

Advocates of global and global citizenship education (GCE) implicitly or explicitly assign to classroom teachers the role of social change agent. We need look no further than this volume to see examples of that. Larsen & Faden and Vetter, for example, explicitly assign such a role to teachers, while Pike (1996) does so implicitly. I have done so myself (O'Sullivan, in press; O'Sullivan & Vetter, 2007). In so doing we are building on the work of John Dewey (1938/1997, 1916/2000) and Paulo Freire (1970, 1985, 1987, 1993, 1998) to

Michael O'Sullivan is Assistant Professor at the Brock University and can be reached at mosullivan@brocku.ca

mention only those two prominent radical educational reformers. Their strategies for educational reform placed socially conscious teachers at the centre of classroom-based pedagogies that - or so they envisioned - would prepare learners to participate in processes of political and personal transformation.

Yet, it is not self-evident that even a critical minority of 21st Century Canadian teachers can be expected to assume the role of classroom-based social change agent. This is especially so when we add the proviso, as the more overtly politicized literature does (e.g., the work of Freire, 1970, 1985, 1987, 1993, 1998 and of Giroux, 1988, 1995, 1997, 2001, 2003), that to be considered social change agents, educators must teach from a critical and transformative (hereafter *C/T*) perspective. This *C/T* perspective is often *presumed* to be sharply demarcated from other perspectives which, while they are innovative and progressive, are nonetheless, not viewed as being as overtly political, and thus are seen to be less critical, less transformative, than the perspectives advocated, for example, by Giroux.¹ I speak of a presumed contrast with these latter approaches because I am not convinced that the assumption that these approaches are somehow antithetical to *C/T* pedagogy is well founded. When professionally well-prepared and politically well-informed global and global citizenship educators teach from a social justice perspective, when they encourage students to consider the impacts of war, of worsening poverty, racism, sexism, and so forth-even if they do not do so from an explicitly *C/T* perspective, they are creating the space for an important dialogue within the profession and among students.

The Importance of Clarity

Which pedagogies, even if they are not explicitly *C/T*, are part of a progressive consensus that forms a community of social justice-oriented educators? Pike (1996) struggled with the question of inclusion/exclusion – specifically in his case with the question of what was (and was not) included in the field of global education – and why such distinctions were important. He considered the ambiguity in the literature with respect to what constituted global education. Pike noted that “it could be argued that an academic preoccupation with definitions is unimportant” and that “the existence of a variety of definitions, encompassing diverse perspectives and even ambiguities, is not antithetical to some central tenets within global education” (p. 8). Though he was open to ambiguity, he also observed that “definitions ... are often highly revealing of the nature and scope of the thinking that lies behind them” (p. 8). He wrote that

deficiencies in global educators' understanding may limit their abilities to seize opportunities to build global education into

their classroom practice. [A] survey of graduate students suggests that those teachers who are able to define global education are more likely than others to be promoting global awareness. (p. 8)

Are, then, definitional issues important? As I have suggested by the title to this essay, with apologies to Bob Dylan, you can't criticize what you don't understand. If an educator's understanding of how the world works is "deficient," his/her ability to teach insightfully about that world from any perspective much less a critical and transformative perspective will be compromised.²

The context in which I frame these considerations includes the belief that teachers can and must play a role as social change agents both within the school and, indeed, beyond. Yet, despite efforts dating back to Dewey's progressive educational movement, this strategy has not been successfully integrated into K-12 schools in any significant way. It is essential that we understand why this is so and continues to be so as reflected by Schweifurth's (2006) observations about global educators being consigned to the periphery of the interests of the teaching profession (p. 49). We need to learn from those failed experiences in order to move the 21st century C/T agenda forward. To do this, at a minimum, we need to ask the following questions:

- How do we define critical and transformative pedagogy, and what is the goal of such a pedagogy?
- What evidence is there that past (and present) generations of progressive and other C/T educators have failed to inject critical pedagogies into the curriculum?
- Can pedagogies, that raise students' awareness of social, economic, political, and environmental problems but that fall outside of the strict parameters of critical and transformative pedagogy, contribute to the movement to transform schools into centers offering such a pedagogy?
- How best can C/T educators support their colleagues to reach the level of critical consciousness required to teach from a shared perspective?

Defining Critical and Transformative (C/T) Pedagogy

Before addressing the assertion that past generations of progressive educators failed to inject C/T perspectives into the curriculum, we must come to understand the nature of the pedagogy that our predecessors supposedly failed to implement. This brings us to the highly contested territory regarding the relationship between the personal and the political and pedagogical efforts

to address that relationship. Much of the more politically explicit critical pedagogical literature, while it stresses issues of power, the ongoing struggle to achieve social justice locally and globally, and concerns such as working for a sustainable environment, is silent on personal transformation. Furthermore, and in contrast with this silence by many critical educators on this aspect of change, much of the mainstream literature that has so strongly influenced curriculum delivery (the most recent example being character education; see Noddings, 2002) emphasizes personal change without any reference to social context. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), speaking of this divide as it manifests itself in the context of adult education, note that “one school of thought holds that the emphasis should be on the growth and development of individuals while another school argues that social change should be the primary function of adult education” (p. 131). They argue that this “notion of individual vs. social emphasis is a false dichotomy,” as “one cannot exist without the other” (p. 131). I agree with this observation; even so, I caution that a great deal of care must be taken to ensure that balance is maintained and that, in classroom practice, the focus on the individual does not take over. This can happen all too easily in our highly individualistic, consumer-driven society, in which teachers are personally disposed and professionally encouraged to stress individual growth in the virtual absence of critical discussions of the “social.” That said, those critical educators who are perhaps more oriented toward the social need to keep in mind that people who cannot care about themselves (or who, at the other extreme, are so busy caring about themselves that they have no time or inclination to care for others) are unlikely candidates to involve themselves in movements for social change.³

Maslow's (1970) theory of self-actualization includes what he calls a “democratic character structure,” which involves relating well with people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. In a multicultural society like Canada, this constitutes a precondition for effective participation in a broad-based movement for social change.

What are the prospects for combining teachers' concerns (indeed, a passion) for realizing each child's individual potential cognitively and emotionally, socially and personally, with the planet's pressing need for social, political, and environmental change? Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) raise this issue when they refer to *perspective* transformation, which, though it is a process of personal transformation, they see as having the capacity to “lead to action in the social arena” (p. 133). Yet, they also realize that this perspective is open to criticism precisely because there is no *necessary* link between personal transformation and engagement in social change. To establish this link, educators who teach from a perspective that poses issues

from a critical point of view (i.e., one that relates to who exercises social, political, and economic power, on whose behalf it is exercised, and the adequacy or inadequacy of our democratic institutions and practices) must also employ pedagogical practices that focus on personal transformation understood as development of the individual student's ability to act in concert with others. Pedagogical strategies designed to prepare students for collective social engagement, when such strategies are not fused with curricular strategies designed to promote personally transformative change, are highly unlikely to have a transformative impact, be it personal or political.

The definition of transformative learning developed by the OISE/UT Transformative Learning Centre articulates this link between the personal and the social. Transformative learning involves

a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; sexual orientation, our body-awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (Transformative Learning Centre, OISE/UT, n.d.)

Fusing the Politically Critical with the Personally Transformative

Many compelling and worthy pedagogies have emerged over the years (critical literacy being one of the better known examples) that provide a framework for educators to teach from a *C/T* perspective. I contend, however, that of these many approaches, global education – or, more recently, global citizenship education (GCE) – constitutes the most promising and inclusive framework for *C/T* educators in our elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions.⁴ Global education and GCE are world-minded and student-centered pedagogies (Selby, 2004). I would argue that this is equally true of GCE and that both contain the three essential elements that characterize all good curricular practice – namely, thinking, feeling, and doing (Miller, 2007). Global education and GCE have as their central concern an understanding of the interconnectedness of local, national, and global events with issues of race, class, gender, peace, the environment, and so forth, from a *C/T* perspective.

This fusion of the political and the personal is nicely captured by Selby (2004). His notion of outer and inner dimensions, corresponding to the

M. O'Sullivan

political and the personal, provides a succinct summary of what this approach entails pedagogically. As Selby addresses a single aspect of the “outer dimension” – in this case the one he calls the spatial – he weaves in the “inner dimension” of the personal:

At a personal level, this [spatial] dimension focuses on the interconnectedness of an individual's mental, emotional, physical and spiritual make-up. Learners, it is argued, should develop an understanding of the interdependencies that, in so many forms and at so many levels, personal to global, influence their present and future lives. They should learn to understand, too, the nexus between humans and all life forms. In curricular terms, this dimension calls for forms of integration, interdisciplinarity or other-than-disciplinary, and speaks to forms of learning that enable learners to cultivate an holistic mindset and the attendant skills that are usually marginalized within the citadels of [the] mechanism we recognize as schools. Intuition, for instance, the ability to immediately perceive and be sensitive to the whole ... is recognized as a quality to be honed in the learning. (p. 2)

Selby's article is important because it demystifies the fusion of the political and the personal and holds out the real possibility that, once they are provided with professional development and the proper supports, teachers will be able to integrate politically critical and personally transformative curricular approaches into mainstream classrooms.

Past Failures to Implement Transformative Pedagogies

Progressive educators ever since Dewey have failed to inject C/T pedagogies broadly into the curriculum or to connect schooling with movements for social reform and democracy. Even so, we need not be pessimistic. Indeed, this observation is useful, for it reminds us that stubbornly doing more of the same and expecting different results will not help us achieve C/T outcomes.

One of the important lessons to be drawn is that curricular reform is an unavoidably political process. Many classroom teachers carefully avoid bringing politics into the classroom. When teachers fail to bring public issues (e.g., politics) into the classroom in a nonpartisan and grade-appropriate way, they are undermining both their own capacity and that of their students to develop into critical pedagogues. Dewey would not agree with this apolitical approach to “social problem solving.” In the early decades of the 20th century, he was deeply worried about a *democratic deficit* (Carr & Hartlett, 1996). For him, the solution to the crisis of democracy was to avoid limiting

popular political participation to occasional voting, leaving the serious business of public life to professional politicians; indeed, he favored reforming the public education system so that citizens would develop the motivation and intellectual tools to participate in processes of *deliberative democracy* (Kadlec, 2007; Westbrook, 1991).⁵ To prepare students for such participation requires classroom discussion of public issues. Dewey would later posit that the failure of his generation of educational reformers to link their proposals for schools to their proposals for the broader society was the main reason why both reform projects failed (Tanner & Tanner, 1995). Of course, many of Dewey's specific educational proposals were, in fact, adopted in schools in the United States and Canada, and elsewhere; but because they were taken out of context, they were reduced to being new techniques for teaching old curriculum. In other words, Dewey's reforms were incorporated into the curriculum, but his vision was not (Glass, 2000, p. 278).

The fate of Dewey's educational reforms is an example of *mainstreaming*. By mainstreaming we understand the process by which ideas with C/T intent are adapted for use in regular classrooms (Ibrahim, 2005). Mainstreaming is not inherently good or bad, though, generally speaking, the mainstreaming of progressive ideas invariably involves a blunting of their critical edge. When a progressive idea loses its essential criticality, mainstreaming serves no progressive purpose. Indeed, it is not at all far-fetched to suggest that the explicit purpose of Ministry curriculum developers who mainstream a particular critical pedagogy may be to blunt the critical edge of that pedagogy which is being practiced *on the periphery* by C/T teachers. Dewey's experience of having his ideas mainstreamed, with negative consequences from a progressive perspective, reflects what is occurring with C/T pedagogies today – including global and global citizenship education. With respect to the practice of mainstreaming, Openshaw and White (2005) describe the resulting “banality” of the treatment in official curriculum documents of complex citizenship issues:

Informed, reasonable, “responsible citizens,” “cultural diversity,” “global interdependence,” are indeed soft phrases that roll easily from the tongue, laundered as laudable, understandable, and achievable objectives for future citizens, uniformly mandated by social studies curricula ... this very banality camouflages harsher realities. (p. 6)

The fact that reformers of the stature of Dewey and his contemporaries failed to achieve their progressive objectives, and that Freire feared the same fate (Macedo & Araujo Freire, 1998, p. x), is significant today. This failure cannot be said to have resulted from any shortcomings in the logic and coherence of their arguments in favor of reform or in the justice of

M. O'Sullivan

their cause. The failure of these C/T educational reform efforts must be sought elsewhere.

Ideology and Social Control

The single most important barrier to critical and transformative school reform at the present time, as it was throughout the previous century, is explained by the concept of *ideology* – specifically, by the hold that ideologies have on the worldviews of teachers, school administrators, and society as a whole, including students and parents.

An ideology is a system of political and social ideas, or a way of thinking, that is held (usually) unconsciously by large numbers of people in a given society. Ideologies serve to justify social, political, and economic actions and cultural practices in the societies over which these ideas hold sway. Ideologies become the “common sense” of the society in which they are hegemonic; invariably, they serve to explain the ways of the world according to a logic that serves the interests of the politically and economically dominant social class. Today, the dominant ideology is neoliberalism. The central component of neoliberal ideology is the belief that the free market, unfettered by government regulation, is the best mechanism for achieving economic and social well-being, which is defined to a great extent by the degree to which the population can consume. This is accompanied by an abhorrence of state ownership and by unwavering support for private ownership of the means of production (Giddens, 1998).

The concept of ideology, and its hold over entire populations – an idea that was summed up succinctly by Marx and Engels (1976) when they wrote “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (p. 67) – was developed and expanded by Antonio Gramsci (Mouffe, 1979). Gramsci observed that the dominant ideology permeates all of society, including the organizations of the civil society, the churches, and most certainly schools and universities. This ensures that the vast majority of citizens – even those who could hardly be said to benefit from the existing social order – accept its basic logic. Of course, to say that there is a hegemonic ideology in any given society, or even globally, does not preclude the existence of parallel or counter-ideologies that challenge, in whole or in part, the prevailing dominant ideology. There are times when counter-ideologies assert themselves and become a force to be reckoned with. This possibility provides hope to those who have a critique of the dominant socioeconomic order, including advocates of C/T educational reform. The movement of an erstwhile counter-ideology from the social margins to the mainstream occurs when the ideas that form the core of the counter-ideology expand their influence from being the beliefs of a small circle of social critics to being more widely accepted by

growing sectors of the citizenry. Over time, counter-ideologies can come to challenge the existing order. Freire's (1970) notion of conscientization is based on breaking the hold of the dominant ideology on subordinate populations as they learn to "name" their oppressors and develop the ability to consider alternative ways of organizing society unencumbered by the oppressor's mode of thought. This constitutes the key to answering the question of how teachers (and students) can be moved toward the level of critical consciousness that is necessary to engage in C/T practice in the classroom and beyond.

Reaching the point where teachers and students have the ability, in the words of C. Wright Mills (1959/2000) to "achieve the intricate connection between the patterns of their lives and the course of world history [and] cope with the larger worlds with which they are so suddenly confronted" (p. 4) involves breaking the hold that the dominant neoliberal ideology has upon them. Teachers, struggling to make the transition from neoliberalism to criticality, from individualism to a fusion of the personal and the political, will benefit from mentoring by more experienced practitioners who have well-grounded C/T classroom practice and a high degree of critical consciousness, to use Freire's term.

Critical Consciousness, C/T Pedagogy, and Social Change

What is the relationship between accepting the conviction that political and personal change can occur (and that the two need to occur together) and the ability to teach from the C/T perspective? Put another way, what is the relationship between *critical consciousness* and C/T pedagogy? To begin to understand this relationship we must briefly visit the Freirian theory of consciousness.

Freire distinguishes between that which is "natural" and that which is "cultural" (his term). That which is natural is understood to be given and cannot (or should not) be interfered with by human intervention, whereas that which is cultural involves those institutions and practices which are "historically, materially, and politically constructed or, at the very least, conditional [and] can, theoretically, be changed or acted upon by [human agency]" (Connolly, n.d., p. 5).

People at the lowest level of social consciousness, what Freire called *naive* level of consciousness, are unable to conceive of social change. They are characterized by "an unreflecting acceptance of the absolute validity and questionability of the world as is," and furthermore, they "cannot conceive of a basic perspective different from their own" (Connolly, n.d., p. 5). This unquestioning acceptance of *what is* impedes their ability to consider *what*

M. O'Sullivan

might be. Arguably, few adult Canadians and (hopefully) no teachers operate at this level of (un)consciousness.

The next level of consciousness is what Freire calls *superstitious* consciousness (but which I have chosen to call *conventional* consciousness). This level of consciousness is “characterized by a recognition of cultural options but a concomitant sense of powerlessness to do anything about those options” (Connolly, n.d., p. 5). People who live at the conventional level of consciousness recognize that many of our institutions, including schools, corporations, government ministries, and the media, are the products of human endeavor, but they also accept the permanence of these socially constructed institutions in their present form even though any institution that has been created by humans can be modified or abolished by humans. Freire labeled this form of consciousness as superstitious consciousness because it attributes near mystical and unchanging powers to such institutions. I would argue that this level of consciousness characterizes the worldview of the vast majority of Canadians, including most teachers, and explains my decision to label it *conventional* consciousness.

The form of consciousness that empowers people to engage in transformative practice is what Freire calls *critical* consciousness. Critical consciousness “recognizes that cultural institutions are created and sustained by human purpose and [that] action and language both shapes and reflects people’s perceptions of cultural institutions” (Finlay & Faith, 1987, cited by Connolly, n.d., p. 6). This is the level of consciousness which recognizes that “culture ... can, theoretically, be changed or acted upon” (Connolly, p. 5) by human intervention. Connolly’s use of the term “theoretically” implies that, yes, such change is possible, but only with many preconditions.

Freire’s understanding of critical consciousness is highly political. He understands politics not so much as the understandably discredited parliamentarianism as practiced in Canada and elsewhere, but rather as the efforts of ordinary people to shape their life conditions through collective political action guided by critically informed judgment (similar to Dewey’s deliberative democracy). The educational practice that flows from such a concept is also political, just as “uncritical” educational practice is political, albeit for different ends. Freire (1987) summed up the political nature of educational practice as follows:

Since education is by nature social, historical and political, there is no way we can talk about some universal, unchanging role for the teacher ... A teacher must be fully cognizant of the political nature of his/her practice and assume responsibility for this rather than denying it. When the teacher is seen as a political person, then the political nature of education requires

that the teacher either serve whoever is in power, or present options to those in power ... Professional competence, command of a subject or discipline, is never understood by the progressive teacher as something neutral. There is no such thing as a category called "professional competence" all by itself. We must always ask ourselves: In favour of whom and of what do we use our technical competence? (pp. 211-12)

Faculties of education and the very structure of schooling emphasize professional and technical competence. At no point does Freire deny the importance of educators being professionally and technically competent; he does, however, ask them to remember on whose behalf they are exercising this competence and to apply their skills as educators in ways that help students develop their own critical consciousness. This, in turn, will help students develop the tools to think, feel, and act critically.

Freire's categories of consciousness are not watertight, and this allows us to consider the relationship between C/T practice and the practice of those who, while open to infusing criticality into their classroom practice, are not doing so from an explicitly C/T perspective. For example, individuals who for the most part operate at the conventional level of consciousness will not always exhibit a sense of powerlessness in the face of dominant institutions nor will they always shy away from the prospect of engaging in social change. The constrained sense of empowerment experienced by people at the level of conventional consciousness may not fundamentally challenge established beliefs, practices, or institutions (a characteristic of the empowerment arising from critical consciousness), but, at the same time, we should not underestimate the significance of change that can emerge from citizens who are still very much influenced by conventional consciousness. The impact of such partial empowerment is attested to, and helps explain why Canada is not the same socially as it was 20, 40, or 60 years ago. Change, including changes in belief systems, consciousness, and behaviours, can happen in a variety of ways. For example, citizens can and do take action to make change happen, or they can simply accept change that has come from elsewhere. Telford and Lazar (2002) point out that Canadians have, enthusiastically or reluctantly, endorsed important changes over the past 2 or 3 decades. Public opinion polling over recent years indicates that Canadians

- have embraced the political values entrenched in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms;
- have endorsed the principle of official bilingualism ...;
- are comfortable with the advances made by women over the past four decades;
- have accepted the unclustering of homosexuality;

M. O'Sullivan

- are broadly sympathetic to Aboriginal peoples ...; and
- accept the multicultural dynamic of Canada. (Telford & Lazar, p. 4)

On a more contemporary note, a recent poll commissioned by the *Globe and Mail* and CTV found that “typical” Canadians feel that

- Canada’s proudest moment was a decision not to go to war in Iraq;
- its foreign policy is too heavily influenced by the US;
- we are fighting in Afghanistan mainly at the behest of Washington; and
- climate change and the rich–poor gap are a bigger threat to world security than terrorism or weapons of mass destruction. (Gee, M., 2007, p.A.4)

These views reflect a key characteristic of conventional consciousness (i.e., *a recognition of options*), but they do not reflect another characteristic of this same level of consciousness (i.e., *a concomitant sense of powerlessness to do anything about these options*). Some of the above-cited changes came about as the result of years of political struggle (e.g., Aboriginal rights), while others (e.g., court decisions affecting gay marriage) may well have been decided on by decision-making elites. In such dynamic circumstances, it is impossible for us to say that Canadians as a whole feel powerless. Their sense of empowerment or lack thereof seems to depend on the issue at hand and on a basket of complex circumstances. Thus, it can be said that on a range of issues, Canadians seem to be moving – however cautiously – between two levels of consciousness (conventional and critical) and that they seem to be open to persuasion. By inference, it is logical to presume that if their children come home from school talking about classroom discussions and research projects around such social issues in a grade-appropriate way, this is unlikely to be highly controversial in most homes.⁶

Such changing social and political views, along with, for example, the “permission” granted to teachers in the curriculum to teach global issues (see Schweifurth, 2006), amount to an invitation to educators wishing to teach from a C/T perspective to do so in a way that encourages students to grapple with socially significant issues.

Some Concluding Remarks

I began this article with the observation that the more explicitly politicized approaches to C/T pedagogy are presumed to be in contradiction with other pedagogies that, while less explicitly politicized, nonetheless raise questions of social justice, environmental degradation, and so forth. There is no question that a divide exists between those self-defined global education and GCE practitioners who make little or no effort to raise issues critically with their students (perhaps characterized, following Openshaw & White (2005), as

the ones who indulge in *banality*) and those who work hard to inject a social justice perspective into their classroom practices. It is very important not to lump the former (neoliberals, in effect) with the latter (aspiring C/T pedagogues). It is these latter teachers – and their counterparts among teacher candidates in faculties of education – who constitute the hope for significantly expanding the numbers of C/T practitioners.

Educational reform initiatives always involve a minority of teachers “buying in” during the early stages (Hargreaves, 2000), and C/T educational reform is no exception. The core of committed C/T practitioners – the ones referred to by Larsen and Faden (this issue) as the “exceptionally motivated and politically active teachers” – have to make the effort to journey from the periphery, as Schweifurth (2006) would have it, and engage with those teachers who are struggling in the mainstream to support their students as they confront the social issues that affect them directly and indirectly.

By way of example, elsewhere I have described in some detail the progressive and exemplary classroom practice of N.C., an elementary school global education practitioner, and her colleagues in a small-town Ontario school (O’Sullivan, in press; O’Sullivan & Vetter, 2007). N.C. and her fellow teachers came to global education in a highly idiosyncratic way. One interdisciplinary unit that is taught by N.C. from a global perspective is her grade 7 study which is based on the novel *The Heaven Shop* (Ellis, 2004). A superficial understanding of the experience might cause some to question whether this unit constitutes a C/T pedagogy that significantly moves her students toward a new level of sociopolitical understanding and critical consciousness or is best thought of as an enrichment of existing curricular paradigms.

Posing the issue in such stark contrast strikes me as being unhelpful in the extreme. In the face of the stultifying expectations placed on classroom teachers, N.C. and her colleagues have taken advantage of the space they have found in the Ontario curriculum. They have created an opportunity to open their students’ eyes, minds, and emotions to a global reality that, as with the students in Vetter’s small-town class (this issue), seems very far away until the connections are made by insightful classroom practitioners. In practicing (in this case) global education, N.C. and her colleagues are operating within the frame of reference of two levels of consciousness; in this way they are expanding their own intellectual and personal horizons as well as their personal forms of social engagement, and those of their students. With little institutional support, and with only themselves as mentors, these teachers are engaging in a critical and transformative practice that demonstrates an openness to exploring issues far more deeply than is currently happening in most mainstream classrooms.

N.C.'s experiences are a reminder that, regardless of ongoing debates among critical pedagogues, it is the initiative and expertise of classroom teachers that is reshaping the practice of C/T pedagogy. "Mainstream" teachers, like N.C., and those documented by Larsen and Faden, as well as the "exceptionally motivated and politically active teachers" operating on the margins, would all benefit from a supportive relationship with one another. This in-school collaboration, supported by an injection of explicitly political C/T pedagogies into faculties of education, amounts to an important precondition for mainstreaming C/T pedagogies in a way that would allow them to maintain, rather than blunt, their critical and transformative edge.

Endnotes

¹ I am thinking of the contributions associated with Pike & Selby (1988), Merryfield (1997), Tye (1999), and Noddings (2002, 2005), to name only a few.

² I recognize that to characterize anyone's view of the world as "deficient" is to invite charges of elitism. The issue of judging teachers' understanding of how political, economic, and social processes work needs broader discussion. We are comfortable judging a teacher's knowledge of math, science, history, or French, for example, and we expect a minimal level of subject competence to teach these subjects. I argue that CT competence (global literacy, for example), including the associated pedagogies, is as important to learn as traditional subject areas.

³ From my involvements with global and global citizenship educators, I observe that these teachers are motivated first and foremost by a concern about their students as individuals; their social involvements arise from a desire to implicate these students in a social engagement that causes them to grow intellectually and emotionally. This is the topic of my ongoing research.

⁴ Global Education and GCE are two closely related but distinct pedagogies. Some work has been done on defining the distinctions between the two (e.g., Davies, Evans, & Reid, 2005), however, Pike (this issue), argues for finding commonalities rather than constructing barriers between these two global pedagogies.

⁵ Deliberative democracy is a concept central to Dewey's thinking on the relationship between democracy and educational reform. The practice of deliberative democracy, be it in the classroom or in the community, involves shifting and enriching our understanding of democracy from one that effectively reduces public political participation to the act of voting to one that sees democracy as an ongoing process in which an informed and motivated citizenry engages in public debate and political engagement at the local, national, and, increasingly, the global level (Benhabib, 1996; Habermas, 1996; Kadlec, 2007).

⁶ Of course, "most homes" are not "all homes," and the move by a teacher or a number of teachers in a particular school towards a C/T stance will not always be welcome. In some jurisdictions, explicit curricular provisions or board policies place teachers on a stronger footing when dealing with "controversial issues" (e.g., critical thinking, gay and lesbian issues, global education), while in other circumstances (e.g., Catholic schools on gay and lesbian issues) teachers will have to tread more carefully (or not at all). Ironically, teachers in the Catholic system can often teach from a highly critical perspective on certain social issues because of the mandate to teach from the perspective of Catholic social values (Vetter, this issue).

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M. O'Sullivan

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