



Professing Education

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Editors

As we head into our second volume of *Professing Education*, a semi-annual publication of the Society of Professors of Education, we are quite excited by the responses we have received to our call for essays dealing with the theme, "Fighting the Miseducation of the Democratic Public." We are especially pleased that we can bring to you our exclusive interview with one of North America's leading critical educational theorists, Peter McLaren. McLaren is Professor in the Division of Urban Schooling, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is the author and editor of forty books on the sociology of education, critical pedagogy, and critical social theory. He is also the inaugural recipient of the Paulo Freire Social Justice Award from Chapman University.

In this interview McLaren offers a provocative analysis of the United States' (George W. Bush's) military machine and its use as the prime vehicle for neo-liberal economic policy writ large in an expanding web of war. As we live in a time of much global turmoil and violence, there is an almost deafening silence emanating from the left, especially from within the academy. McLaren punctures that silence here with a revitalization of some salient, though often misused and misrepresented Marxist themes, so as to fuel an almost moribund left to begin voicing critical resistance to the totalizing power of neo-liberal economic policies. He remains committed to non-violent revolution (as compared to "tinkering" reforms and redistributions within the dominant capitalist system) leading to a transformed post-capitalist society. As he says: "When I talk about revolutionary transformation, I am talking about education, the development of revolutionary social consciousness as a direct challenge to reformist consciousness...." The result is a full-fledged and

comprehensive interview that is provocative, probing, and thoroughly educative.

In the first essay, Peter Carbone provides an articulate treatment of some "bedrock assumptions" underlying democratic educational theory. He takes a close look at the role of the intelligent citizen, especially the critically intelligent citizen, as an integral requirement for an open and free society. Drawing on Richard Paul's distinction between weak and strong-sense critical thinkers, Carbone urges educators to cultivate strong-sense critical thinking in their students, so as to offer not only democratic resistance to the status quo but perhaps more importantly, to keep the critical desire alive that future generations might continue to ask important questions about themselves and their society.

In the next essay, Jan Armstrong turns her critical gaze inward to the university itself asking us to reflect on "three professional challenges" faced by today's professors of education. The challenges, as she states them, are as follows: "preparing future professors; modifying institutional reward structures; and resisting pressures to trivialize, commodify, and de-contextualize the curriculum." What follows is a clear and concise "direct hit" on some of the most pressing maladies afflicting not only those professing in Education but all of those who profess within the contemporary academy. Written with clear-sightedness and offering some good practical suggestions as well, Armstrong's contribution resonates with a genuine care for and commitment to her students. Her emphasis, finally, falls on students getting what it should be important to get from a university education – a critical sense of their contexts. A good university education, argues the author, should be something that cannot be gotten anywhere else, thus being a real alternative to what can be gotten anywhere else. Furthermore, the university should be oppositional at its core so as to be always in a position to challenge "dominant modes of communication." This produces articulate, engaged, and intelligent citizens and we think the author would agree that a healthy and educative democracy depends on such engagement.



!proletarios de todos los países uníos!
(Workers of the world, unite!)

Illustration by Marcelo Layera

Traveling the Path of Most Resistance: Peter McLaren's Pedagogy of Dissent

Interview with Peter McLaren
University of California, Los Angeles

Kenneth McClelland: Hi Peter! We are happy that you have been able to take some time to talk with us here at *Professing Education* and address some of the problems surrounding the miseducation of the democratic public.

Peter McLaren: Thanks, Ken, for offering me an opportunity to put a few of my ideas on the table for your readers to consider.

K. M.: In the wake of the kind of confusion and horror generated by the recent attacks on the United States, its leaders have responded with confidence—their answer, among other things, involving the forceful display of ‘democracy’ abroad in what we might assume will be an expanding web. It seems to me that this brash confidence belies the real confusion that can be the only result of such terror tactics. To your thinking, do confident answers in this case represent the easy way?

P. M.: Well, long before the Bush gang took power (illegally, in my view) in January 2001, the present architects of U.S. foreign policy at the Project for

the New American Century (PNAC), recognized the need to maintain the dominant position of U.S. capitalism by advancing such American values through a policy of ‘peace through strength.’ It has turned out to be more like peace through war. Permanent war.

Americans like to plump for the Bush gang’s tough stance against terrorism while forgetting that transnationals who are flooding the market with cheap and subsidized food are forcing millions of farmers into bankruptcy, including thousands per week in the U.S. Forgotten are the millions of urban homeless and unemployed and those who cannot afford medical insurance. Forgotten is the environmental degradation in the Homeland, and the toxic waste we are dumping not just on Native American lands but also exporting to developing countries as the solution. Forgotten is California’s energy crisis that was stage-managed by Kenny Boy Lay, the darling of Bush W., who still runs free even after the collapse of his company, Enron. Well, the corporate media helps us forget. And FOX-News virtually *commands* us to forget. As I have tried to document with Valerie Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, Ramin Farahmandpur, Greg Martin, Noah DeLissovoy, and Nathalia Jaramillo in a torrent of articles over the past year, ultra-right wing mouthpieces have been busily trying to craft George W. Bush as a fraternity brother version of Ronald Reagan, while labeling critics as un-American and unpatriotic. Recently, pro-war columnists and radio and television gasbags have begun a testosterone-driven campaign to have anti-war dissidents arrested by invoking the Sedition Act of 1918. It has become dangerous to think, to ask too many questions, or to look beyond the surface of whatever commentary is served up to us by politicians, the military, and the infantilizing screeds of talk-radio pundits.

As far as linking Bush military strategy to neo-liberal economics, my focus, Ken, has been on monopoly capital theory which traces the developments in finance capital, the concentration and centralization of capital as part of a new phase of neo-liberal globalization, stagnation tendencies in the capitalist center, and imperialist exploitation in the countries located on the periphery (developing capitalist economies).

Well, we know that all the talk by the U.S. ruling elite about exporting democracy really boils down to exporting neo-liberal free market ideology, policy, and practice. In my view, neo-liberal economics is incompatible with democracy, and later on I'll try to give you a rather technical answer directly from Marx—*Capital*, Volume 1 to be precise—that speaks to why I feel this to be the case. Occupied by the military forces of the U.S. and British coalition, Iraq is slowly being turned into a vassal state – a protectorate, if you will—of its conquering imperialist powers. The Security Council of the UN granted these occupying forces full powers to control the economy and the future politics of Iraq, which it is doing by virtue of a campaign designed to terrorize the population into submission. We've already read about the thousands of civilians who have been—and continue to be—killed. We have seen what happened to Iraq's cultural heritage in the mass lootings, likely encouraged by the US administration, and now its national wealth—i.e., oil—will be sold in order to pay US corporations, who, without bidding, have been granted huge reconstruction contracts. If, in Iraq, citizens decided by free election to keep their oil socialized, then the US would never permit that election to stand. The US occupying powers are saying that the Iraqis must take 'baby steps' toward democracy before they will be permitted to govern themselves in full (the US has such a colonial view of the Iraqis it is sickening, and it reminds me of the patronizingly pathetic way the Anglo-Europeans viewed the Indians or African slaves: as underdeveloped children). The US is prohibiting elections until the conditions are ripe for a government to be elected that will favor the institution of free-market capitalism. They need to propagandize first, and get their ideological machinery institutionally in place. And they need to build a loyal capitalist class, with the help of their imported Iraqi exiles (Iraqi workers are already complaining that their wages were higher when Saddam's state tightly controlled the economy). And, of course, they need to purge the socialists and communists. Then, when the occupying powers are assured that the government will remove any impediments to letting the US and other developed democracies exploit their cheap labor and natural resources, then—and only

then—will they be given a green light to hold elections. And God forbid if the Iraqis wish to elect an Islamic fundamentalist government. (Of course, the US helped to cultivate the most reactionary Islamic fundamentalists possible when it worked with bin Laden and Pakistan's secret service to help expel the Soviets from Afghanistan.) And what will happen when Iraqi citizens start to press for the right to organize independent unions and to collective negotiation? History has shown that the US will militarily pummel or covertly destabilize any country that refuses the great dream of free-market capitalism, because, frankly, the US needs the markets (it is trying its best to topple Venezuela and it has failed for decades to finish off Cuba). Anything considered remotely socialist is linked to the evil of the gulag. The key point here is that whether they opposed the war or not, all countries that are at the mercy of the international institutions that are devoted to neo-liberal capitalist globalization (G-8, World Bank, IMF, European Union, or "free-trade" agreements like the FTAA on the American continent) are forced to implement policies of "structural adjustment" and counter-reforms that are totally directed against rights that have been gained through courageous and relentless struggle by workers over decades.

Even the United Nations (although it had a minor revolt by the Security Council over the war in Iraq) is perceived by many in the US as a feral socialist body that attempts to impede the will of the United States, even though historically it has genuflected to the interests of U.S. imperial policy-making on nearly every occasion.

One thing to keep in mind is that the US has always acted militarily to pursue its imperial interests and maintain its economic hegemony. As the philosopher Hobsbawm (2003) has pointed out, the imperial reach of the U.S. differs from that of Britain a century ago in that the U.S. does not practice colonialism but relies on dependent and satellite states, resorting to armed intervention when the natives get restless and start refusing to buckle down. Whereas the British Empire was based on a singularly British purpose, the U.S. is based on a universalist conviction that the rest of the world

should follow its example of free market capitalist democracy.

But the Bush Doctrine has relegated the notion of ‘just war’ to the realm of absurdity. There is, as Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, no more real aim to war, since its results can never be achievable. The means—attack by the most powerful military ever known—are no longer proportionate to the ends—eliminating evildoers. The economy, just like evildoers, is boundless. It’s not just that the means are disproportionate to the ends – attacking countries like Afghanistan whose GNP amounts to less than a B-52 bomber—but when you have an open-ended declaration of perpetual war, what achievable goals can you hope to postulate in order to justify it? And Meiksins-Wood argues how this notion of perpetual war, this war without end, *answers the needs of this new imperialism, by the universality of capitalist imperatives*. Anyway, suffice it to say that the Bush gang has emerged as an indispensable guarantor of ‘super-profits’ for the drive to world economic domination. Think about this, Ken, in the context of education for a moment. We now have the concept of “life-long learning” that is designed to replace the principle of a basic public school education before entry into the workforce. This reduces workers to human resources designed to serve the new flexibility of the corporate sector and the internal needs of individual companies. In other words, the concept of life-long learning means that workers could be compelled to work at any job, at any age, and under any conditions that the employer sees fit. This is paving the way for NGOs to take over the business of education, as it has already done in places such as Haiti. Education must be de-linked from the IMF, the World Bank, and the international financial institutions since the multinationals see a potential market in education of US\$2.2 trillion dollars a year. Given the crisis in world capitalism, corporations cannot afford to lose this potential market. Thus, one of the battles we are fighting is the privatization and dismantling of education in any form: private teaching; subcontracting or externalization of public school and university work to private companies, associations, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs); transnational “free-trade” agreements;

decentralization and the fragmentation of public services; the establishment of voucher systems and the substitution of “competencies” for “qualifications.” (These points were made at the recent International Conference Against War and in Defense of Public Education was held in Paris, on June 14-15, 2003.)

For a while it seemed that capitalist imperialism could do the work of what formerly was accomplished by military means by imperial states and colonial settlers. This is no longer the case. The new imperialism needs a doctrine of war, but the doctrine of the former ‘just war’ is no longer sufficient. It needs a new doctrine of war – a doctrine of endless war, of war without boundaries. It needs a new model of imperialism, so watch how the US rebuilds Iraq—with particular attention to how it restructures public services, education, labor codes, etc.

You are familiar, I am sure, with the frequently invoked quotation made famous by Prussian military officer, Karl Marie von Clausewitz (1780-1831): “war is the continuation of politics by other means” (cited in Meszaros, 1993, p. 18). However, Istvan Meszaros notes that this definition no longer is tenable in our time. This is because such a definition “assumed the *rationality* of the actions which connect the two domains of politics and war as the continuation of one another” (2003, p. 18). For this definition to hold, war had to be winnable—winnability in war was its absolute condition, for even a defeat in war would not destroy the very rationality of war between competing nation states. This absolute condition for Von Clausewitz’s definition no longer exists, maintains Meszaros, if we consider that today, the objective of a winnable or feasible war is tied to the objective requirements of imperialism, which is “*world domination by capital’s most powerful state, in tune with its own political design of ruthless authoritarian “globalization” (dressed up as ‘free exchange’ in a U.S. ruled global market)*” (2003, p. 18). This situation is clearly unwinnable and could not be considered a rational objective by any stretch of the imagination. War as the mechanism of global government is untenable because the “weapons

already available for waging the war or wars of the twenty first century are capable of exterminating not only the adversary but the whole of humanity, for the first time ever in history” (2003, p. 19). Meszaros warns that Bush’s National Security Strategy “makes Hitler’s irrationality look like the model of rationality” (2003, p. 19).

Once Iraq, for instance, is made sufficiently vulnerable to the rules of the imperial marketplace, the US no longer needs to rule by military occupation. But Iraq must always be threatened by military force if it no longer complies. The smashing of Iraq was also a lesson for other countries that defy free-market imperatives. The cruel irony here is that US military and economic imperialism is most certain to promote more terrorism than it is able to prevent. The US is after total war as a form of unilateral world domination. Now if we want to talk about the world system today, then I would follow again the arguments made by Enrique Dussel and argue that we can locate the dependency of less developed countries at the level of competition and the distribution of surplus value. Were it not for space limitations, I would focus here on Marx’s notion of the fall of the rate of profit as a result of the growth of monopoly capitalism or as simultaneous with the growth of the mass of profit, which will take us into the whole arena of overcapacity or overproduction – a situation that I hold in large measure responsible for driving the recent imperialist hegemony of the United States. That might be a good discussion for another interview.

K. M.: How might those who are attempting to profess education in the wake of such traumatic events start coming to terms with the questions not being asked then, and what might a few of those questions be?

P. M.: It is important for any educator to spend time with real people, in real life struggles, to understand how they engage with society from the bottom up. It is important to be part of struggles outside of the seminar room. My own activity as a revolutionary socialist is premised on the notion that democracy as a set of discourses or principles or political philosophy is simultaneously re-functioned at the level of everyday social relations as an instrument of exploitation. And

where I have become the most outspoken is in my critique of liberal reformism. It seems obvious to me that most of the educational left speaks from a discourse of reformism. However, in my own work, I refrain from dogmatically posing an either-or option of reformism or revolution but rather take a both-and dialectical position. Dialectics is about mediation, not juxtaposition, most surely, and I approach the reform versus revolution question dialectically. Of course we have no choice but to act within capitalist social relations but my position is that while we are living and struggling within the belly of the beast we need to develop a vision of working towards a society outside of capitalism’s value form of labor. I don’t offer a blueprint, but a glimpse of some possibilities.

My work on developing a post-capitalist society is mostly in the subjective “what if” mode and not the imperative “it must look like this” mode. However, in my critique of capitalism I am less tentative. In fact, it has been described as downright ruthless. We need to be clear that we don’t have on the agenda in the United States a revolutionary perspective, especially in education. We have militant movements in the US, true, but most of these operate within the larger optic of reformism. Approaching reformism from the perspective of the classical distinction posited between reformism and revolution by Luxemburg and Lenin (in the era of the Second and Third Internationals), Alex Callinicos has written some insightful commentaries on the dangers of reformism (reformism used here as the gradual improvement of capitalism rather than the revolutionary transformation of society) that I believe need to be rehearsed. Now I know I make a lot of people in the field of education nervous—especially in a post-9/11 environment—when I talk about the revolutionary transformation of the state. I am not talking about armed revolution here but rather the ability of workers to take control of society through means other than its violent overthrow. I am reminded of the revolution that occurred in Paris in late February, 1848, triggering revolutionary activity throughout most of Europe. During this time Marx had returned to Paris from Brussels to help organize the communist movement and he was adamant in discouraging armed resistance as reckless adventurism. He urged winning a democratic,

political revolution with a view towards pushing ahead to achieve socialism. When I talk about revolutionary transformation, I am talking about education, the development of revolutionary social consciousness as a direct challenge to reformist consciousness, a critique of political economy rather than tinkering with capitalist redistribution, resistance that at times would surely constitute civil disobedience and protracted class battles, but I am not talking about armed revolution, so let's be clear on that. And I have always taken a strong stand against terrorism, whether that is state terrorism or individual acts of terrorism.

Well, back to the concept of reformism. Even militant anti-capitalist movements can be reformist if they attempt to redress neo-liberalism by strengthening the state, but at the same time do little to challenge the basis of the inter-imperialist rivalry we are seeing throughout the globe (in contrast to the insights of Hardt and Negri, I might add, in their world bestseller, *Empire*). To defeat reformism, we need patience, obviously, and we need to move in a number of directions. As Callinicos notes, we need to create a united front, which means winning the working-class base of the electorate over to the struggle for a socialist alternative to capitalism. We need to build our struggle around demands and through organizational forms that can be shared by diverse political forces. This means increasing efforts at radicalizing the labor movement, which works overwhelmingly within a reformist logic. Struggles along this line have never been easy in the United States. Since the Battle of Seattle, there have, however, been promising signs. The anti-war movement, especially the ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) coalition, was able to bring together divergent groups that took a strong stand against the war, and against US imperialism, although it did take a lot of media hits for its association with the Workers World Party. Strategically, it makes little sense to work toward the construction of a mass revolutionary party here—the objective conditions just don't exist. I favor the notion put forward by Callinicos, which is that of regroupment, which means revolutionary Marxists working on a non-sectarian basis in which there exist multiple interpretations on what revolutionary

socialism might mean but which takes seriously the concept of building an anti-capitalist movement within the context of the notion of a permanent revolution. In other words, any effective anti-capitalist struggle needs to be international in scope. Now, within education, my role is singularly more modest. My goal is simply to educate teachers and teacher educators about Marx's ideas and the Marxist tradition, and dispel the lies and distortions that have crusted over Marx's legacy since the United States emerged victorious from the Cold War. This was never an easy task, and has become more difficult now in the United States since 9/11. I am also committed to the notion that teachers need to become part of the united front in their personal lives. When you see the country—and nearly all countries of the world, in fact—ruled by a small cadre of the capitalist class, serving the neo-liberal agenda which has led to the virtual impoverishment of working-people and the destruction of the planet's ecosystems, and the superexploitation of women throughout the globe, how is it possible to remain, as an educator, detached from larger social movements struggling against this?

K. M.: It is assumed that certain pre-conditions are necessary for intelligent criticism of existing social conditions. Those who profess education can play an integral part in deciphering and establishing some of these pre-conditions. Can you speak to what some of these pre-conditions for intelligent criticism might be, and what challenges do today's Professors of Education face when so many of society's associations seem bent on taking arms against such efforts?

P. M.: Preconditions for generating a critical pedagogy than can address the world situation today—and thereby avoid its current domesticated incarnations in college classrooms—means a lot of things, obviously. I can catalogue a few of them. Especially after 9/11, it means a societal commitment to freedom of speech, a willingness to challenge the current Bush regime's definition of patriotism (where an analysis of the root causes of terrorism is tantamount to aiding and abetting the enemy), a

willingness to permit open investigations of the U.S. government which means its connection to its intelligence agencies, what these agencies were willing to share with the United Nations, an open examination of U.S. attempts to destabilize foreign governments, its links to transnational corporations, and a commitment to critical self-reflexivity and dialogue in public conversations. Greater efforts must be made to enforce the separation of church and state in principle as well as more pressingly as a means of countering the Likudites in the Bush administration as well as Bush's own rabid brand of Christian fundamentalist beliefs (Bush is trying to turn the US into a covert theocracy). It also means struggling for a media that does not serve corporate interests. How can you have a democracy when you have the ideological state apparatuses in the hands of the corporations, which in turn are connected to the military industrial complex, etc.? Which in turn, develop monopolies, which in turn shamelessly take up the agenda of the Bush regime (FOX TV and Clear Channel are just two examples). I could talk about any one of these, and more, but I want to concentrate on another pre-condition: Understanding the fundamental basis of Marx's critique of capitalism.

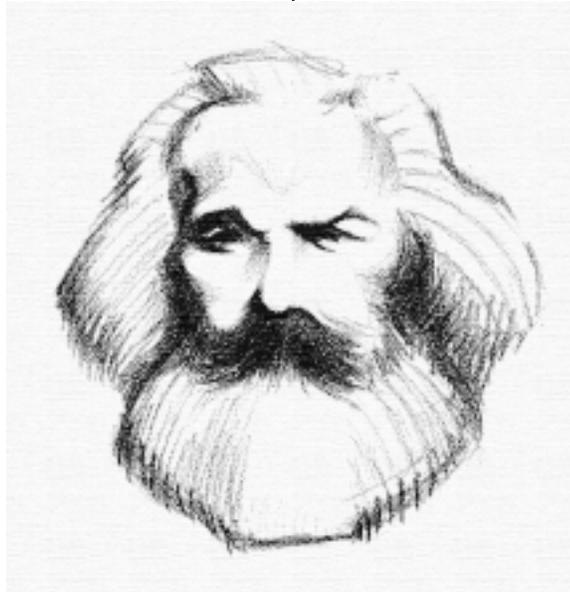
Since I am well aware that Marxism is fairly marginalized in the academy—and especially the revolutionary critical pedagogy that has come to inform my work as a Marxist humanist—I will take the time to situate my first answer with a bit of a theoretical overview. Since critical pedagogy's current phase of theoretical gestation does not deal adequately with the issue of class as a social relation, I feel it necessary to dispatch the reader for a couple

of paragraphs into the very technical and, for those who are not accustomed to it, the sometimes esoteric and off-putting language of Marxist theory, but I don't see any way to avoid that. I hope that your readers will bear with me for a few paragraphs. Answering this question will serve to form the basis of the position that I have been taking

in my work since coming to California and grounding my work in Marxist humanism. It might seem at first blush that I am trying to avoid the specifics of your question but this background information is crucial for subsequent answers. In other words, I believe this concept of value linked to the exploitation of labor-power—something British educationalist, Glenn Rikowski has written about in powerfully nuanced ways—is a crucial precondition for having an extended discussion about educational

transformation. Without it we are stuck in what I have called the logic of 'reformism', which I will discuss later on in the interview.

About a decade ago I decided to revisit Marx to get a better grasp of how capitalism works at its roots. Much of this was due to frequent visits to Latin America and spending time with Marxist activists there, and from conversations with British educationalists such as Paula Allman, Glenn Rikowski, Mike Cole, and Dave Hill as well as US educationalists such as John Holst, Wayne Ross and Rich Gibson. Rikowski encouraged me to re-visit Marx's *Capital*, vol. 1, and especially the labor theory of value and to explore the distinction between labor and labor-power. So I dusted off my volumes of Marx, and Marx and Engels, and began a new journey into Marxist theory. Well, let me get



Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Illustration by Marcelo Layera

started. Casting aside for the moment current debates on the whole question of the ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘fictitious capital’ and related issues of ‘cyber-capitalism’ (after all, our space is limited) I have come to the conclusion, along with many Marxists, that capital as a form of exploitation takes place fundamentally at the level of production, not at the level of circulation or exchange or in the sphere of consumption (which is not to say that these other spheres are unimportant in our analyses). It is to be aware of Marxist fundamentals—what Marxists and liberation theologians and others have been saying for decades—that the worker does not sell his or her labor to the capitalist, but rather he sells his labor-power or his labor capacity (that is, his skills, level of education, competencies, etc). The worker sells this labor-power as a commodity at a price or money equivalent of the value of his or her labor-power, and the value or price paid by the capitalist is determined by the quantity of labor required to produce and maintain the worker’s existence (whatever it takes to educate the worker in the required skills and whatever is necessary to raise children who can replace the worker on the labor market, etc.). The worker in return gets no real wealth or power over commodities in general, but only power over the commodities that are needed to maintain him and perpetuate the class of laborers of which the worker belongs. The key point here—and really, this a very fundamental idea known as the labor theory of value—is that human labor-power expends more time than is necessary for its maintenance, and this labor power creates no value for the worker, but does create surplus value for the capitalist, for, in other words, private interest. Profit, or surplus value, is the result of living labor-power, or the exploitation of the living labor of workers. The value of labor-power is measured by the amount of labor required to reproduce itself as labor-power. The value of this special commodity known as labor-power is concretized in a certain amount of consumer goods that enable workers to sustain themselves and reproduce their offspring. When the value of consumer goods diminishes, the value of labor-power also diminishes and this remains the case even though the physical quantity of goods consumed by the worker remains the same. Likewise, if the productivity of the worker increases, the value of labor-power may

decrease. Living labor produces all value, including the surplus value that valorizes capital, or that turns capital into a profit for the capitalist. The wages received by workers is only part of the value that they actually produce. The capitalists appropriate as their surplus value or profit the other part of the value produced by the workers. Living labor is subsumed by capital. That is, the labor-power of the worker is the source of all value in capitalist society.

Capital, therefore, is not a self-sufficient totality, but exists only by incorporating living labor outside of itself. In fact, a good argument has been made by the philosopher Enrique Dussel that all forms of surplus value (profit, interest, rent, etc) are derived from the surplus value of workers. The value of a commodity, because it is realized in circulation, gives the illusion that it arises from the process of circulation, and not production. In effect, labor-power produces nothing (its use value is that it produces exchange value), but when it is exercised through the act of laboring, it produces value. Put another way, labor power is a commodity, but of a special kind. Its use value is the act of laboring itself and the creation of value. It is this commodity that is purchased by the employer. The secret of capitalism is in the use that is made of this commodity by the capitalist after its purchase. Here is the key. Before anything is actually produced by the worker, the worker is already paid for his or her wealth-creating capacity or the availability of his capacity to labor, so that the proportion of the values which the worker produces by the actual act of laboring is more than the values he or she receives as equivalent to the availability of his or her labor-power. But this unpaid labor takes the semblance of an equal exchange. In other words, surplus value is uncompensated labor. In effect, it is what the wage worker gives to the capitalist without receiving any value in return. Surplus value, then, is the difference between the value created by work, and the amount the worker needs in order to subsist.

The point I want to stress is that once you understand capital as a social relation—the subsumption of concrete labor by abstract labor, the negation of concrete/particular labor time by

abstract/general labor time—well, then you need to consider irrefutably that this social relation is one of exploitation and it presupposes or characterizes all social relations within capitalism. This is the ironclad logic of capital. I mean if it really is a matter of improving the level of consumption in materialistic terms of all workers, then there is no reason to get rid of capitalism. A worker's standard of living would continue to improve without marking any lessening of the degree of exploitation! In reality, workers cannot prevent the value of their own labor-power from diminishing or the theft of their surplus value from increasing exponentially. In other words, capitalism is given ballast, or is bolstered by a corrupt morality, or by a set of ideologies that perpetuates the false notion that relations between capitalists and workers is one of free and equal exchange, that what in fact the workers receive in terms of wages is equal to their contribution to production. Similarly, it is a lie to assume that capitalists receive as surplus value or profit, a contribution equal to their role in production given the factories and machines that they own and control. All of capitalist society is a theft of the surplus value of workers. Society becomes an independent, alienated entity from humankind precisely through the process of commodity fetishism. Workers hallucinate their labor as a property of the products themselves and the value form of labor that is produced. And of course, the corporate media help to perpetuate this mass hallucination.

The point I wish to underscore, Ken, is that the standard of living of workers can rise without this representing any diminution of their degree of exploitation, just as an improvement in the economy can actually result in greater numbers of people fired from their jobs. The point Marx is making is that capitalism is a system of slavery. Workers are not allowed to reproduce themselves unless they agree to labor for free for a certain number of hours during the day in order to provide surplus value for the capitalist. The workers need the permission of the capitalists to feed themselves and their families. This permission will be denied unless the workers agree to these terms, to work a certain length of time for the exclusive benefit of the capitalist. Now I have deliberately not addressed the issue of bourgeois property relations as they emerged on the basis of the

development of commodity production as the shape by which the laws peculiar to commodity production assert themselves. But I don't want to get more technical here than I have already. Well, many educators today are writing about global capitalism, and that's a good thing. But not enough of them are looking at Marx's central premises surrounding the commodification of human labor and its value form.

Peter McLaren interview continued in Vol 2, No. 2 (December, 2003).

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American Education: Educative or Miseducative?

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Democratic educational theory has long been characterized by a number of bedrock assumptions. One of them holds that popular government, by encouraging citizens to take an active part in the discharge of a public function (even if only to exercise the right to vote), stimulates the intellect and is conducive as well to the development of character. In short, as John Stuart Mill maintained, popular government, in addition to its inherent

political merits, contributes meaningfully to the education of the electorate.¹

Another key assumption underlying democratic educational theory attests that a free press is a necessary condition for a viable and robust democracy. At the very outset of the American experiment in self-government, for example, Thomas Jefferson stated that “were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive these papers and be capable of reading them.”² That last sentence is important for it forges a clearly discernible link between the liberal views of Jefferson and John Dewey. Like Jefferson, for instance, Dewey was convinced that the burden of dissemination would have to be borne by the daily press as well as the publishers of scholarly books and articles in order to raise the level of informed public opinion. In response to the oft-repeated claim that the masses lacked the intellectual capacity to understand the intricacies of social inquiry, Dewey argued that this objection would be rendered moot provided that relevant information were provided in a sufficiently creative manner.³ In other words, then, sophisticated social inquiry might have to be left to the “experts,” but the ability to discern and judge the consequences of such investigation lies within the reach of most individuals, provided that they are properly tutored.

Yet another, and perhaps the most telling of the assumptions undergirding democratic theory speak directly to the relationship between education and freedom. Jefferson set the tone with his famous dictum that “if a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.”⁴

Horace Mann, too, as Cremin observed, “understood well the relationship between freedom, self-government, and universal education.” Like Jefferson, Mann (the driving force behind the establishment of the American common school) believed that freedom could rest secure only as free men had the knowledge to make intelligent decisions.⁵

Thus both Jefferson and Mann contributed significantly to our understanding of the relationship between democracy and education, but it fell to John

Dewey to fully map the common ground between the two in a number of his writings, including *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Experience and Education* (1938).

Central to Dewey’s philosophy of education is the goal of institutionalizing intelligence in the schools as he felt it had already been institutionalized in the study of nature. Dewey thought that if the attitudes and methods of inquiry employed in the sciences were made an integral part of the educational process, reason and intelligence would emerge as the ultimate guide to both individual behavior and social policy.

In the political arena, institutionalized intelligence implies democracy for Dewey, since democracy allows (or at least should allow) for the same free and open exchange of ideas, the same testing and evaluation of hypotheses pertaining to public policy that scientists enjoy in their own domain. Thus science, democracy, and education are interrelated in Dewey’s thought, and intelligence is the common denominator underlying all three concepts.

Now the obvious question at this point, especially in view of the fact that a democratic society requires the consent of an informed electorate, is to what extent have the views of Jefferson, Mann and Dewey found acceptance in American political and educational thought. Alas, the signs are not particularly encouraging, given the degree to which significant numbers of people are still swayed by negative political campaigning, intolerant of those who hold unconventional views, and eager to suppress freedom of expression in a variety of contexts (including the university, of all places).

Many such tendencies are of course exacerbated in times of national crisis. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that since 9/11 neither the “loyal opposition” democrats nor the “watchdog fourth estate” have demonstrated any real interest in challenging the majority party on major foreign-policy issues. The democrats, with few exceptions have come across as G.O.P. light, and the media in large part have given the President a pass despite the fact that his unilateralism has alienated many of this country’s staunchest allies. A few cases in point, in that connection, would include the administration’s withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Treaty; its

rejection of both the Kyoto agreement on global warming and participation in the International Criminal Court; the decision to summarily dismiss the views of the U.N. Security Council regarding the invasion of Iraq; and finally the unveiling of the doctrine of pre-emptive military strikes against “rogue” states. The latter, in particular, represents a stunning departure from traditional American ideals, yet it has elicited remarkably little public debate of a probing nature. Moreover, the flimsy justifications for the war on Iraq – the alleged ties of Saddam Hussein to Osama bin Laden and the existence of hidden weapons of mass destruction – have yet to be substantiated and now appear to have been highly questionable claims made by those bent on selling the merits of the war to an unsuspecting public. Yet the media have all too often disseminated the administration’s self-serving rhetoric as though it were the incontrovertible truth. In short, then, it would seem that neither the media nor the democratic process itself are contributing much to the ideal of an enlightened citizenry.

Well, then, what about our schools? Can we say that they have been any more successful in contributing to the civic edification of the populace? Have our schools instilled in students the abilities, skills, and dispositions that are prerequisites for critical thinking? Apparently not. Not if we accept Richard Paul’s distinction between weak and strong-sense critical thinkers. For Paul, the former tend to question only those beliefs and assumptions that they have been encouraged early on to reject.⁶ On the other hand, “strong-sense critical thinkers realize the necessity of putting their own assumptions and ideas to the test of the strongest objections that can be leveled against them.”⁷

The problem is that strong-sense critical thinkers are a rare breed because the schools tend not to foster that kind of critical reflection, But the schools are simply reflecting the views of the general public. Most people, after all, do not share the view that schools should question the conventional wisdom. On the contrary, they expect the school to reinforce the values they are attempting to instill in children at home. As A.C. MacIntyre has observed in this connection, “the values of rational critical inquiry stand in the sharpest contrast to the prevailing social

values.”⁸ Hence the critical thinker, as Passmore has observed, is an intellectual disturber of the peace,⁹ one who insists on raising questions about matters that others consider settled once and for all.

Thus a vicious circle presents itself. Each generation of students emerges from formal education with little or no appreciation for critical thinking and hence no burning desire to see it cultivated in the next generation. At the same time politicians have little incentive to “level” with the people, since they realize that political candor can be an elective liability. Hence they often prefer to demonize their opponents and tell their constituencies what they want to hear (as opposed to what they need to hear). And finally, how realistic is it to expect the media to hold the feet of politicians to the fire in an increasingly neo-conservative one-party system?

So long as there is no mandate from the general public to foster critical thinking in the strong sense, neither education, the press, nor participation in the political process can be expected to perform the educative functions traditionally assigned to them, and the discouraging reality at this juncture is that no such mandate is visible in the foreseeable future. And of course none of this augurs well for a society that aspires to freedom and openness. For as Paul notes, “an open society requires open minds.”¹⁰

Notes

1. John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, ed. CV Shields (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 16-25.
2. Letter to M. Adamantios, October 31, 1823.
3. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1927), 183.
4. Letter to Col. Charles Yancey, January 6, 1816.
5. *The Republic and the School*, ed. Lawrence A. Cremin (New York: Columbia Teachers College Press, 1957) 7.
6. Richard Paul, *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive In a Rapidly Changing World* (Rohnert Park, Cal: Sonoma St. Univ., 1990), 132.
7. *Ibid.*, 568.
8. A.C. MacIntyre, “Against Utilitarianism” in *Aims in Education*, ed. T.H. Hollins (New York: Humanities Press, 1964), 21.

9. John Passmore, "On Teaching to be Critical," in *The Concept of Education*, ed. R.S. Peters (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 195.
10. Paul, *Critical Thinking*, 105.

Universities and the Problem of Cultural Miseducation

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One of the assumptions students often bring into my classes is that education is synonymous with learning and being able to apply a clearly defined set of concepts and techniques that will be useful to them as classroom teachers. While it is clear that potentially students can benefit from learning key concepts and practices in any field, as a professor of education what most concerns me is not the task of teaching students clearly defined concepts and practical applications. It is the more difficult problem of helping them understand the contexts in which widely shared cultural ideas about human nature, learning, development, and education have been created, promoted, adopted, and eventually abandoned and supplanted by new ideas over time. There is a healthy tension between student expectations about the aims of higher education and my own.

There are also a variety of institutional pressures to streamline both content and delivery – to make learning more entertaining, agreeable, measurable, and above all, convenient for everyone concerned. This has me pondering the nature and perhaps the inevitability of university-mediated miseducation. It has me thinking about some of the professional practices and institutional patterns that may foster miseducation in universities and the need to explore possible remedies. I will take as my starting point Jane Rolland Martin's (2002, p.5) assertion that cultural miseducation occurs "when so many cultural liabilities or such devastating ones are passed down that a heavy burden is placed on the next generation; or, alternatively, when invaluable portions of the culture's wealth are not passed down." My analysis focuses on three professional challenges many of us face today: preparing future professors; modifying institutional reward structures, and resisting pressures

to trivialize, commodify, and de-contextualize the curriculum.

Preparing the next generation of professors is one of the most important challenges we face as a professional community. An important part of any professional culture's wealth is the legacy left by those who have gone before – a legacy fully available only to those who learn about the history of their field and begin to grapple with perennial philosophical and ethical problems as part of their graduate study. As we prepare future faculty members, we need to ask whether continued emphasis on technical skills and the rapid production of "marketable" academic projects might not engender professional liabilities at the expense of disciplinary wealth. McClelland (2002, pp.11-12) observes that: "For the discipline of Education to pull away from the isolationist and rarefied discourses that have become the mainstay of other disciplines, it needs to recover a generalist spirit that once was the cornerstone of education in the Humanities." He explores the concept of the professor of education as a "generating generalist" ...[who] "loves learning, who is imaginatively enlivened to ideas, both great ideas from the past as well as those being generated in the present, and who wishes to impart this love to his or her students. Such a love draws the student out, patiently and with care, into a world of imaginative possibility where future horizons are projected in hope and in deepening thoughtfulness." How might we best prepare the next generation of university professors to become and to nurture generating generalists? How can we create within the academy a professional climate that values and supports teaching as a lifelong developmental process? As far as I can tell, contemporary graduate programs typically do not encourage students to seek historical and philosophical training, or to engage in critical reflection on what it means to teach. This is cause for concern because fighting miseducation requires clarity, or at least thoughtful discussion about the aims and consequences of education. It seems to me that university professors have themselves been miseducated to the degree that they are unable or unwilling to examine and discuss fundamentally important educational questions. Such conversations

must take place if universities are to become more democratic, inclusive, and caring institutions.

This brings us to the second challenge: if we take it as a given that universities ought to become more democratic, inclusive, and caring places, we need to examine how the structure of reward in higher education fosters some professional skills and activities at the expense of others. I am hardly the first to note that universities are rapidly becoming more like corporations in form and function.

University decision-makers have adopted any number of market-oriented institutional practices as they compete with other public institutions for tax dollars and political influence. Corporations claim to educate workers, while universities claim they train people for higher paying, higher status jobs.

For administrators trying to make ends meet on limited budgets, it is self-evident that research universities must find alternative ways to generate new sources of revenue. They seem to grant heroic stature to faculty successful in this realm. As a consequence, reward structures for university professors encourage entrepreneurial activities. Young faculty members find themselves under intense pressure to prove they have the “right stuff” by pursuing lines of inquiry likely to meet with the approval of external funding agencies. As teachers, they learn to avoid the risks inherent in teaching well (including the considerable risk of investing too much time in it). The system as a whole operates against those inclined toward “challenging students ‘realities’” by “introducing an element of epistemological chaos” in their classes (Schifellite, 2002, p.11), and exploring diverse teacher narratives of reflection, hope, freedom, journey, apprenticeship, social criticism (Preskill and Jacobvitz, 2002). I worry that competitive systems for allocating rewards among untenured and post-tenure faculty members may promote the use of pedagogical tactics most likely to garner high student approval ratings on instruments whose flaws are well known but largely ignored (Baldwin and Blattner, 2003). Extrinsic incentives for academic labor foster competition, anxiety, rivalry, factionalism, and demoralization. They may also suppress risk-taking and creativity. It seems to me that if professors seek to preserve and share cultural wealth, as well as create new knowledge and ideas, we must find ways

to nurture diverse conceptualizations of what it means to be a good professor. Although we may have little choice but to accept the reality (and perceived necessity) of systems of extrinsic academic reward, we should do what we can to minimize their adverse effects. One way to do this is to reduce the salience of external reward structures while deepening and making more inclusive our conceptions of colleagues’ actual responsibilities and creative contributions. Providing faculty with meaningful opportunities to engage in informal “shop talk” about their work as teachers, scholars, and public servants would be a step in the right direction.

The third challenge involves taking a critical look at the curriculum. The prospects for cultural miseducation increase when the university curriculum emphasizes content over context. In fact, one of the most valuable things we can do as professors is to examine carefully the degree to which we balance the content/practice narrative with the context/complexity narrative in our courses. The content/practice narrative includes facts, definitions, skills, methods, concepts, principles, theories, and so on. The context/complexity narrative locates content within one or more contexts, acknowledging the inevitability and the value of multiple points of view. It asks whose knowledge counts, how cultural knowledge is created and disseminated, under what circumstances, why, and with what effects? For example, a lesson on the psychological principles of motivation might include historical accounts of changing patterns of parental discipline within different historical periods (Inkeles, 1966). A lesson on constructivism might examine links between constructivist pedagogies, modernity, and the social administration of the individual (Popkewitz, 1998). The need to contextualize teaching is obvious to scholars in some, but not all fields. Psychology and engineering tend to emphasize content; history, anthropology, and women studies emphasize context. In content-centered fields, those unable to quickly demonstrate mastery of basic concepts and ways of thinking must fight hard to keep from being weeded out. Little wonder that content-centered fields have difficulty retaining visible minorities and

women. This is cause for concern, as miseducation occurs when universities fail to provide women, minority groups, and the poor with equal access to role assignments, role rewards, and power.

Another consequence of the content-driven curriculum is that it lends itself to trivialization, commodification, and market place exchange practices. For students confronted with vast arrays of disembodied technical information and periodic objective examinations, this means that the complex, potentially life-enhancing task of working with their professors to develop a deep, compassionate understanding of human wisdom and fallibility, past and present, becomes irrelevant. Prospects for deep learning and creative thinking are supplanted by concerted efforts to figure out how best to minimize effort while maximizing gain (grades). I find that many students are comfortable with and often seem to prefer this kind of system. It expresses a kind of marketplace logic that pervades everyday life outside the academy. This leads me to think it may be time to revisit Neil Postman's neo-functional argument that the proper relationship between Education and Society ought to be one of opposition (Postman, 1979). Such opposition is essential because Education is one of the only social institutions capable of resisting and offering alternatives to dominant modes of communication, which in turn shape cultural practices and moral values (ibid.). It is imperative that professors help their students learn skills and ways of thinking they will not be able to acquire elsewhere (from the mass media, religious organizations, leisure activities, the workplace, or marketplace). In order to achieve this end, academic institutions must operate according to a different set of rules, organizing experience and distributing resources in ways that depart from what students expect and assume to be natural. As I try to figure out how best to work with students who consider classroom discussion and deep learning a waste of time, I will continue to grapple with the problem of miseducation, examining carefully my own assumptions about what university professors do, why, and with what effects. My students may or may not thank me for trying not to miseducate them, but that is probably not the point.

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Executive

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Call for Essays

We will be continuing the theme “Fighting the Miseducation of the Democratic Public” into our next issue (Vol 2. No.2, December, 2003) at which time we will also bring to you the second half of our interview with Peter McLaren.

As 2004 is an election year, we would like to announce, as well, our theme for next June’s issue. We will be looking for essays dealing with the following topic: “What should we, as professors of education, be hoping for in the next election?” Is the election process still an integral component of the democratic process? Has the election process devolved into a mere entertainment spectacle? And how might the Society of Professors of Education speak out on behalf of, and act toward enhancing, the democratic integrity of the election process?

These and related issues will be addressed in the December 2003 and June 2004 issues of *Professing Education*. Essays of approximately 500-1000 words that deal with these themes are requested, and should be submitted by November 1, 2003 for the December issue, and May 1, 2004 for June’s issue.

Please visit our interactive website at:

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for submissions, other information, and access to present and past issues of *Professing Education*.

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