SCHOOLING, POPULAR CULTURE, AND A PEDAGOGY OF POSSIBILITY

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In this paper, the authors analyze the importance of critical pedagogy by examining its potentially transformative relations with the sphere of popular culture. Popular culture is viewed not only as a site of contradiction and struggle but also as a significant pedagogical terrain that raises important questions regarding such issues as the relevance of everyday life, the importance of student voice, the significance of both meaning and pleasure in the learning process, and the relationship between knowledge and power in the curriculum. In the end of the piece, the authors raise a number of questions that suggest important inquiries that need to be analyzed regarding how teachers and others can further develop the notion of critical pedagogy as a form of cultural politics.

Within the last decade educational discourse in North America has focused primarily on two related issues. On the one hand, educational reform has been linked to the imperatives of big business. Schools in this perspective are training grounds for different sectors of the workforce; they are seen as providing knowledge and occupational skills that are necessary for expanding both domestic production and foreign investment. This view links schooling to the demands of a technocratic and specialized literacy. Its offensive is less ideological than it is technicist and instrumental in nature. On the other hand, the late 1980s have witnessed the dramatic rise of the culturalist wing of the far Right, especially in the United States. This ideological detour in the conservative offensive has been legitimated and sustained in the United States largely through the influence of William Bennett, President Reagan's secretary of education since 1985. Bennett has broadened the conservatives' definition of schooling by reaffirming its primacy as a guardian of Western Civilization. Under the banner of excel-

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lence, Bennett has promoted a 19th-century brand of elitism by appealing to a narrowly defined "Western tradition," conveyed through a pedagogy unencumbered by the messy concerns of equity, social justice, or the need to educate a critical citizenry.

Bennett's redefinition of the purpose of education and the nature of teachers' work has set the stage for a number of ideological assaults against liberal and radical views of schooling. In this refurbished conservative discourse, the targets are modernity, democracy, difference, and above all, relativism. Classical Western traditions, in this view, are beset on all fronts by relativism. It is alleged to be running rampant in various academic disciplines; in the social protest movements of students; in the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of the United States; and in the expanding sphere of popular culture, which is viewed as a tasteless and dangerous threat to the notions of civility and order.

Although these positions defend various aspects of the conservative agenda for schooling, they share a common ideological and political thread. That is, they view schools as a particular way of life organized to produce and legitimate either the economic and political interests of business elites or the privileged cultural capital of ruling-class groups. More importantly, both positions represent an attack on the notion of culture as a public sphere where the basic principles and practices of democracy are learned amid struggle, difference, and dialogue. Similarly, both positions legitimate forms of pedagogy that deny the voices, experiences, and histories through which students give meaning to the world and in doing so often reduce learning to the dynamics of transmission and imposition.

We want to intervene in this debate by arguing for schools as sites of struggle and for pedagogy as a form of cultural politics. In both cases, we want to argue for schools as social forms that expand human capacities in order to enable people to intervene in the formation of their own subjectivities and to be able to exercise power in the interest of transforming the ideological and material conditions of domination into social practices which promote social empowerment and demonstrate democratic possibilities. We want to argue for a critical pedagogy that takes into consideration how the symbolic and material transactions of the everyday provide the basis for rethinking how people give meaning and ethical substance to their experiences and voices. This is not a call for a unifying ideology by which to construct a critical pedagogy; it is a call for a politics of difference and empowerment as the basis for developing a critical pedagogy through and for the voices of those who are often silenced. It is a call to recognize that, in schools, meaning is produced through the construction of forms of power, experiences, and identities that need to be analyzed for their wider political and cultural significance.

With these issues in mind, we want to emphasize the importance of critical pedagogy by analyzing its potentially transformative relations with the sphere of popular culture. In our view, popular culture represents not only a contradictory terrain of struggle, but also a significant pedagogical site that raises important questions about the elements that organize the basis of student subjectivity and experience.

At first glance, the relationship between popular culture and classroom pedagogy may seem remote. Popular culture is organized around pleasure and fun, while pedagogy is defined largely in instrumental terms. Popular culture is located in the terrain of the everyday, while pedagogy generally legitimates and transmits the language, codes, and values of the dominant culture. Popular culture is appropriated by students and helps authorize their voices and experiences while pedagogy authorizes the voices of the adult world, the world of teachers and school administrators.

In addition to these differences, there is a fundamental similarity between popular culture and pedagogy that needs to be articulated. Both exist as subordinate discourses (Grossberg, 1986). For both liberals and radicals, pedagogy is often theorized as what is left after curriculum content is determined. It is what follows the selection of ideologically correct content, its legitimacy rooted in whether or not it represents the proper teaching style. In the dominant discourse, pedagogy is simply the measurable, accountable methodology used to transmit course content. It is not a mutually determining element in the construction of knowledge and learning, but an afterthought reduced to the status of the technical and the instrumental. In a similar mode, in spite of the flourishing of cultural studies in the last decade, the dominant discourse still defines popular culture as whatever remains when high culture is subtracted from the overall totality of cultural practices. It is seen as the trivial and the insignificant of everyday life, and usually it is a form of popular taste deemed unworthy of either academic legitimation or high social affirmation.

The dominant discourse, in short, devalues pedagogy as a form of cultural production and it likewise scorns popular culture. Needless to say, while popular culture is generally ignored in the schools, it is not an insignificant force in shaping how students view themselves and their own relations to various forms of pedagogy and learning. In fact, it is precisely in the relationship between pedagogy and popular culture that the important understanding arises of making the pedagogical more political and the political more pedagogical. Popular culture and pedagogy represent important terrains of cultural struggle which offer both subversive discourses and important theoretical elements through which it becomes possible to rethink schooling as a viable and important form of cultural politics.

Pedagogy and the Production of Knowledge

Pedagogy refers to a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within and among particular sets of social relations. It can be understood as a practice through which people are incited to acquire a particular "moral character." As both a political and practical activity it attempts to influence the occurrence and qualities of experiences. When one practices pedagogy one acts with the intent of creating experiences that will organize and disorganize a variety of understandings of our natural and social world in particular ways. What we are emphasizing here is that pedagogy is a concept which draws attention to the processes through which knowledge is produced:

> It enables us. . . to ask under what conditions and through what means we "come to know." How one teaches is therefore of central interest but, through the prism of pedagogy, it becomes inseparable from what is being taught and, crucially, how one learns. . . .What pedagogy addresses is the process of production and exchange in this cycle, the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the interaction of three agencies—the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge they produce together. (Lusted, 1986, p. 3)

Such an emphasis does not at all diminish pedagogy's concern with "What's to be done?" As a complex and extensive term pedagogy's concern includes the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, a time and space for the practice of those strategies and techniques, and evaluation purposes and methods. All of these aspects of educational practice come together in the realities of what happens in classrooms.

But the discourse of pedagogy centers something more. It stresses that the realities of what happens in classrooms organize a view of how a teacher's work within an institutional context specifies a particular version of what knowledge is of most worth, in what direction we should desire, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment. In other words, pedagogy is simultaneously about the practices students and teachers might engage in together *and* the cultural politics such practices support. It is in this sense that to propose a pedagogy is to construct a political vision.

The education organized by a critical pedagogy is one that must raise questions of how we can work for the reconstruction of social imagination in the service of human freedom. What notions of knowing and what forms of learning are required by such a project? Required is an education rooted in a view of human freedom as the understanding of necessity and the transformation of necessity. We need a pedagogy whose standards and

achievement objectives are determined in relation to goals of critique and the enhancement of human capacities and social possibilities. This means that teaching and learning must be linked to the goals of educating students: to understand why things are the way they are and how they got to be that way; to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Clifford, 1981; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; McLaren, 1986, 1988); to take risks and struggle with ongoing relations of power from within a life-affirming moral culture; and to envisage a world which is "not yet" in order to enhance the conditions for improving the grounds upon which life is lived (Giroux, 1988; Simon, 1987).

Education and the Popular

The development of cultural studies in the last two decades has produced an intense interest in the concept of "popular culture" and, correspondingly, a number of important efforts to theorize the idea of "the popular." Given our specific concern with popular culture and its relation to pedagogy, it is important to recognize that well over a century ago those who controlled the developing agenda of state schooling were implicitly, if not explicitly, theorizing a notion of the popular that has dominated the practice of schooling ever since.

At the dawn of Canadian confederation (1860–1875), Egerton Ryerson, social architect and then head of Ontario's emerging public school system, was writing and speaking against a particular form of "the popular." Addressing himself to educators, he warned against the "trashy and positively unwholesome literature which is so widely extended throughout the country in the shape of. . . novelette papers" (Ryerson, 1868, p. 72). He was convinced that reading such material would help undercut Canada's "connection with the mother country" and that officials at the U.S.–Canadian border should intercept the "obscene" and "filthy" publications "now so abundant in the States." Ryerson thought that "persons who read little or nothing besides the trashy novels of the day would do better not to read at all." He complained that "the most popular and best thumbed works in any of our common reading-rooms are invariably those which are the most worthless—we might say the most dangerous" (Ryerson, 1870, p.53).

What Ryerson was talking about was not material analogous to contemporary pornography. He was referring to relatively inexpensive publications of short stories and novels filled with local vernacular expressions and "republican ideas." It was in a context such as this that, for instance, Ryerson criticized Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (Morgan, 1987). What is at issue in positions such as Ryerson's is not simply an attempt at aesthetic definition—a matter, for instance, of articulating the distinguishing features between a "high" and a "low" or "popular" culture. Rather, given the cur-

rent control over the social field by individuals who express ideas similar to Ryerson's, what is more fundamentally at issue is which set of cultural forms will be acknowledged as the legitimate substance of state-provided schooling. In other words, how will state schooling be used as an agency of moral regulation? The issue here is very basic; it is a matter of what vision of future social relations a public school system will support. Such visions have always been defined by a few for the many. Examining what has been excluded as well as required in official curricula clearly reveals, in country after country, that such decisions have been dialectically structured within inequitable and unjust relationships. Indeed, Ryerson's invective against the popular was asserted from the assumption of a superiority and natural dominance he associated with his class, gender, and race.

The popular has been consistently seen by educators as potentially disruptive of existing circuits of power. It has been seen as both threat and profane desire, that is, as both subversive in its capacity to reconstruct the investments of meaning and desire, and dangerous in its potential to provide a glimpse of social practices and popular forms that affirm both difference and different ways of life (Rockhill, 1987). The year 1987 is no exception. Allan Bloom's best-selling book in the United States, *The Closing of the American Mind*, argues that popular culture, especially rock music, has resulted in the atrophy of both nerve and intelligence in American youth. Rock music, and more generally popular culture, represent in Bloom's mind a barbaric appeal to sexual desire. Not to be undone by this insight, Bloom further argues that since "Young people know that rock has the beat of sexual intercourse" (Bloom, 1987, p. 73), popular culture is simply synonymous for turning "life . . . into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy" (p. 75). Of course Bloom's sentiments about popular culture in general and rock music in particular have been shaped by what he perceives as indices of a serious moral and intellectual decline among American youth. Specifically, he fears the challenge to authority formed from the student movements of the 1960s, and the leveling ideology of democratic reform characteristic of the discourse of radical intellectuals. In effect, Bloom's book offers unsupported authoritarian ravings that appear to emulate the very convulsions he suggests characterize much popular culture. He writes:

> The inevitable corrollary of such sexual interest is rebellion against the parental authority that represses it. Selfishness thus becomes indignation and then transforms itself into morality. The sexual revolution must overthrow all the forces of domination, the enemies of nature and happiness. From love comes hate, masquerading as social reform. A worldview is balanced on the sexual fulcrum. What were once unconscious or halfconscious childish resentments become the new Scripture. And then comes the longing for the classless, prejudice-free, conflictless, universal society that necessarily results from

> liberated consciousness—"We are the World," a pubescent version of *Alle Menschen werden Bruder*, the fulfillment of which has been inhibited by the political equivalents of Mom and Dad. These are the three great lyrical themes: sex, hate, and a smarmy, hypocritical version of brotherly love. Such polluted sources issue in a muddy stream where only monsters can swim. (Bloom, 1987, p. 74)

Of course, the monsters who inhabit this terrain are contemporary youth, subordinate groups, and all those others who refuse to take seriously the canonical status that Bloom wants to attribute to the Great Books that embody his revered notion of Western civilization. More specifically responsible for this version of contemporary madness are leftists, feminists, and anyone who uses a Walkman radio. Bloom's discourse is based on the myth of decline, and its attack on popular culture is inextricably linked to the call for the restoration of a so-called lost classical heritage. Rather than a sustained attack on popular culture, this is the all-encompassing discourse of totalitarianism using the veil of cultural restoration. Its enemies are democracy, utopianism, and the unrealized political possibilities contained in the cultures of "the other"—that is those who are poor, black, women, and who share the common experience of powerlessness. Its goal is moral and social regulation in which the voice of tradition provides the ideological legitimation for a ministry of culture. Its echo is to be found in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy; its pedagogy is as profoundly reactionary as its ideology and can be summed up simply in the terms *transmission* and *imposition*.

In mentioning Ryerson and Bloom, we are stressing the rather straightforward point that historically, state-regulated forms of schooling have viewed popular culture as a marginal and dangerous terrain, something to be inoculated against, or—at best—occasionally explored for the incidental motivational ploy that might enhance student interest in a particular lesson or subject. In other words, educators have traditionally viewed popular culture as a set of knowledges and pleasures which are distinguished from, properly subordinate to, and at times co-optable by, the agenda of schooling. And for our purposes, this traditional view cannot be completely dismissed. Despite all its repugnant aspects, it correctly places teachers' work at the center of its discourse. That is, useful notions of the concept of popular culture must be articulated to a particular notion of pedagogy.

Pedagogical Relevance of Popular Culture

Our interest is not in aesthetic or formal qualities of popular culture. Nor are we particularly concerned with the way in which various popular forms might be codified into subjects or themes for study in cultural studies

programs. Rather we begin with more fundamental questions, including some that are raised by teachers: What relationship do my students see between the work we do in class and the lives they live outside of class? Is it possible to incorporate aspects of students' lived culture into the work of schooling without simply confirming what they already know? Can this be done without trivializing the objects and relationships important to students? And can it be done without singling out particular groups of students as marginal, exotic, an "other" within a hegemonic culture?

In asking these questions we have to assume that pedagogy never begins on empty ground. For this reason, a good starting point would be to consider popular culture as that terrain of images, knowledge forms, and affective investments which define the ground on which one's "voice" becomes possible within a pedagogical encounter (Giroux, 1988). In stating this it is apparent that we have a particular form of teaching and learning in mind. This form is a critical pedagogy that affirms the lived reality of difference and everyday life as the ground on which to pose questions of theory and practice (McLaren, 1988). It is a form that claims the experience of lived difference as an agenda for discussion and as a central resource for a pedagogy of possibility (Simon, 1987).

Such a discussion of lived difference, if pedagogical, will take on a particular tension. It implies a struggle—a struggle over assigned meaning, a struggle over the direction in which to desire, a struggle over particular modes of expression, and ultimately a struggle over multiple and even contradictory versions of "self." It is this struggle that makes possible new investments and knowledge beyond individual experience and hence can redefine the possibilities we see both in the conditions of our daily lives and in those conditions which are "not yet." This is a struggle over the very notion of pedagogy itself, one which constantly makes problematic how teachers and students come to know both within wider cultural forms and in the exchanges that mark classroom life. It is a struggle that can never be won, or else pedagogy stops (Lewis & Simon, 1986).

This position does not require teachers to suppress or abandon what and how they know. Indeed, the pedagogical struggle is lessened without such resources. However, teachers and students must find forms within which a single discourse does not become the locus of certainty and certification. Rather, teachers must find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse; at the same time, teachers must develop forms of pedagogy informed by a substantive ethic that contests racism, sexism, and class exploitation as ideologies and social practices that disrupt and devalue public life. This is a pedagogy that refuses detachment, though it does not silence in the name of its own ideological fervor or correctness. A critical pedagogy examines with care and in

dialogue how social injustices work through the discourses and experiences that constitute daily life and the subjectivities of the students who invest in them.

What might a teacher need to understand in order to engage in such a struggle? Though we will take this issue up in detail at the end of this paper, we can suggest here several questions that a teacher might pursue in the effort to develop a critical pedagogy. If we further define popular culture as both a site of struggle between dominant and subordinate groups (Hall, 1981), and a reference for understanding how experience is organized, produced, and legitimated within cultural forms grounded in the dynamics of everyday life, there are several questions a teacher might pursue. For instance, what are the historical conditions and material circumstances within which the practices of popular culture are pursued, organized, asserted, and regulated? Do such practices open up new notions of identities and possibilities? Do they exclude other identities and possibilities, and if so, which ones? How are such practices articulated with the hegemonic forms of knowledge and pleasure? Whose interests and investments are served—and whose are critiqued and challenged—by a particular set of popular cultural practices? Finally, what are the moral and political commitments of such practices and how are these related to one's own commitments as a teacher? If there is a divergence between these two sets of commitments, what does this imply?

The importance of asking these questions is, in part, to remove the analysis of popular culture from simply a question of reading ideology into either commodity forms or forms of lived everyday relations. Rather, we are moving toward a position within which one could inquire into the popular as a field of practices that constitute for Foucault an indissoluble triad of knowledge, power, and pleasure (Foucault, 1980a). In an important sense this is what the pedagogical struggle is all about: testing the ways we produce meaning and represent ourselves, our relations to others, and our relation to our environment. In doing so we consider what it is we have become, and what it is we no longer want to be. We also enable ourselves to recognize, and struggle for, possibilities not yet realized.

Some Cautions on the Way to Rethinking the Popular

Rethinking the notion of the popular is a difficult and hazardous task. Briefly, we wish to share our sense of some of these difficulties.

Popular cultural practices display a wide variety of differences, which in part are organized by the struggles inherent in existing gender, class, racial and ethnic, age, and regional relations. As long as such differences are used to establish and maintain disadvantage and human suffering, we need in any discussion of pedagogy and popular culture to register the

notion of difference clearly and loudly. Our preference then is to eliminate the singular and always speak about popular cultural *practices*. It is also important to stress that we view such practices as lived processes, as part of the way in which everyday life is experienced and responded to differently by different groups. Of course, there is a danger here of reducing particular students to simple reflections of some putative characteristics of group membership. This is a path of classism, sexism, and racism. However, it is equally objectionable to avoid consideration of the social construction and regulation of both knowledge and desire.

We think it is important to retheorize the term "mass culture" in any analysis of popular culture. The agenda is not to simply assert the homogenization and domination of everyday life. We do not wish to conflate those forms which are mass-produced and distributed as products (toys, books, films, records, television programs) with popular culture. Of course, we are interested in those forms both as they offer and give form to (but not mechanically impose) the practices which organize and regulate acceptable styles and images of social activity and individual and collective identity. However, we think it is a mistake to reduce the discussion of popular culture to a discussion of products. If we want to sustain the notion of popular culture as a terrain of possibilities, not just of threat and profane desire, then we require other ways of conceptualizing the term. One alternative consistent with our emphasis on popular cultural practice is to consider commodities in their circuits of distribution focusing on the commodity not as text but as event. In other words, this means considering both the structured occasion of engaging a commodity and the ways in which a product is employed or taken up (Radway, 1984).

In making this suggestion we are stressing that popular cultures are constituted not just by commodity forms but by practices which reflect a creative and sometimes innovative capacity of people. Popular culture may contain aspects of a collective imagination which make it possible for people to surpass received knowledge and tradition. In this sense, popular culture may inform aspects of a counter-discourse which help to organize struggles against relations of domination. As Tony Bennett has written,

> A cultural practice does not carry its politics with it, as if written upon its brow for ever and a day; rather, its political functioning depends on the network of social and ideological relations in which it is inscribed as a consequence of the ways in which, in a particular conjuncture, it is articulated to other practices. (Bennett, 1986, p. xvi)

This notion was recently illustrated for us in an essay written by a woman teacher participating in a Masters of Education course on the relation of pedagogy and popular culture. In this paper she was reflecting on

her fondness of the persona of Marilyn Monroe as expressed in both Monroe's films and public imagery (Rowe, 1987). On the one hand, a given popular cultural practice (the event of watching Monroe's movies) may feed into existing forms of domination (in this case, patriarchy). However, at the same time such forms can be an acknowledgment of the nondeterministic subjective side of social relations in which human beings are characterized by an ideal or imaginary life, where will is cultivated, dreams dreamt, and categories developed. This teacher's paper showed that, for a young girl growing up amid the patriarchal relations of a traditional rural farm family, such forms can provide a type of counter-discourse which is, in part, a promise of possibility. To ignore this possibility is to fail to understand that our material lives can never adequately reflect our imaginary lives. It is imagination itself that fuels our desire and provides us with the energy to reject relations of domination and embrace the promise of possibility (Fitting, 1987).

This view is not naively romantic. We cannot suppress those aspects of popular culture that we may see as regressive; rather we must face them for what they are and attempt to move beyond them. Fascism was and still is viable as a particular practice of popular culture. We must not forget there will always be a moral project associated with particular cultural practices and we need to understand and assess the relation of such practices to the commitments we hold as educators and citizens. It is important to re-emphasize popular culture as a terrain of struggle infused with practices that are both pedagogical and political. Since consent has to be won for popular forms to be integrated into the dominant culture, popular culture is never free from the ideologies and practices of pedagogy. Similarly, popular forms have to be renegotiated and re-presented in order to appropriate them in the service of self- and social empowerment. This suggests a critical pedagogy operating to disrupt the unity of popular culture in order to encourage the voice of dissent while simultaneously challenging the lived experiences and social relations of domination and exploitation. Adam Mills and Phil Rice capture the complexity of these issues and are worth quoting at length:

> "Popular culture is always a threat": by always occupying the subordinate, illegitimate pole in the field of cultural relations the values embodied in the practices and representations there are antithetical to, what are by definition, the minority values of "elite" cultures. Of necessity those discourses and forms which originate in the dominant cultural institutions, as Stuart Hall suggests, must activate the "structural contradiction which arises whenever a dominant culture seeks to incorporate" and include, within its boundaries, the people. They must raise, in other words, even if it is only an attempt to neutralize, the spectre of oppression and subordination. That certain forms are popular must then require of analysis a recognition both of the means by which consent is won for those dominant discourses, and the way in which

> those discourses, by presenting themselves as popular, re-present yet connect with the lived practices and experience of subordinate social classes. This suggests that the popular is a site of political and ideological struggle, first and foremost over the formation of what is given as "popular," and beyond that over the formation of "the people." But more than this, it suggests that cultural forms can no longer be regarded as coherent, expressive unities, or even that popular forms are no more than one-dimensional commodities functioning as standardized and stupefying cultural narcotics for the masses. What is implied is that cultural forms comprise a contradictory and uneven balance of elements, both dominant and subordinate—those which connect with "popular" social life, and those dominant elements which attempt to close or constrain alternative meanings and which attempt to mute the voice of dissent. (Mills & Rice, 1982, pp. 24–25)

A pedagogy which engages popular culture in order to affirm rather than mute the voice of the student is not without its difficulties. Michel Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1980a) comments on "the pleasure of analysis": the pleasure of discovering and exposing the secrets of human pleasure. The teacher engaged in a pedagogy which requires some articulation of knowledge forms and pleasures integral to student everyday life is walking a dangerous road. Too easily, perhaps, encouraging student voice can become a form of voyeurism or satisfy a form of ego-expansionism constituted on the pleasures of understanding those who appear as "other" to us. This is why we must be clear on the nature of the pedagogy we pursue. Popular culture and social difference can be taken up by educators in either of two ways: as a pleasurable form of knowledge/power which allows for more effective individualizing and administration of forms of physical and moral regulation, or alternatively as the terrain on which we must meet our students in a pedagogical encounter that enables rather than disables human imagination and capacities in the service of individual joy, collective prosperity, and social justice. Dick Hebdige (1982) warned us when he reported the words of a young male member of a subculture he was studying: "You really hate an adult to understand you. That's the only thing you've got over them, the fact that you can mystify and worry them." Contemporary youth have cause to be wary of giving up their anonymity, of making their private and lived voices the object of public and pedagogical scrutiny.

There is yet one more caution to raise. We think it important to question the notion of what it means to put popular cultural practice into play in the context of a pedagogical encounter. Does it mean to make such practices topical as curriculum content, to put such practices "up" for discussion? Would doing so not fundamentally change their character? Iain Chambers (1985) has written quite explicitly about this question and his admonition should be pondered:

> High culture, with its cultivated tastes and formally imparted knowledge, calls for particular moments of concentration, separated out from the run

> of daily life. Popular culture, meanwhile, mobilizes the tactile, the incidental, the transitory, the visceral. . . . It does not undertake an abstract aesthetic research amongst already privileged objects of cultural attention, but invokes mobile orders of sense, taste, and desire. Popular culture is not appropriated through the apparatus of contemplation but, as Walter Benjamin put it, through "distracted reception". . . . To attempt to explain fully. . . would be to pull back [popular culture] under the contemplative stare, to adopt the authority of the patronizing academic mind that seeks to explain an experience that is rarely his or hers. A role as Barthes has said that "makes every speaker a kind of policeman". . . . The vanity of such a presumed knowledge runs against the grain of the popular epistemology I have tried to suggest: an informal knowledge of the everyday, based on the sensory, the immediate, the concrete, the pleasurable. . . . These [are] areas that formal knowledge and its culture continually repress. (Chambers, 1985, p. 5)

The Practice of Critical Pedagogy

The issue, in this case, is how does one make popular culture an object of pedagogical analysis without undermining its privileged appropriation as a form of resistance. How can popular culture become part of a critical pedagogy that does not ultimately function to police its content and forms?

A pedagogy which takes popular culture as an object of study must recognize that all educational work is at root contextual and conditional. Such a pedagogy can only be discussed from within a particular time and place and from within a particular theme. This points to a larger issue concerning the nature of critical pedagogy itself: doing critical pedagogy is a strategic, practical task, not a scientific one. It arises not against a background of psychological, sociological, or anthropological universals (as does much educational theory related to pedagogy), but from such questions such as: How is human possibility being diminished here?

We are deliberately offering an expanded and politicized notion of pedagogy, one that recognizes its place in multiple forms of cultural production, and not just in those sites which have come to be labeled "schools." Any practice which intentionally tries to influence the production of meaning is a pedagogical practice. This includes aspects of parenting, film making, theological work, social work, architecture, law, health work, advertising, and much else. These are all forms of cultural work. There are possibilities for pedagogy in any site: schools, families, churches, community associations, labor organizations, businesses, local media, and so forth. All work in such sites must begin with naming and problematizing the social relations, experiences, and ideologies constructed through popular forms that directly operate within such sites as well as those that emerge elsewhere but exercise an influence on those who work within them. A good part of the political work of pedagogy includes the articulation of practices not only within sites but also across them. Indeed, one of our long-term tasks as educators must be to define a framework that is helpful in

articulating what critical pedagogies would be possible in a variety of sites of cultural work. This point is essential. The practical efficacy of our own commitments rests with the possibility of constructing an alliance between different forms of cultural work.

In what follows we want to bring our discussion to bear more directly on classroom reality by presenting a list of problems that have been raised by students and a diverse group of educators (elementary and secondary school teachers, university professors, literacy workers, health care professionals, artists, and writers) in the process of sharing their own cultural work as well as their readings of various articles and books. In many ways, the questions and the issues they raise make clear that the journey from theory to pedagogical possibility is rarely easy or straightforward. At the same time, the problems being raised suggest new and alternative directions for rethinking pedagogy as a form of cultural politics supportive of a project of hope and possibility. Such problems are symptomatic of the fact that a critical pedagogy is never finished; its conditions of existence and possibility always remain in flux as part of its attempt to address that which is "not yet," that which is still possible and worth fighting for.

Curriculum Practice

Of course, a critical pedagogy would be sensitive to forms of curriculum materials that might be implicated in the reproduction of existing unjust and inequitable social relations (e.g. sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism). But just what does this "sensitivity" imply? Does it lead to a legitimate form of censorship of material? The other side of censorship is the exclusionary choice we all make as to what set of materials we will use in our teaching during any particular period of time. What forms of authority can be invoked to make such choices? How should we make such choices? Can we employ reactionary material in the service of a progressive pedagogy? If one argues that we should include materials that (while reactionary) are integral to the dominant mythos of the community and hence "ripe" for critical analysis, in what ways would the material chosen for use be similar or different in the southern United States, in the northern United States, in English Canada, in French Canada, in England, in Australia, etc.? What balance and integration should be given to the interrogation of global and regional social cultural forms?

Critical pedagogy always strives to incorporate student experience as "official" curriculum content. While articulating such experience can be both empowering and a form of critique against relations that silence, such experience is not an unproblematic form of knowledge. How can one avoid the conservatism inherent in simply celebrating personal experience and confirming that which people already know? In other words, how can we acknowledge previous experience as legitimate content and challenge it

at the same time (Giroux, 1988). How do we affirm student "voices" while simultaneously encouraging the interrogation of such voices (Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 1988).

Popular memories and "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1980b) are often discussed as useful forms of critique of dominant ideologies. How can one draw on such knowledges in one's pedagogy (Giroux, 1988)? Since, as we have suggested earlier, this means working with the knowledge embedded in the forms of sociality, communities of discourse, and the popular forms students invest with meaning, what should be done to avoid making students who live outside of dominant and ruling forms feel that they are being singled out as the marginal "other" when we take seriously the knowledge organized within the terms of their everyday lives? Furthermore, how do we confront forms of resistance by students to what they perceive as an invasion by the official discourse of the school into private and nonschool areas of their lives?

Cultural Politics, Social Differences, and Practice

In planning and enacting a pedagogy whose central purpose is directed at enhancing human possibility and establishing a just and caring community, how do we know that what we are doing is ethically and politically right? How can we keep from slipping from a vision of human possibility into a totalizing dogma?

Many teachers want to help students identify, comprehend, and produce useful knowledge—but what constitutes useful knowledge? Is it the same for all students no matter what their gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, or geographic region? If not, then how can I cope intellectually, emotionally, and practically with such diversity and social difference? What if the teacher's view of useful knowledge differs from what students and their families think? What should happen to the teacher's vision of education? How far can you go in doing critical pedagogy if people are not interested in your agenda or see it as suppressing theirs? Do democratic forms of curriculum making ensure a critical pedagogy?

What can we or should we know about the basis of students' interest or disinterest in the topics and materials of our pedagogy? How can such knowledge make a difference to our practice? What would it mean to understand ignorance as a dynamic repression of information (Simon, 1984)? Is there a form of ignorance that is produced as a defense against hopelessness?

What does it mean to work with students in different class, racial, and gendered positions with regard to privilege? Why would those whose interests are served by forms of oppression want to change the situation? Is this structural conflict inevitable in our present society? Are there not issues and values that could mobilize broad interest in social transformations (e.g. ecology, peace, health)?

Guarding Against Hopelessness

Sometimes when students and teachers engage in a critique of existing social practices or forms of knowledge, a feeling of powerlessness comes over the group. Doing critical pedagogy can turn an educational setting into a "council of despair." How can one guard against the production of hopelessness when you take up an agenda of critique and social analysis? Given all the limitations of teaching and schooling, how can we effectively empower people (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; McLaren, 1986; Simon, 1987)?

Working with students to make clear the social contradictions we all live is an important aspect of critical pedagogical practice (Simon, 1987). However, will not raising contradictions in students' lives simply threaten them (Williamson, 1981–1982)? Will not pointing to social contradictions lead to cynicism and despair? Furthermore, if the value of understanding "ideology" is to stress that what is often taken as natural and inevitable is historically constructed and morally regulated, will not ideology critique produce a destabilization of identity and a paralysis of action. If you start questioning the givens of everyday life, won't this simply be overwhelming?

The Work of Teaching

How can we understand the constraining effects of the administrative and economic contexts within which we work? How should one take into account the realities of state regulation and the limitations imposed by a corporate economy? Should these always be seen as limits?

For those of us who work within public education, why should a teacher act in a way that might be contrary to school board policy or directive? When would a teacher be justified in doing so? What would be the consequences? Should teachers be accountable to specific groups or an organized public sphere? In practice, how would/should this be done?

Given the fact that the practice of critical pedagogy requires a substantial personal investment of time and energy, does it require the near-abandonment of a teacher's "private" life? How can one cope with the moments of depression and emotional disruption that come from a continual concern with the extent of injustice and violence in the world? How can we develop forms of collegial association that might support our efforts?

Conclusion

Posing these questions should not suggest that they have not been addressed either historically or in contemporary forms of social and educational theory. In fact, much of our own work has developed in response to many of the issues and questions we have listed above. They are ques-

tions that emerge at different times from diverse voices under widely differing educational contexts, and need to be constantly reconstructed and addressed. The notion of critical pedagogy begins with a degree of indignation, a vision of possibility, and an uncertainty that demands that we constantly rethink and renew the work we have done as part of a wider theory of schooling as a form of cultural politics. Defining the connections between popular culture and critical pedagogy is only one part of this ongoing task, and our introductory comments on this issue have attempted to sketch our view of the work that lies ahead. We will have been successful if we have stimulated the search for new ways of thinking about the notion of popular culture, the issues to be addressed by critical pedagogy, and the relationship that a critical theory of education might have to a pedagogy of possibility.

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