

A PEDAGOGY OF RESISTANCE: REFLECTIONS ON A CRITICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING IN COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ¹

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ABSTRACT

We always share our research but rarely share our teaching. Doing so is just as important. In this paper, I focus on three courses I teach regularly in Comparative and International Education, two for the past ten years and one for almost forty years at two universities in the USA: political economy of education and development; alternative education, alternative development; and modes of inquiry. I reflect on why I like what I have done with them, as well as areas of dissatisfaction. My approach to education in these courses is shaped by three basic principles: fair debate, understanding different viewpoints, and creating a safe space and climate in the classroom. My goal is to try to develop courses that resist simplistic explanations of individual failure and the triumph of the market system and, instead, offer students the opportunity to explore alternative explanations and discourses.

Introduction

I see the U.S., where I live and work, as a very conservative country. By this I mean that individual explanations of fundamental social issues like poverty and inequality predominate. Lack of success is generally seen as an individual problem or, at most, requiring some sort of minimal intervention in

¹ I wish to thank Anne Hickling-Hudson, Nisha Thapliyal, and an anonymous reviewer for comments on a draft of this paper.

the form of a government safety net. Too rare is there a structural understanding of class, race, gender, and other differences. Capitalism is rarely critiqued, patriarchy is rarely mentioned, racism is seen as a problem of individual prejudices. Unfortunately, this is also often true within academia. There are, of course, notable exceptions, but fundamental critique is the exception, not the rule. My background is as an economist originally, but one who has been working for a long time in the field of comparative and international education, concerned with education and development policy.² In the U.S., economics is a very conservative field. Comparative and international education is less so, but still individual explanations predominate.

I have been fortunate to teach in comparative and international education programs, most specifically at the University of Maryland and at Florida State University, where a critical, structural approach was valued. The idea was not to indoctrinate students into taking a critical approach, but to enlarge the discourse beyond dominant explanations. The title of this paper may be a bit of a romantic exaggeration, but this is how I see my teaching. My goal is to try to develop courses³ that resist simplistic explanations of individual failure and the triumph of the market system and, instead, offer students alternative explanations and discourses.

We always share our research but rarely share our teaching. Doing so is just as important. I teach

² Comparative and international education draws on perspectives from the social sciences and humanities to better understand education practice and policy within and across nations.

³ “Courses” in the U.S. is the term used for “subjects” in Australia and elsewhere.

in a comparative and international education graduate program for M.A. and Ph.D. students, so my approach is most relevant to this context. But many aspects of my approaches are applicable in other fields, most especially those dealing with the social sciences and related applied areas. I also believe that my approaches can be easily adapted to undergraduate teaching.

I will focus on three courses I teach regularly, two for the past ten years and one for almost forty years: political economy of education and development; alternative education, alternative development; and modes of inquiry. I like what I have done with them, otherwise, I would not be writing this, but it is also true that I remain dissatisfied with some aspects of them and will mention these in my discussion. Before talking about each course, I wish to elaborate a few basic principles that underlie my approach to education:

- Debate. I believe that every theory, method, and finding is debated. And debated by people who believe they have good arguments and evidence. For me, a central feature of a critical pedagogy is debate and discussion. And that debate and discussion must be as fair as you can make it, meaning avoiding straw persons. By straw persons, I mean not doing a fair job of portraying the alternatives you disagree with. Avoiding straw persons means trying to present an insider's view of all alternatives, as best you can. That is always difficult because strong opinions can limit one's ability to present alternatives fairly, but it is necessary to try. It should be unacceptable for university pedagogy,

in any field, to offer a restricted exposure to debates in their fields.

- **Understanding Different Viewpoints.** A principal pedagogical goal is to help students to understand better how and why people think differently. By improving their understanding of the views of others, they come to better develop and understand their own points of view. I find that my students have a comparative advantage because they see alternative views. They are very able, for example, to critique or support policies to promote educational vouchers. Of course, they have their own views but they can understand the views of others. This is one reason they have been very successful in finding jobs in educational policy, where it is necessary to understand that there are debates, that there are different views. While, of course, some students will agree with neoliberal views, the best tools for resisting neoliberal hegemony are to understand that there are significant critiques and thoughtful alternative views.
- **Space and Climate.** Given the focus on debate, pedagogically, there must be the space to allow debate and a climate that promotes the safe expression of unpopular views. This is difficult to achieve but essential to both pedagogical principles above.

Political Economy of Education and Development

This is the course I started teaching in 1973 as part of my first university job at Cornell. At that

time, it was labeled, "Education and Economic Development," but the intent and structure was similar to what I do now. This course is partially rooted in the economics of education field with its associated human capital theory. For most economists, that field is defined by neoclassical economics and, today, its neoliberal offshoot. Neoclassical economics is the ubiquitous Western economics framework that upholds the efficiency and equity of a capitalist free market, while its neoliberal offshoot adds a strong critique of government intervention. Nonetheless, even some mainstream economists had a much broader conception of the economics of education field and raised some fundamental questions about the dominant neoclassical theory and its view of education (Blaug, 1985). From the beginning of my university education, I had a broader conception of the field, having studied economics at Stanford University in the late sixties and early seventies and, in particular, having studied economics of education with Henry Levin and Martin Carnoy, both of whom I would consider political economists (e.g., Carnoy and Levin, 1984).

Labels are always tricky and, like many, the term political economy is contested terrain. It is used by the right to mean a neoliberal orientation of neoclassical economics and by the left to denote a critical perspective. Political economy was also the term used by classical economists like Smith, Malthus, Marx, and others to denote social theory. I confuse students a little because in the title of the course, I use the term more in an all-encompassing way. However, throughout the course, political economy is the term I use for economics shaped by a

left-of-center view (and that is how I will use it in this article). The course content focuses on neoclassical economics vs. a political economy perspective.

Political economy is not precisely defined so I take a very broad view of what a political economy perspective is in today's world, where I see it as not strictly economic, but as very much related to critical paradigms such as⁴: dependency, world systems, neo-Marxist, progressive economic, economic reproduction, cultural reproduction, social reconstructionism, resistance, feminist standpoint, gender and development, socialist feminist, Third World feminist, critical race, queer, intersection, critical postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial, critical pedagogy, and all the related critical theories within each social science and applied field. I am not saying that all these fields offer identical perspectives, but they share two fundamental commonalities. First, they are centered on revealing and challenging marginalization and see the world as composed of systems and structures that maintain, reproduce, and legitimate existing inequalities. Second, for most of them, challenges to the social reproduction of inequalities of position and power come from contradictions that yield spaces for action and human agency that takes advantage of those spaces. While my course cannot include all such perspectives, some are discussed, and I make it clear that all of these perspectives are interrelated. While one can make the argument that

⁴ Some might prefer to call this confluence “critical theory” rather than “political economy.” The important thing, in my view, is not the label but the recognition that there is a very important shared critique and development of alternatives.

neoclassical economics also has counterparts in other fields, I think it is much less true than for political economy, and the neoclassical economics field is much more insular. However, in the course, I do connect the closely linked human capital and modernization theories.

This has generally been a required course in my comparative and international education programmes. It was felt that all students in the field should have some exposure to economics. Few students in the course have any background in economics and, although it is possible to pursue economics further, most do not. This course is part of a general education for students concerned with international education policy. About one-fourth of our students go into academia; the majority work for agencies concerned with educational research, policy, and practice.

At the core of this course is a focus on debating perspectives. The course starts with four classes from a neoclassical perspective, followed by two classes from a political economy perspective. After that, every class contrasts these two perspectives -- in terms of issues such as equity, World Bank policy, basic education (Education for All and the education goals in the Millennium Development Goals), girls' education, higher education, and overall development strategies. I try, as much as I can, to offer an insider perspective of each -- no straw persons. But, of course, that is always difficult when you have a strong personal point of view. For many years, when I taught the course, students used to ask me which view I held, and I was somewhat proud of the fact that they couldn't tell. However, I am no longer sure that is something to be

proud of. In fact, I have changed my stance, revealing my own views by including a number of my own writings in the course which are strongly from a political economy viewpoint. I try to be student-centered, in terms of understanding where students are coming from and how they construct this new knowledge, but at the same time my focus is getting them to understand the different positions taken by neoclassical and political economists.

Two highlights of the course are formal debates. The first is at the end of the neoclassical part of the course when I divide them into two teams, and they debate how a liberal neoclassical economics⁵ perspective versus a conservative/neoliberal one would interpret the role of government, in general, and the finance and structure of schooling, in particular. At the end of the introduction to political economy part of the course, I ask students to engage in another debate about equity and equality in education and society, this time between political economy and neoclassical (either liberal or neoliberal) views. The remainder of this course continues this debate, but without the formal debate structure.

I give two take-home exams⁶ during the course. I do not assign any papers because students do not have a sufficient grasp of either paradigm to develop a paper until too late in the semester. Both exams

⁵ Liberal neoclassical economists, who predominated before the neoliberal era, see some of the inefficiencies and inequities of capitalism and routinely argue for government interventions to mitigate them.

⁶ Contrary to systems where exams are usually timed, proctored, and without books, in the U.S. it is quite common to give students an exam where they respond to the questions at home using whatever reference materials they wish.

are learning exercises whose goal is to help students further understand the debates in the field. The midterm exam comes early and focuses solely on the neoclassical paradigm. Appendix 1 gives the key midterm question asking them to put the debate between liberal and neoliberal economists on paper. It is essentially about the debate regarding the role of government in society, especially as applied to the privatization of education and education finance. Appendix 2 displays the final exam which also forces students to debate themselves. It asks them to pick two education and development strategies from a neoclassical perspective and explain their rationale and then critique each from a political economy view. Then they do the reverse: select two political economy strategies and justify them followed by a neoclassical critique. I am always pleasantly surprised how well most students do on the midterm and final; they have developed an insider view of each of the paradigms, and it is hard to tell which they favor. There are few straw persons!

Alternative Education, Alternative Development

One dissatisfaction for myself and for students with the Political Economy of Education and Development course is that it does not offer much in the way of alternative policies and programs from a political economy standpoint. Mostly, this was because of time and complexity. I did not have time in the political economy course to deal with the complex issues that surround political economy alternatives. Dealing with neoliberal views of alternative policies in the Political Economy course was less of a problem for at least two reasons.

First, neoliberal views are the predominant ones, so their alternative policies are basically the quite visible current education and development policies. Second, for neoclassical economists, policies are relatively straightforward. That is, policy-making is easy if you have measureable cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness criteria that make the current policy choice follow logically from the latest research that, for example, might tout vocational education or a certain reading program. I oversimplify, but not by a lot. To the contrary, deciding what is the best policy from political economy perspectives is a messy, complicated, and debated process. This has given political economy views the reputation that they are long on critique and short on alternatives. But I never really believed this to be true, and I initiated the Alternative Education, Alternative Development course as a follow-up to my Political Economy course that would start where the critique ended and focus on both alternative education and development policies and programs.⁷

For the first few years, I let students develop much of the syllabus. We quickly found so much relevant literature that in later years I laid out much of the course content in the syllabus, but still left room for students to develop the content of some classes. I did not make the Political Economy course a prerequisite because I wanted to attract students from elsewhere and did from other parts of the College of Education, Public Policy, and the Social

⁷ Getting a new course approved is not always a straightforward process, especially if it is a critical course in a conservative institution. Academic freedom does not necessarily reign supreme. However, I have been fortunate to get courses like these approved.

Sciences.⁸ While I asked that they have some background in social justice issues,⁹ there has sometimes been a related problem in terms of what the word "alternative" means. I was using it as it comes out of a literature on social transformation, but some students saw it as any alternative to the status quo, e.g., decentralization or even education vouchers. To better develop the idea of alternative, we discussed Andre Gorz's (1967) idea of non-reformist reform, meaning one that offers a progressive challenge to the status quo.¹⁰

I did not start this course with the idea of trying to "convert" students to a political economy perspective but to fill a gap in our knowledge of what such a perspective implies. My argument is that you didn't have to believe in a social transformative perspective to take the course but that the course was about the reforms that might be recommended from such a perspective. In this sense, debate was different in this course than in the previous one. At times, we did go back to the neoliberal vs. political economy debates, but since most of the time was spent on political economy alternatives, the debates were more about whether a particular alternative was feasible, sensible, progressive, could be brought to scale, etc.

⁸ In part, we recruit students from elsewhere to boost enrollment. But equally important, the course offers something to students elsewhere not easily found on campus and enrolling students from other fields offers important perspectives to our own students.

⁹ "Social justice" or "social transformation" (see below) are terms that cover much of the left-of-center perspective I encompass with the terms "political economy" or "critical theory" (I am using the latter more broadly than does the Frankfurt School)

¹⁰ Gorz (1967) argued that most reforms were only "reformist" meaning that they offered no fundamental challenge to reproductive structures.

Box 1 gives you an idea of some of the content of the course. The parallels between the educational alternatives and the development alternatives are not perfect, but they tied some of the content together. A fundamental assumption of the course is that it is important not to look at educational alternatives alone but to consider them in the context of progressive development alternatives.

Each student was required to make two presentations and write a term paper on some education and/or development alternatives. Students look to find non-reformist reforms, that is, alternatives that stem from a broad political economy critique of current programs and policies and that offer some fundamental approach to social transformation.

Box 1: Alternative Education, Alternative Development: Nonreformist Reforms?

Development Alternatives	Educational Alternatives
human rights	right to education
sustainable development, solidarity economics -- intentional communities	ecological education
civil society and social movements -- World Social Forum	youth activism autonomous education teachers unions popular education
participatory and deliberative democracy -- participatory budgeting -- participatory research	critical pedagogy democratic schools critical multicultural education community schools
peace and conflict resolution	peace education
feminist development	girl's and women's education
socialism	socialist education

In addition to the alternatives in Box 1, some of the educational alternatives students examined were:

- Citizen school movement in Brazil
- MST (Landless Movement) schools in Brazil
- Maori education reform in New Zealand
- Social justice education
- Zapatista education in Mexico
- Higher education in Venezuela
- Social movement education
- Indigenous knowledge
- Ethical schools

In addition to those in Box 1, some of the development alternatives considered were:

- Cooperative communities
- Zapatista movement
- Policies in certain Latin American countries
- Indigenous movements
- Landless movement in Brazil
- Dalit movement in India
- New Economy movement
- Buddhist economics
- Ecological economics
- Alter-globalization movement

I should point out that whether a reform is a progressive non-reformist reform is a matter of debate about tactics and strategies. For example, some might argue that some girls' and women's education reforms are reformist while others may see some of them as progressive, and there may not be agreement on which is which.

I am less directive in this course than in Political Economy because I am less clear on exactly how political economists think about alternatives. That is, in Political Economy I knew that a major goal of mine was to help students understand how neoclassical and political economists think about education and development. But it is not straightforward to go beyond the political economy critique to how a very broad view of political economy considers the very messy world of alternative strategies. Therefore, this course is more inductive, with me and the students trying to make sense of many discrete program and policy alternatives out there. Whatever I am doing seems to work in the sense that many students have said that it is one of the best courses they have had. I don't credit my own teaching; it is that this course fills a gap that is rarely filled elsewhere. Students are hungry for alternatives.

Modes of Inquiry

The last course I wish to discuss, Modes of Inquiry, is the required introduction to research methods course for three program areas -- higher education, student affairs, and international education policy. I started teaching it about ten years ago. A colleague was also teaching it, but over time I revised it, sharpening the contrasts among research paradigms and modifying the required readings. The most notable feature of the course is that it is essentially a debate between three methodological paradigms -- quantitative/positivist, qualitative/interpretive, and critical/transformativ. The first two, in some fields, are now often part of an

introduction to research methods course; the latter is not. I was fortunate to find a textbook that elaborates the three paradigms (Mertens, 2010), but the textbook is only about one-quarter of the readings. The additional readings are articles that elaborate two aspects of each research method discussed – firstly, are readings that tell about the method, e.g., about grounded theory, and, secondly, readings that give examples of the method, e.g., a study using grounded theory.

There are some researchers -- and some of my students -- who would argue that the critical/transformational paradigm is not a methodological paradigm. Instead, they would say it is a theoretical, political, or ideological perspective. This is quite understandable. The critical/transformational paradigm can use the same or similar methods as the quantitative and qualitative paradigms -- e.g., critical ethnography instead of ethnography. It does begin with a theoretical/ideological framework -- basically a broad political economic one. Nonetheless, I would strongly argue that it is a methodological paradigm. It makes two telling points about the other methodological paradigms. One is that they are ideological as well; they just don't admit or see it. And second, neither the quantitative nor qualitative paradigm recognizes the influence of unequal power on their methods or results.

Moreover, I am far from alone in this recognition of a third methodological paradigm. There is a large literature, on which I draw, that supports the view that there is a critical/transformational methodological paradigm

(e.g., Lather, 2007, 1991, Fine and Weis, 2004). Even the main chroniclers of research and evaluation paradigms, Guba and Lincoln, have long included a critical paradigm in their paradigm comparisons (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, Lincoln and Guba, 1985, 2013). Their many paradigm comparison tables inspired me to make one of my own, see Box 2, which gives a sense of some of the orientation of this course.

Box 2: *My Typology of Research Methodologies*

<u>Issue</u> <i>Ontology/epistemology</i>	<u>Positivist</u>	<u>Interpretive</u>	<u>Critical</u>
	-there is an objective external reality -can be quantified, measured, categorized -observer separable from observed	-multiple realities, socially constructed -observer and observed inextricably linked, jointly construct knowledge, "reality"	-understanding of reality depends on historical & contextual circumstances
<i>Looking to find</i>	-truth, universal laws	-interpretive understanding of different meanings, realities -meaning in context	-the nature of, marginalization, oppression & the means to transform it
<i>Methodology</i>	-control "intervening" variables = strip context	-holistic within natural settings	-varied, but often emphasize participation, action
<i>Methods</i>	- experimental -quasi-exp. - correlational	-case study - ethnography -grounded theory	-phenomenology -oral history -critical ethnography -participatory/action research - feminist/postmodern
<i>Role of substantive theory</i>	-a priori theory necessary -any theory OK if yields testable hypotheses	-often little explicit a priori theory although generally functionalist	-begins w/broad theories about marginalization and social structures: critical, feminist, political economy, critical race, post-colonialism, etc.
<i>Facts vs. values</i>	-easily separable, science oriented to finding facts	-there are no "facts," socially constructed along with values	-facts (understanding of marginalization) obscured by position/identity

<i>Criteria for good research</i>	-internal validity -external validity	-credibility -transferability	- credibility/transferability, "click"=face validity, authenticity, contribute to transformation
<i>Critique</i>	<u>by Interpretive:</u> science's search for objective truth is futile and misleading when there are only multiple realities <u>by Critical:</u> the findings of science have nothing to do with objectivity; they are structured to support dominant and powerful interests <u>by Positivists:</u> poor methodology – threats to internal and external validity	<u>by Positivists:</u> no hypotheses, no design; only examining subjective realities, ignores the objective reality of our social world and ignores major social issues and the search for policies to remedy social problems. <u>by Critical:</u> there is more than subjective interpretations of individuals, their understandings are often obscured by their position in society (e.g., class, race, gender); completely ignores the key issue of inequality, power, oppression <u>by Interpretive:</u> varies with method	<u>by Positivists:</u> no hypotheses, no design; simply begins with an ideological position and ends with same ideological position; data-gathering is just an excuse to continue to express the initial biases <u>by Interpretive:</u> same as above; too often is not open and does not listen to other views of social reality; not recognize that their view is also socially constructed; presents only their own position <u>by Critical:</u> overemphasizing one dimension of marginality (e.g., class); ideological imposition of framework vs. open to empirical results; not participatory, not tied to action and transformation

Since this is a paper focused on the critical paradigm it is worth elaborating that, like any paradigm, the critical one can be self-critical. In the table, I point out three common critiques. One that is often discussed is of research that focuses exclusively on only one dimension of marginality. It is not that it is always possible to look at the intersection of multiple dimensions but the extreme of focusing, let's say, on social class, and ignoring all else can be seen as problematic. Second, the critical paradigm starts with a strong theoretical/ideological framework and some critical researchers are concerned that exceptional care has to be taken to be open to what empirical data tells us rather

than let it become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Lather, 1991). Third, there are some who argue that critical paradigm research is not sound unless it is tied to widespread participation and action for transformation (Mertens, 2010). Not all critical paradigm researchers agree with these three points but they are all raised in the literature.

While some faculty make some effort to get students to take this course at the beginning of their graduate coursework, students often take it at the middle or end, after other methodological coursework. I have found that having both groups together is a plus, not a minus, as students can learn from each other. These two groups, of course, get different things out of the course, but it is very valuable to both. Those who are taking it at the end of their coursework find the course helps them clarify and make sense of their prior methodological training. Those at the beginning of their coursework use it to understand better what is to come and to make better choices of future coursework. I should mention that the course is required for both M.A. and Ph.D. students, and it is as relevant to becoming a consumer of research as it is to becoming a researcher.

I have three assignments for this course, each one focused on one of the three paradigms. Students are asked to find a journal article in their field done from the particular paradigm being studied and do the following:

- a short summary
- methodological strong points
- critique of the study
- author's response

- the student's view as to whether this is good research and why

The central theme of the course is what constitutes good research. Just because you can always find criticisms of a study does not mean it is not good research. Since the course begins with the quantitative paradigm, that critique revolves around internal and external validity. When we get to the qualitative paradigm assignment, the critique centers around credibility and transferability issues for what I call the internal critique, and a second critique is required from a quantitative paradigm perspective as well as two author's responses. Finally, the internal critique for the critical paradigm centers on authenticity issues and some of the points I raised above (Lincoln, 2013, Mertens, 2010), and there are two external critiques and responses from quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Again, best responses don't create straw persons but treat each paradigm as valid in its own terms.

The other assignment for this course is a non-graded short reflection paper that describes and reflects on the student's journey through the methodological paradigms. To prepare them, I have them read excerpts from Heshusius and Ballard's (1996) "Tales of Transformation" which offers reflections by well-known researchers who rejected their positivist training to align themselves more with an interpretive or critical paradigm. I quote from students' reflection journals at some length below to give you a sense of what a difference a course like this can make.

The course raised basic questions about knowledge, critique, and power:

Modes of Inquiry was an immensely important and interesting class for me. It served, in many ways as a mechanism to bring together issues that I had been exposed to separately, addressed issues that I felt were lacking but could not pinpoint, and also raised a lot of new questions about both my future academic and professional work. The issues of greatest importance that emerged for me were how do we "know," what it means to "know," and how is our "knowledge" limited by current dominant ways of research.

Modes of Inquiry has been overwhelming. The basic modes of research are not, to me, common knowledge. The basic theories and associated terminologies were helpful to learn, but the nuances of the types of research and the tensions between them were most interesting. This is the first class where I have actually analyzed something, and moreover, been invited to do so.... Prior to this class, research was simply something to cite, to summarize, and to use as a frame of reference for our presentation of topics. Now, however, research is more relatable to how I think and why I think since I have the tools to critique it as well as use it as a basis for inquiry....

The last few months have both confused and informed me about the uses of research in education and in the world. As I learned more about the various paradigms and critical analyses, it is hard to take research at face

value without questioning motivations, methodology, and morality. Not a day goes by that I hear a report on the radio and ask myself "Who was studied?" "Who funded this study?" "Who does this research benefit?"

Students often had more prior background in the quantitative paradigm and some held on to it, but often not completely:

When I first began grad school, quantitative research scared me because of the statistics. But it has grown on me. You always fear what you don't know, and now that I have several stat courses I know more and fear less. As a budding researcher, I am attracted to the formulaic nature of quantitative research. There is "a way" to design, research, and analyze. But more than the structure I am attracted to quantitative research's power in getting funding and making policy.

Prior to this course I assumed that quantitative research was the be all and end all of research. I have a passion for education law. In the number of law courses I have taken, the first thing I learned...is that the courts want facts.... In our society today if we are given the numbers we will believe it. Now I am not sure that quantitative data is everything it is cracked up to be.

I am confused, confused, confused...[by the qualitative/interpretive paradigm]. If there is no "one" answer and everything is relative then

why should I listen to one researcher over the other? I miss the absolutes of the quantitative paradigm. It seems you have to accept to live with a certain amount of uncertainty and discomfort to really thrive in the [qualitative] paradigm.... There is no such thing as the objective researcher, so why pretend?...[The critical/feminist/postmodern/emancipatory paradigm] seems to make sense. Yes, point of view matters, ideology matters, and everyone is a product of where they come from. No, there can't be any "objective" researchers. I like that this paradigm is concerned with issues of power, gender, race, and economics. I also like the fact that critical researchers strive to change and challenge current structures in education.

When the course first began, I considered myself solely a qualitative researcher. Mainly because I was knowledgeable of both qualitative and quantitative research methods.... As a result of this course and our in-depth analysis of alternative research method...my thinking was actually altered. I can now see that I am more of a 'critical-qualitative-quantitative' researcher -- now I just made that name up but it basically means that I see that...[all three are necessary].

The critical paradigm was less familiar to most students but it was of great interest to many:

In thinking about my own evolution over the course of the semester on various modes of

inquiry I am both hopeful and terrified. Hopeful with the knowledge that there is a great universe of methodology to explore and examine over time; terrified with the knowledge that I have only begun to scratch the surface. This course has been especially significant to me in its elucidation and illustration of the transformative paradigm, a paradigm of which I was vaguely familiar with prior to this course, and which I wish to become increasingly familiar with thereafter. The notion of the transformative paradigm, that is, a paradigm that attempts to take a critical look at structure and power in the world, is especially interesting and relevant in my opinion in a world in which power and power dynamics are such salient features of an individual's life.

My understanding of the function of research stems from the philosophical understanding of the world that Mertens [course textbook] calls emancipatory. I believe that objective knowledge is impossible and that rather than trying to couch our biases in a language of objectivity, they should be recognized and placed in their historical and social context.... To be honest, I am not even sure that the emancipatory paradigm is specifically a research paradigm, but rather a life paradigm that cannot be ignored when conducting research. It doesn't really matter whether one chooses to classify the paradigm as a research or life paradigm, the point is more that inherent power structures cannot be ignored in designing, conducting,

presenting, or interpreting research...[or in affecting] positive change in education.

I don't understand how someone can talk about education as though it exists in a social, political, economic vacuum. How can we talk about improving education when we don't have the curiosity or patience to study the complexities of the problem? Critical race and feminist theories, for example, inform and frame the situation we are studying. They provide a vocabulary to talk about inequity and also allows the researcher to not just talk about the problem, but commit to changing it. How can we then discuss fundamental change without at least committing to rigorous understanding of the root causes of the problem? I understand that a certain degree of arrogance and colonial reflex is embedded in some critical theorists, but how is that different from some of the quantitative researchers who express similar assumptions?

Most importantly, the course opened up alternative viewpoints, even though there was a danger that it (and my other courses) would drive students a little crazy.

At the outset of the semester, I had very little knowledge of the debate surrounding research methods paradigms, aside from the basic underlying distinction between quantitative and qualitative methodology. I had never heard of critical or emancipatory research methods. Even though I had taken a women's studies

course, the concept of performing research within a critical framework was something I had never been exposed to, I had always assumed the primary issue for those doing research was whether they chose to use data that was quantitative or qualitative in nature. Before this semester, I had never given much thought to the underlying ontological and epistemological issues that exist for anyone considering an appropriate method for performing research....[I]...now realize that I must consider them closely as I begin to progress into performing studies of my own.

[This was]...an eye-opening research methods course -- I definitely saw each perspective and side of an argument. However, if I end up in a mental institution, I am going to say that...[this course]...made me schizophrenic!

While these journal entries are my selection, they are typical; most students were transformed by this course. At the beginning, most students only had exposure to quantitative research, some had a qualitative background, but only a few had a critical background. At the beginning of the course, I sometimes asked them what paradigm they affiliated with. Roughly, the response was: 30% quantitative; 40% qualitative; 10% critical; and 20% uncertain. At the end of the course, I always had them anonymously indicate which paradigms they felt most comfortable with (first and second choices), and it roughly came down to 20% to 25% quantitative and the rest divided pretty equally between qualitative and critical adherents. Many

students in the class reported a change from their initial preferences.

As I told them from the beginning, this was an unusual course. Twenty or thirty years ago, across most social science and applied fields, there was little methodological choice. Research methods courses usually meant studying the quasi-experimental procedures of Campbell and Stanley (1963). Today this is still true in many fields. However, in other fields, things have opened up tremendously, and today's students can face a plethora of alternative methods. This is both very difficult, as choices are complex, but it is also an amazing opportunity to choose how to approach real world data and problems.

Conclusion

I do not mean to make it seem like any of these courses are straightforward, uncomplicated, or objective approaches to some version of reality. I believe there are multiple interpretations of the world we see around us. I do not believe I have a monopoly on truth. Developing each of these courses has been and continues to be a struggle. Over what my goals are, over how to attain them, over how to work with students, over what to include, over how to grade. In my Alternative Education, Alternative Development course I teach critical pedagogy, but I don't do a very good job of living it. In particular, I do not engage with my students in the type of participatory social activism that many critical pedagogues consider essential (Picower, 2012; North, 2009; McLaren and Kincheloe, 2007; Wade, 2007). Nonetheless, I think these three courses offer something very useful to my students. They

empower students to resist. I generally agree with Giroux (2007, p. 2):

Education is not neutral, but that does not mean it is a form of indoctrination. On the contrary, ...[it is]...a practice that attempts to expand the capacities necessary for human agency and hence the possibilities for democracy itself...Teachers can make a claim to being fair, but not to being either neutral or impartial.

We live in a hegemonic world. The last 30 years have seen increasing consolidation of what I see as neoliberal globalization permeating every aspect of our economic and social life. However, despite hegemony, there are cracks, contradictions, resistance, and room for human agency to offer challenges, individually and collectively. I have been fortunate to teach in programs where I am not alone in offering courses that center on our fundamental social debates.¹¹ While, unfortunately, this is too rare, it is perhaps more common than we imagine as there are many critics out there who have found the space to offer an alternative education. I hope my experiences can contribute to furthering such efforts.¹²

¹¹ While debate is important it is no substitute for widespread participation, for deliberation, and for human agency and engagement.

¹² Course syllabi are available on request: sklees@umd.edu

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APPENDIX 1

POLITICAL ECONOMY - MIDTERM EXAM QUESTION

1. As you know, there are strong disagreements on some issues among neoclassical economists. In particular, “liberal” neoclassical economists disagree with “neoliberal/conservative” neoclassical economists about a number of things, perhaps, most importantly, on the role of government in society. With these disagreements in mind, focus on one or both of the following two issues:

- the role of the private sector in education – e.g. the degree to which government encourages, gives incentives to private schools or universities, initiates voucher plans, etc.

AND/OR

- who should pay for schooling and how should schooling be paid for – eg., in particular via “user fees” (usually meaning tuition) vs. various kinds of taxation

For the issue you select, answer the following four-part question.

How would a “neoliberal” neoclassical economist look at the issue?

How would a “liberal” neoclassical economist look at the issue?

How would a “neoliberal” neoclassical economist respond to the liberal’s analysis of the issue?

How would a “liberal” neoclassical economist respond to the neoliberal’s analysis of the issue?

Do more than talk generally or abstractly about these perspectives; orient your discussion to responding to the question, “Why would or why wouldn’t this perspective support using vouchers/privatization?” (issue #a) or “Why would or why wouldn’t this perspective support the use of “cost recovery” mechanisms like user fees?” (issue #b).

APPENDIX 2

POLITICAL ECONOMY - FINAL EXAM

Please answer the following four questions:

1. Assuming you are a neoclassical economist, briefly describe the overall view and two education strategies/policies for development that you recommend and discuss their underlying rationale from a neoclassical economics perspective.
2. Critique the overall view and two strategies you discussed in question #1 above from a political economy perspective.
3. Assuming you are a political economist, briefly describe the overall view and two education related strategies/policies for development that you recommend and discuss their underlying rationale from a political economist perspective.
- (4) Critique the overall view and two strategies you discussed in question #3 above from a neoclassical economics perspective.

In your answers I want you to make sure you include the following:

- (1) In questions #1 and #3, include the overall view from that perspective of education's role in development.
- (2) In questions #1 and #3, you must include a brief but explicit description of two educational strategies, and you must give separate rationales for each of them.
- (3) In questions #2 and #4, you need to critique both the overall view in the other two questions and critique each strategy proposed.