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ARE THERE ANY CRITICAL EDUCATORS OUT THERE? PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHERS AND TRANSFORMATION.

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Introduction

My intention in writing this paper is to explore -- in a formal, theoretical manner -- the possibility that teachers can be recruited in the task of critical education, and to examine the conditions under which this possibility becomes a probability. By critical education I refer to both a theory and a practice -- hence critical pedagogy -- which draws on the depiction of human persons by social theorists of the Frankfurt School as rational, self-conscious beings who are bound to *"strive (perhaps incoherently) for ever greater freedom, fulfillment, and self-critical awareness"* (Inglis, 1985, p.16).

Following Simon (1985), we can outline three moments in the development of a critical education. This therefore draws on the "new" sociology of education to acknowledge the social production, legitimation and distribution of knowledge within the school; it admits that school knowledge is not value-free but represents specific interests and values, and finally it ought to lead to transformative action in favour of a democratic vision of life. In another context, Simon (1986) elaborates to suggest that critical pedagogy empowers students by drawing upon their own cultural resources as a basis for engaging in the development of new skills and interrogating existing knowledge claims. It helps them interpret their everyday realities and facilitates the consideration of possible alternatives which are more humane, just and equitable.

In other words, critical education and pedagogy are firmly planted in the political spheres of life, decoding the power structures of the "what is" through a declared normative stance in order to project the "what could" and the "what should" be in the social organisation of life. But what chance is there that teachers -- a notoriously politically illiterate group of workers -- become attracted to such a project? In asking this question we are also exploring wider structural issues which can be formulated in the following manner: To what extent can inroads be made by educational activity into the promotion of more democratic and equitable social arrangements? To what extent and under which conditions does counter-hegemonic schooling take place?

In attempting to address such questions and to reconnoiter the borders of possibility -- a vital task of any theory of action -- the relevant issues are located in their theoretical context in the following sections. Here, critical perspectives on teachers' work are traced, with a specific reference to the hope -- currently expressed in a variety of literature -- that teachers can become allies in the task of bringing about progressive change within -- and outside of -- schools. The paper next discusses the likelihood that teachers become the "transformative" or "organic" intellectuals that critical education perspectives would like them to be.

Recent Portraits of Teachers

Recent educational theorising within a critical framework has gone through three successive phases, and in each of these teachers have been portrayed in different ways. The first phase, concentrating as it did on the ways schooling produced social inequalities, viewed

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teachers as agents of the *status quo*. Carlson (1987) refers to this as the "*reproductive theory of teaching*", with teachers being seen as "*heavily implicated in the reproduction of reproductive world views, modes of work behaviour and social and technical relations of production*" (p283). As Apple (1986) notes, this led to a certain degree of "*teacher bashing*" as well as to an unfortunate characterisation. This phase, heavily influenced by the structuralist functionalism of Bowles and Gintis (1976) and by the early work of such authors as Sharp and Green (1975), was "*much too mechanistic and left no space for the inherently contradictory tendencies in both teachers and their jobs*" (Apple, 1986, p454). Within this phase, as Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) point out, teachers tended to be heavily criticised by Right and Left alike: the former held teachers to task for their professional incompetence and ineffectiveness in teaching the "basics"; the latter for being too effective in reproducing the hegemonic order, for being insufficiently reflective, over concerned with quantifiable outcomes, inequitable and so on.

The next phase in radical educational scholarship moved from the deterministic accounts and the pessimism of the "*thesis of inevitability*" to accounts which stressed "*human agency within structural constraints, the 'relative autonomy' of some superstructural sectors, and the idea of hegemonic limits rather than determined necessity*" (Burbules, 1986, p.302). Schools, like other social sites, were discovered to have an internal cultural politics of their own, "*characterised by processes of conflict and contest, negotiation and exchange, resistance and accommodation*" (Hogan, 1982, p.58). Without losing the fundamental insight that schools cannot be analysed as institutions removed from the socio-economic context in which they are situated, a new emphasis developed which accentuated the role schools played as political sites in the construction and control of discourse, meanings and subjectivities. Such "relative autonomy" could be used to create and transmit progressive and transformative meanings rather than reproductive ones. The identification of resistance among students (Willis, 1977) highlighted the fact that reproduction is not necessarily inevitable, and ensuing "*resistance theories*" (Aggleton and Whitty, 1985; Viegas Fernandes, 1988; Sultana, 1989b) provided a "*language of possibility*" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985) for those interested in the transformative potential of schools. Within this perspective, teachers were no longer seen as agents of reproduction, but as possible allies. Connell's (1985) work is a good example of a recent trend in pointing out the possibility of an alliance between critical scholars and transformative teachers.

Such accounts entrust critical scholars and teachers with a more active role, moving on as

they do from merely identifying resistance to actually promoting and politicising it within schools. Burbules (1986) refers to the need for progressive teachers to undertake "*the political and pedagogical strategies necessary to encourage oppositional behaviour in schools*" (p.302). In this context it is of strategic importance that teachers be won over in the struggle for the engendering of a liberating and transformative education. As Apple (1986) notes, this can happen only "*if teachers are listened to, if one searches out the real conditions under which they work, and if there is serious respect for the jobs that they must do. This does not mean that one covers over the negative actions that some teachers may engage in. Rather, it means looking at the material and ideological roots of the conditions that may limit teachers' actions*" (p.454).

Teachers -- perhaps more than students¹ -- have therefore become the focus of attention among critical educational scholars. Looking backwards, Lawn and Grace (1987) note that "*for too long teachers have been largely taken for granted both in theoretical analysis and empirical investigation in education*" (p.vii). Increasingly the emphasis is now being put on teachers as actors with relatively autonomous cultural and political space. This relative autonomy means that a teacher -- within the real constraining structures s/he experiences daily -- can become the transformative intellectual (Giroux, 1986a) who treats students as critical agents, problematises knowledge, utilizes dialogue, and makes knowledge meaningful, critical, and ultimately emancipatory. Teachers are in this perspective considered to be political actors not only within the relative "privacy" of their classroom/s, but also -- as Ozga and Lawn's pioneering studies have shown -- through their collective actions, strategies and struggles.

Currently too, teachers are being urged to "*actively participate in social movements collectively designed to bring about fundamental progressive change*" (Ginsburg, 1988, p.364). Giroux (1986b) has argued that transformative teachers fighting against any form of oppression and anti-democratic practices need "*to open up every aspect of formal education to active, popular contestation and to other front-line groups and constituencies*" (p.37). He also points out that

reforms that limit their focus to specific school problems or the politics of instruction ignore the ways in which public education is shaped, bent and moved by wider economic, political, and social concerns ... Radical educators need to make alliances with other progressive social movements in an effort to create public spheres where the discourse of democracy can be debated and where the

issues that arise in such a context can be collectively acted on, in a political fashion if necessary (ibid., p.37).

There is, therefore, in critical educational scholarship today, an increasing emphasis being put on teachers' work within and outside of schools, and the critical role they have in bringing about social transformation. This is especially true since student resistance and oppositional practice -- practically the only tools which could be harnessed for progressive change -- have proved to be more tragic than emancipatory (Willis, 1977; McRobbie, 1978; Sultana, 1987, among others). As Buroway (1979) notes with reference to shop floor oppositional activity, resistance which is neither collectivised nor politicised in itself implies co-optation because by playing "games" (such as beating the clock, sabotage, soldiering, etc.) one is at the same time accepting the wider rules, the larger context. It is therefore the teacher that critical intellectuals are turning to so that student resistance can be informed and politicised.

This development can also be seen in Freire, among others. While Freire is the pedagogue *par excellence* when it comes to the recognition - and insisting on the centrality - of students' experience in the learning process, yet he nevertheless has recently emphasised that when the educator begins the dialogue, "*he or she knows a great deal, first in terms of knowledge and second in terms of the horizon that she or he wants to get to*" (Shor and Freire, 1987, p.103). This is a significant departure from the much less directive concept of the teacher-student's introduction of "*hinged themes*" in the educational encounter, as described in Freire's best known work (1972, p.92).

Teachers as Political Actors

The foregoing discussion on education and transformation has implied that teachers, like all other human beings embedded in systems and social relations, are always political. They are political not only when they take part in stop work meetings and engage in militant union activity on their own behalf, but also when they, as they must, create or participate in structures, deliver curricula, encourage sets of pedagogical relationships and assessment procedures instead of others. In all these ways and more, teachers are, overtly and covertly, consciously or unconsciously, declaring themselves for or against a *status quo*. They are political when they are silent about specific issues, and when their "selective tradition" (Williams, 1978) excludes counter-hegemonic knowledge. What will be examined in this section therefore, is not whether teachers are political or not, for they always are. The concern is more with exploring the possibilities which tilt teachers' political and ideological allegiance towards

transformative rather than reproductive ends, and which therefore justify current hopes that progressive teachers can be counted as allies in the general struggle for equity, justice and democracy.

There are a number of theoretical paths which one can follow in such an exploration. A variety of studies, inspired by a structural-functionalist approach, have regarded teachers as class agents, attempted to analyse their position within a stratified society and deduce their political potential from that². Sachs and Smith (1988) note that most studies indicate that teacher recruitment is made from the "middle classes", adding that such a term is a "*euphemism for relatively conservative attitudes and beliefs, for an orientation into a bourgeois discourse and 'habitus'*" (p.429).

Steven (1978), and later Harris (1982) suggest that teachers actually occupy contradictory class locations, what Poulantzas (1975) calls the "new petty bourgeoisie". Steven argues that teachers have an unconscious allegiance to the bourgeoisie. He locates teachers within the middle classes, and proposes that - depending on the advanced state of capital accumulation in the country and the amount of surplus value that is produced - teachers do not experience capitalism as an external force, and "*can take more surplus value with one hand than [they] surrender with the other. [Their] interests therefore move close to those of the bourgeoisie*" (p.124). Steven also argues that slow accumulation of surplus value will test the loyalty of teachers to the bourgeoisie, and enhance their proletarianisation. Teachers become increasingly critical of capitalism so that "*as the crisis deepens, the bourgeoisie will find in the middle-class an increasingly unreliable ally, although not too much hope should be placed on this*" (p.125).

While, as will be discussed below, this structuralist-functionalist approach is limiting and limited, it nevertheless does pose the possibility of recognising that the class allegiance of teachers changes over time. There is also some value in describing how a particular institution reproduces class relations, and in depicting the objective relations that individuals enter into within institutional settings over which they experience little direct control. Cole (1984) for instance suggests that due to the economic crisis and the subsequent legitimisation crisis of schooling in the eyes of students, teachers are losing both the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards associated with their work³. The crisis therefore enhances the possibility of penetration, of understanding one's structural location, and hence to pass from "practical" to "discursive" consciousness (Giddens, 1976), and from "common sense" to "good sense" (Gramsci,

1971). Carlson (1987) suggests that involvement in industrial unionism -- something teachers are increasingly obliged to do as their work becomes proletarianised -- is influential in bringing teachers in confrontation with the capitalist state and draws them closer to an identification with the political interests of a broad working-class movement.

Despite the obvious strengths of structural-functional approaches to teachers' work, a number of authors have pointed out important limitations. Ashendon *et al.* (1987) for instance, argue that "location" does not sufficiently take into account teachers' actions. They argue that the question to ask is not "*In which class location are teachers?*" but rather "*Into which class relations do teachers enter? How far are these relations being formed by this person's activity?*" (p.256). Carlson (1987) finds the functionalist approach not only inaccurate in its overdeterminism, but also politically disempowering since "*it promotes a pessimism about teachers' potential contribution to social transformation that the Left should do its utmost to fight rather than encourage*" (p.291). Carlson highlights the need to look at classes, occupational groups and individuals not as merely analytic abstractions, but rather as "*historically embedded agents of action, [whose] actions and beliefs have real consequences that cannot be totally determined*" (p.292).

Drawing on both strands of sociological theory, and hence addressing both structure and agency⁴, could lead to a more sophisticated analysis of teachers' work and thus of their ideological allegiances. A culturalist understanding of teachers leads to an appreciation of the active and dynamic production of meaning, so that, in the tradition of "resistance theory", penetration and resistance are not the prerogative of students but also of teachers. It is only through this complex approach that we can get "*accurate bearings on the social situations of teachers, the constraints they work under, and the possibilities open to them*" (Connell *et al.*, 1983, p.206).

A range of literature now exists which throws light on teachers' work, and which orthodox "class location" approaches failed to illuminate. Much of this literature tends to negate the probability that teachers can, indeed, become allies in the bringing about of more democratic and equitable futures, both within and outside of schools. Sachs and Smith (1988) argue for instance that since all teachers share many similar conditions of the same work situation, they experience the same basic concerns and problems, and hence a teacher culture is created despite the fact that each teacher has a personal history, predispositions and habits of thought.

Among the variety of shared conditions and constraints over which they have little control, Sachs and Smith (*ibid.*) mention the following "givens": class-size, school timetables, the education of persons who have not necessarily chosen to be at school, a hidden pedagogy, a concern with what works and hence an instrumental approach to their work rather than one guided by goals and ends, the organisation of the school (so that when the teacher exercises autonomy, s/he does so within the conditions set by the institutional structure), and anticipatory socialisation of those individuals entering teaching. Drawing from a large body of research, the authors conclude: "*The anticipatory socialisation of individuals entering teaching, the experience of their initial teacher education and later their experience in schools provide the basis for the development of cultural spheres and practical and discursive resources.*" (Sachs and Smith, 1988, p.431-2).

A number of authors have argued that a major aspect underlying teachers' work is their "culture of individualism" (Hargreaves, 1982), their "*humanistic, child-centred and psychologists conception of 'teaching' and 'learning'*" (Sachs and Smith, 1988, p.427). The latter authors cite Dale (1977) and accept for Australian teacher education programmes the criticism Dale makes of similar institutions in Britain. Dale argues that teacher education inculcates a cognitive style of liberal individualism, where the dominant images of child-centred progressivism of a liberal, individualistic kind allow teachers to concentrate on individual student performance without regard to the social effect of schooling. The school and teacher education therefore focus on individual characteristics but remain generally unaware of the social structuring of these same traits.

This pessimistic portrayal of teachers in the task of winning them over to counter-hegemonic activity within schools seems to extend to considerations of the critical educator. Burbules (1985) notes that the relatively few teachers who do not develop in an overwhelmingly conservative and individualistic direction are "*more likely to quit than to remain and change the system*" (p.202). Everhart (1983) also dismisses public school teachers as possible allies in fighting corporate state interests in the schools since it seems "*unreasonable to expect most teachers in the public school system, as it is presently constructed, to defy vested interests and favor a liberatory education which, in the end, might seriously challenge their own role as members of the state bureaucracy*" (p.51).

Both structuralist-functional and culturalist analyses seem to suggest, therefore, that teachers can hardly be expected to embark on counter-hegemonic, critical activities within

schools. While schools, like other social sites, have a multiplicity of contestual voices, there seems to be little doubt that reproductive and hegemonic ones are the most prevalent both because of the class location of teachers as well as because of the sets of social relationships and power structures in which they are constrained to negotiate, produce and reproduce meaning.

Towards a Language of Possibility

Pessimism about the possibility of teachers becoming implicated in critical education is not unwarranted. However, I would like to conclude my paper by arguing that teachers' political consciousness and activities will increasingly tend towards progressive rather conservative agendas if they are themselves caught up in democratic social movements external to the school which impinge on their perceptions and commitments, both individually and collectively.

The link between education, teachers and social movements in the bringing about of change has been recently formulated by Carnoy and Levin (1985), although there had been earlier statements to the effect that democracy has not been the result of individual action within the classroom as much as of pressures exerted by social movements about particular issues. Carnoy (1983) had in fact stated:

Democracy has been developed by social movements, and those intellectuals and educators who were able to implement democratic reforms in education did so in part through appeals to such movements. If the working people, minorities, and women who have formed the social movements pressing for greater democracy in our society cannot be mobilized behind equality in education, with the increased public spending that this requires, there is absolutely no possibility that equality in education will be implemented (p.41).

A major factor which influences the move from what has been earlier referred to as the culture of individualism on the part of teachers to a deeper political awareness of the relationship between structure and agency, and the role of schooling within both is therefore an involvement with social movements. Schools and teachers cannot avoid such interaction with the "public sphere" because, as Carnoy and Levin (1985) argue *"As both a product and a shaper of social discord, the school is necessarily caught up in the larger conflicts inherent in the capitalist economy and the liberal capitalist state"* (p.4). Indeed, a proposition I would like to advance in this paper states that whenever in schools there is an ideology at work firmly grounded

in social movements and working for democratic ends, a space for an ideological critique of other aspects of the *status quo* is created. When teachers are committed and armed in this manner, there is less of a chance that total institutional and ideological incorporation within the larger *status quo* takes place.

Such propositions have been tested out in a doctoral research project with I carried out in New Zealand (Sultana, 1987). Briefly, the study set out to discover -- in grounded theory manner -- the school-to-work messages given by teachers to students in three high schools. A number of issues were focused upon (see Sultana, 1988a,b, and 1989a,b,c), but an overall theme which emerged was the hegemonic nature of the messages given overtly and covertly in all three educational establishments. The study however highlighted the complex inter- and intra-school similarities and differences observed. While there is therefore some agreement with Sachs and Smith (1988) when they conclude that teachers and schools are characterised by uniformity rather than pluralism, yet if, in the tradition of the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, we are to try to draw that fine red line between what is and what could and should be, it is of utmost theoretical and strategic importance to identify, study and understand the transformative teacher and school. Various research studies, such as those of Anyon (1980, 1981) and Gaskell (1986) for instance, attribute a homogeneity to schools and teachers, failing to identify competing voices. My own research attempted to do justice to the complexity of social beings and institutions, highlighting critical voices in order to discover when, why and how counter-hegemonic messages were given.

Generally then, while the overt and covert, intended and unintended messages in the three schools were overwhelmingly hegemonic, it was observed that when teachers were, individually or/and collectively, caught up in an active interaction with progressive social movements, then their ideological commitment departed from conservative and at times, even reactionary grounds, and moved closer to liberal and occasionally to radical ones. In the research in question, the different social movements which informed teachers' and schools included trade unionism, ethnic rights movement, feminism, liberationism, and the peace movement. Such social movements are considered to represent an important democratic issue, all having in common a moral force stemming from *"their promise to free their participants from the deeply felt unjust (threat of) deprivation of material necessities, social status, and cultural identity"* (Frank and Fuentes, 1987, p.1507).

It takes a very special set of circumstances so that critical voices first of all **emerge** from a distinctly middle class group of workers, and secondly that such voices **survive** the silencing which follows pre-service training and in-service labour conditions. It would appear that the chances of this happening increase when teachers are unified and organised behind an ideal. It has been argued that those teachers who have been conscientised around ideals of social justice by their membership -- official or otherwise -- within social movements, can -- and in the case-studies explored in the ethnographic research project cited above **are** having a positive, democratising effect on schools. They are also affecting the wider social formation through the "the production of forms of consciousness -- ideas, feelings, desires, moral preferences, knowledges, forms of consciousness of self" (Johnson, 1980, p.11).

While some authors -- notably Giroux (1983) - - have argued that teachers need to work for democracy in schools and extend their efforts into other areas of the "public sphere", it would appear that the process, when it does happen, taken place the other way around. Those teachers who do become politicised seem to do so through their involvement in extra-school activities -- and social movements primarily so. The insights generated there subsequently reflect on their work within schools.

The arguments advanced in this paper have important implications for scholars and researchers working within the critical tradition. Such educators need to understand and sympathise with the genuine efforts of teachers who, in Inglis' (1985) fine phrase in another context, are "attempting to make a life [they] can be proud of out of the fragments of history which [they] can win some command over" (p.58). More than that, transformative researchers need to work on the project of identifying individuals and groups of teachers engaged in emancipatory interests or involved in exercising liberating actions. They can offer their support, and share knowledge and insights in carrying out concrete analyses of the power layers within a situation, helping to tilt the balance in favour of the underprivileged. They can make students' contestations available to teachers offering insights leading to reflexivity and praxis. In other words, the researcher would be involved in the sort of Freirian pedagogy advocated for teachers, appropriating various democratic and emancipatory voices, and introducing themes which heighten the chances for a truly critical education to occur.

The formulation of such strategies, and reports of success or otherwise in the implementation of such critical education initiatives⁵, are of utmost importance if critical education and pedagogy is to become a movement within schools.

Footnotes

1. Transformative accounts that pin their hopes on **student** resistance have been criticised by a number of authors, including Lauder *et al.* (1986), Wexler (1987), and Sultana (1989a). Burbules (1986) notes that "clearly there is something paradoxical about enjoining teachers to promote resistance among students, when it is usually teachers against whom students must resist" (p.309).

2. Among these one could mention Hoyle (1969), Lortie (1975), Mardle and Walker (1980) and Harris (1982).

3. Intrinsic rewards flow from favourable relationships with both pupils and fellow teachers, the fulfillment of desire to perform a service on children's behalf, and from craft pride generated by evidence of successful teaching and esteem of colleagues (Lortie, 1975). Extrinsic rewards refer to salary, status, and security. The latter too are subject to diminution, and discontent, frustration and anger have been recorded among teachers in a variety of countries due to low salaries, vulnerability of tenure, and threats of accountability.

4. Giddens' structuration theory (1984) gives us a good indication of how "social structure produces agency, which in turn produces structures ... we make and are made by formal arrangements and dispositions which occupy the frames of our social identity, issue in actions which are out own, though involuntarily mediated by those structures for the future actions of ourselves and others" (Inglis, 1985, p.71).

5. See Sultana (1990) for an example of this.

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