
CULTURE AND POWER IN THE CLASSROOM

*A CRITICAL FOUNDATION
FOR BICULTURAL EDUCATION*

ANTONIA DARDER

Critical Studies in Education and Culture Series
edited by Henry A. Giroux and Paulo Freire



1991
BERGIN & GARVEY
NEW YORK • WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT • LONDON

Critical Studies in Education and Culture Series

Literacy: Reading the Word and the World

Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo

The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education: A Curriculum for
Justice and Compassion

David Purpel

The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation

Paulo Freire

Popular Culture, Schooling and the Language of Everyday Life

Henry A. Giroux and Roger I. Simon

Teachers As Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning

Henry A. Giroux

Women Teaching for Change: Gender, Class and Power

Kathleen Weiler

Between Capitalism and Democracy: Educational Policy and the
Crisis of the Welfare State

Svi Shapiro

Critical Psychology and Pedagogy: Interpretation of the Personal
World

Edmund Sullivan

Pedagogy and the Struggle for Voice

Catherine E. Walsh

Learning Work: A Critical Pedagogy of Work Education

Roger I. Simon, Don Dippo, and Arleen Schenke

Voices in Architectural Education: Cultural Politics and Pedagogy

Edited by Thomas P. Dutton

Educational Leadership: A Critical Pragmatic Perspective

Spencer J. Macey

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AS A FOUNDATION FOR BICULTURAL EDUCATION

The solution is not to integrate them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become beings for themselves.

Paulo Freire
Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Historically, bicultural education has been linked most directly to bilingual instructional theory. The powerful relationship between culture and language suggests the logic at work in this connection and the symbiotic manner in which these concepts are often discussed. As a consequence, the majority of the work in the field is most extensively focused on educational assessment, curriculum content, and teaching strategies that are related to cultural values, language, and cognition (Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974; Pialorsi, 1974; Valverde, 1978; Turner, 1982; Fishman & Keller, 1972; Ovando & Collier, 1985). Although these clearly represent primary areas of concern, the traditional manner in which these areas are addressed in the classroom does not necessarily guarantee that students will participate in a process of social empowerment, nor that they will develop their bicultural voice or become critically discursive with respect to their economic and sociopolitical reality.

A major reason for this phenomenon is the failure to change the structure of schools—a change required in order to alter the

asymmetrical power relations that prevent the emancipatory development of biculturalism. Despite the extensive work directed at altering the content and language of curriculum, bicultural educators have accomplished relatively little in transforming the traditional pedagogical structure of their classrooms. As a result, bicultural students may develop a stronger sense of cultural identity, self-esteem, and both language and cognitive proficiency, while simultaneously being socialized within the context of a technocratic and instrumental pedagogy that stifles the development of critical skills and ignores questions of human agency, voice, and empowerment.

Seldom are issues of power seriously addressed with respect to the structure of classroom life. And even when educators make some effort to address the issues in their classrooms, often it is done in a "banking education" mode (Freire, 1970) that in content may be theoretically emancipatory but in practice is pedagogically oppressive. Hence, what is missing is a critical educational foundation on which bicultural educators can build a liberatory practice of bicultural education. But in order for this need to be met, teachers must struggle to change the basic structure of traditional American education.

The previous chapters have helped to illustrate the need for this structural change and to highlight the specific issues that must be considered in generating such a transformation. In addition to confronting the different forms of cultural invasion through a commitment to a culturally democratic principle, there are specific theoretical constructs related to critical pedagogy that must be incorporated in the process of establishing a critical foundation for bicultural education.

From the standpoint of critical theory, education must hold an emancipatory purpose and acknowledge the process of schooling as a political process. A key to this perspective is the recognition of the contextual relationship that exists between the cultural politics and economic forces in society and the structure of schools. Hence, critical pedagogy espouses a view of knowledge that is both historical and dialectical in nature. True to its critical dimensions, it is built around a serious commitment to the union of theory and practice. Further, a theory of ideology and hegemony is closely

linked to critical pedagogy's concern with the nature of student resistance and its view of education as a form of counter-hegemony. And finally, critical pedagogy incorporates an understanding of critical discourse and the goal of conscientization as a consequence of the dialogical relationships that shape the structure of classroom life.

The following discussion represents an effort to outline the basic principles for a critical pedagogy that may serve effectively as a foundation for bicultural education. It is a foundation that is clearly based on an understanding of the link between culture and power and firmly rooted in a political construct of cultural democracy and a commitment to student empowerment. It represents, in theory and practice, the critical dimension that remains, for the most part, absent from the foundational groundwork of bicultural education programs in this country.

CRITICAL EDUCATION THEORY

The theoretical foundation of any educational practice must be understood by educators in order to develop fully the ability to evaluate their practice, confront the contradictions, and transform their classrooms into democratic environments where they can genuinely address the actual needs of their students—needs that result from an engagement with the real world. Hence, in order to move toward a critical practice of bicultural education, it is most important to examine the fundamental theoretical dimensions behind critical education and their merit in respect to the education of bicultural students.

In the spirit of a critical theory, it is important to begin by stating that there does not exist a recipe for the universal implementation and application of any form of critical pedagogy. In fact, it is precisely this distinguishing characteristic that constitutes its genuinely critical nature, and therefore its emancipatory and democratic function. This quality is consistent with the philosophical principles espoused by major critical theorists over the years. Those theorists who have most influenced the critical theory movement include members of the Frankfurt School, Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, and more recently

Jurgen Habermas (1970). Two of the most significant educational theorists who have built on the work of Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, and others include Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux. Hence, much of current critical education theory has been profoundly influenced by these two educational philosophers—a fact that will be quite evident in the following discussion of critical pedagogy.

Cultural Politics

Above all things, a critical pedagogy must encompass an unwavering commitment to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequities and injustices (McLaren, 1988). This commitment is clearly linked to a basic principle that we as men and women are called to struggle for: what Freire (1970) defines as our “vocation”—to be truly humanized social agents in the world. This spirit of social justice moves the critical educator to an irrevocable commitment to the oppressed and to the liberation of all people.

Prior to continuing with this discussion on critical pedagogy, it is important to distinguish the concept of *pedagogy* from that of teaching. Roger Simon describes this distinction:

Pedagogy is a more complex and extensive term than teaching, referring to the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, a time and place for the practice of these . . . and evaluation purpose and methods. All of these aspects of educational practice come together in the realities of what happens in classrooms. Together they organize a view of how teachers' work within an institutional context specifies a particular version of what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment. In other words, talk about pedagogy is simultaneously talk about details of what students and others might do together and the cultural politics such practices support. To propose a pedagogy is to propose a political vision. In this perspective, we cannot talk about teaching practices without talking about politics. (Simon, 1987, p. 371)

In light of the above definition, a major task of critical educational theory is to expose and challenge the roles that schools play

in the political and cultural life of students. Of particular importance is a critical analysis and investigation into the manner that traditional theories and practices of American schools have thwarted or supported the participation of bicultural students. Hence, schools must be seen critically as both sorting mechanisms in which select groups of students are entitled in respect to race, class, and gender, and as agencies for social and self-empowerment (McLaren, 1988).

Fundamental to critical pedagogy is the assumption that teachers must understand the role schooling plays in uniting knowledge and power, and how this dynamic relates to the development of critically thinking and socially active individuals. Unlike the traditional educational perspective that views schools as neutral and apolitical in nature, a critical theoretical perspective views power, politics, history, and culture as intimately and ideologically linked with any theory of education. McLaren (1988) writes in *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundation of Education*: "[S]chools have always functioned in ways that rationalize the knowledge industry into class-divided tiers; that reproduce inequality, racism, and sexism; and that fragment democratic social relations through an emphasis on competitiveness and ethnocentrism" (pp. 160-161).

Critical pedagogy incorporates Freire's (1970) notion that the form and content of knowledge, as well as the social practices through which it is appropriated, have to be seen as an ongoing struggle over what counts as legitimate culture and forms of empowerment. In accordance with this notion, a critical pedagogy must seriously address the concept of cultural politics by both legitimizing and challenging cultural experiences that comprise the histories and social realities that in turn comprise the forms and boundaries that give meaning to the lives of students.

Economics

Critical education theory also fiercely challenges the prevalent assumption that the function of American schools is based on the broad Western humanistic tradition for individual and social empowerment. In fact, it contends that, in truth, schools often work against the interests of those students who are most in need of

these opportunities. Consequently, the issue of economics is considered vital to developing a critical understanding of how school curriculum, knowledge, and policy are organized around the inequity of competing interests within the social order and thus are dependent on the corporate marketplace and the success of the national economy.

Critical theorists maintain a view of schooling as a cultural and historical process in which select groups are positioned within asymmetrical relations of power on the basis of specific race, class, and gender groups, rather than a process that is value-free and neutral. Its political dimensions are sharply defined within the argument that schools often operate with the intent to reproduce the values and privileges of the dominant culture. McLaren (1988) speaks to this: "Critical theorists challenge the often uncontested relationship between school and society, unmasking mainstream pedagogy's claim that it purveys equal opportunity and provides access to egalitarian democracy and critical thinking. Critical scholars reject the claim that schooling constitutes an apolitical and value-neutral process" (p. 163).

As discussed earlier, nowhere is this form of inequity so clearly evident as in the current system of meritocracy utilized in most American schools—a system that, in order to succeed, requires students to be versed in the dominant cultural versions of truth and knowledge. Those who succeed are considered to possess the individual merit that consequently also makes them privilege to the economic goods that success can bring in the United States. Those who fail are considered to lack the individual intelligence, maturity, or drive to succeed. Seldom acknowledged in this traditional analysis of student success or failure are the asymmetrical power relations determined by cultural and economic forces that grant privilege to students from the dominant culture.

Historicity of Knowledge

Critical pedagogy is strongly influenced by the Frankfurt School's notion of the *historicity of knowledge*. True to this underlying principle, the theory calls for the examination of schools within not only their social practices but also their historical realities. Herein lies a counterlogic to the positivist,

ahistorical, and depoliticizing analysis of schooling that searches for *inner histories* within a specific historical context. With respect to this view, Giroux argues that

[the] given social order is not simply found in modes of interpretation that view history as a natural evolving process or ideologies distributed through the culture industry. It is also found in the material reality of those needs and wants that bear the inscription of history. That is, history is to be found as "second nature" in those concepts and views of the world that make the most dominating aspect of the social order appear to be immune from historical sociopolitical development. Those aspects of reality that rest on an appeal to the universal and invariant often slip from historical consciousness and become embedded within those historically specific needs and desires that link individuals to the logic of conformity and domination. (Giroux, 1983, p. 38)

Critical educational theorists strongly support the view that the study of history, which has deteriorated at all levels of schooling, must be elevated to a position of critical influence. However, instead of orienting the curriculum to a patriotic purpose that stresses the role of great men in shaping our contemporary world, or featuring events whose meaning is usually lost to students, educators should assist students in understanding history as a social process—a process that incorporates both the participation of social movements and the state, as well as the economic and cultural forces acting as significant determinants in the society. Further, since historical events often conceal more than they reveal, the issue of historical understanding is also closely predicated on deconstructing events, texts, and images of the past. Within this context, the meaning of history is to be found not only in what is included in mainstream explanations, but also in what is excluded (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).

Important to this discussion is the manner in which the dominant school culture functions not only to support the interests and values of the dominant society, but also to marginalize and invalidate knowledge forms and experiences that are significant to subordinate and oppressed groups. This function is best illustrated in the ways that curriculum often blatantly ignores the histories of women, people of color, and the working classes. Freire (1970)

speaks to the impact of this historical neglect of oppressed groups: "There is no historical reality which is not human. There is no history without men [sic], and no history for men; there is only history of men, made by men and . . . in turn making them. It is when the majorities are denied their right to participate in history as subjects that they become dominated and alienated" (p. 125).

With this in mind, a critical pedagogical approach must appropriate students' own histories by delving into their own biographies and systems of meaning. But this can only take place if the conditions are created in the classroom for students to speak their own voices and to name and authenticate their own experiences. This is vital to the learning process, for not until students can "become aware of the dignity of their own perceptions and histories [can they] make a leap to the theoretical and begin to examine the truth value of their meanings and perceptions, particularly as they relate to the dominant rationality" (Giroux, 1983, p. 203).

Hence, unlike traditional discourses on education, a critical perspective opposes the positivist emphasis on historical continuities and historical development. In its place is found a mode of analysis that stresses the breaks, discontinuities, and tensions in history, all of which become valuable in that they highlight the centrality of human agency and struggle while simultaneously revealing the gap between society as it presently exists and society as it might be (Giroux, 1983).

Dialectical Theory

Unlike traditional theories of education that seek certainty and the technical control of knowledge and power, critical education theory posits a dialectical notion of knowledge that seeks to uncover the connections between objective knowledge and the norms, values, and structural relationships of the wider society. As such, it provides students with a mode of engagement that permits them to examine the underlying political, social, and economic contexts in which they live.

A dialectical view¹ begins with the fact of human existence and the contradictions and disjunctions that, in part, shape it and make problematic its meaning in the world. It functions to assist

students to analyze their world, to become aware of the limitations that prevent them from changing the world, and, finally, to help them collectively struggle to transform that world. McLaren describes this process:

Critical [pedagogy] begin[s] with the premise that men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege. The critical educator endorses theories that are, first and foremost, dialectical: that is, theories which recognize the problems of society as more than simply isolated events of individuals or deficiencies in the social structure. Rather, these problems are part of the interactive context between the individual and society. (McLaren, 1988, p. 166)

Dialectical thought seeks out these social contradictions and sets up a process of open and thoughtful questioning that requires reflection to ensue back and forth between the parts and the whole, the object and the subject, knowledge and human action, process and product, so that further contradictions may be discovered. As these are revealed, new constructive forms of thinking and action are necessary to transcend the original state. The complement of elements is dynamic rather than fixed or static and results in a form of tension rather than a state of polarization. Thus, within a dialectic, the elements are regarded as mutually constitutive rather than separate and distinct (McLaren, 1988).

Significant to a dialectical understanding of education is a view of schools as sites of both oppression and empowerment. Here, the traditional view of schools as neutral, value-free sites that provide students with the necessary skills and attitudes for becoming good and responsible citizens in society is clearly rejected. Instead, this view argues for a partisan perspective that is fundamentally committed to a struggle for the transformation of society based on the principles of emancipatory education, which are realized only through nonexploitative relations and social justice. Within this context, the contradictions that result within undemocratic forms of relationships are perceived as a multitude of questions that must be explored with students to reveal how they are linked to class, gender, and race interests (McLaren, 1988).

Dialectical thought reveals the power of human activity and human knowledge as both a product of and force in the shaping of social reality. Further, it argues that there is a link between knowledge, power, and domination. Therefore, it recognizes that some knowledge is false, and that the ultimate purpose of a dialectical critique is critical thinking in the interest of social change. It is important to note that, consequently, critical thought can be exercised without falling into the ideological trap of relativism, in which the notion of critique is negated by the assumption that all ideas should be considered equally.

Giroux (1981) elaborates further on this notion of dialectics in *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling*: "The dialectic incorporates an historical sensibility in the interest of liberating human beings not only from those traditions that legitimate oppressive institutional arrangements, but also from their own history, i.e., that which society has made of them. This is the critical point that links praxis and historical consciousness" (p. 118).

Critical theorists argue that what is needed to unravel the source, mechanisms, and elements that constitute the fabric of school culture is a theory of *dialectical critique*. Based on Adorno's (1973) notion of *negative dialectics*, it begins with a rejection of traditional representations of reality. The underlying assumption is that critical reflection is formed out of the principles of negativity, contradiction, and mediation. This calls for a thorough interrogation of all universal "truths" and social practices that go unquestioned in schools because they are concealed in the guise of objectivity and neutrality (Giroux, 1983).

Hence, the primary purpose of a dialectical critique within the context of a critical pedagogy is to address two concerns: (1) the linking of social experiences with the development of modes of criticism that can interrogate such experiences and reveal both their strengths and weaknesses; and (2) the presentation of a mode of praxis fashioned in new critical thought aimed at reclaiming the conditions of self-determined existence.

Praxis: The Union of Theory and Practice

Critical educational theory, in all respects, encompasses a practical intent that is fundamentally centered around the practical

transformation of the world. It is this basic interest in the human condition—never seen as separate from the development and liberation of self-consciousness of individuals actively involved with determining their own destiny—that is at the heart of a critical pedagogy. Unlike the external determinism, pragmatism, and instrumental/technical application of theory so prevalent in traditional American educational discourses, *praxis* is conceived as self-creating and self-generating free human action. Freire (1970) makes reference to this notion of praxis: “The difference between animals—who . . . cannot create products detached from themselves—and men [and women]—who through their action upon the world create the realm of culture and history—is that only the latter are beings of praxis. . . . It is as transforming and creating beings that men, in their permanent relations with reality, produce” (pp. 90–91).

Within this view of human beings, all human activity consists of action and reflection, or praxis. And as praxis, all human activity requires theory to illuminate it. This interface between theory and practice occurs, for example, at the point where oppressed groups come together and raise fundamental questions of how they might assist each other, and how—through such an exchange of views—an action might emerge in which all groups might benefit. But it is crucial to note, once again, that this does not suggest that all views are to be given equal weight, for such a view could easily degenerate into relativistic nonsense. Instead, what it suggests is that the human subject must be integrated into the process of theorizing, and that truth claims of specific theoretical perspectives must be analyzed and mediated through dialogue and democratic social relations. Central, then, to this interface of theory and practice is the fundamental notion of *critique* (Giroux, 1983).

From the standpoint of a critical pedagogical perspective, we can further examine the dialectical relationship between theory and practice in respect to the concrete and theoretical contexts. In the *concrete* context, students can be perceived as subjects and objects in a dialectical relationship with reality. In the *theoretical* context, they play the role of cognitive subjects of the subject-object relationship that occurs in the concrete context. In this way, they are able to return to a place where they can better react as

subjects against reality. This represents a vital point in the unity between theory and practice (Freire, 1985).

Further, it is only as *beings of praxis*—as students accept their concrete situations as a challenging condition—that they are able to change its meaning by their action. This is why Freire (1985) argues that a true praxis is impossible in the undialectical vacuum where we are driven by a subject/object dichotomy. For within the context of such a dichotomy, both theory and practice lose their power to transform reality. Cut off from practice, theory becomes simple verbalism. Separated from theory, practice is nothing but blind activism. Thus, authentic praxis can only occur where there exists a dialectical union between theory and practice.

However, it is important to note that, although critical pedagogy incorporates the union of theory and practice in education, this does not mean theory and practice—while interconnected at the point of experience—are considered identical in character. Rather, to the contrary, they represent distinct analytical moments and should not collapse into each other (Horkheimer, 1972). Giroux also addresses this notion:

Theory must be celebrated for its truth content, not for the methodological refinements it employs. . . . [T]heory is informed by practice; but its real value lies in its ability to provide the reflexivity needed to interpret the concrete experience. . . . Theory can never be reduced to practice, because the specificity of practice has its own center of theoretical gravity, and cannot be reduced to a predefined formula. That is, the specificity of practice cannot be abstracted from the complex forces, struggles, and mediations that give each situation a unique defining quality. Theory can help us understand this quality, but cannot reduce it to the logic of a mathematical formula. . . . Experience and concrete studies do not speak for themselves, and . . . will tell us very little if the theoretical framework we use to interpret them lacks depth and critical rigor. (Giroux, 1983, pp. 99-100)

Ideology

Critical educational theorists conceive of ideology as the framework of thought which is used in society to give order and meaning to the social and political world (Hall, 1981). The notion of ideology cannot be ignored within the context of a critical

pedagogy, for it defines for students the perceptual field from which to make sense of the world. As described earlier, ideology not only structures our perceptions, but also gives meaning and direction to all we experience. McLaren (1988) defines ideology as

the production and representation of ideas, values, and beliefs and the manner in which they are expressed and lived out by both individuals and groups. . . . [I]deology refers to the production of sense and meaning. It can be described as a way of viewing the world, a complex of ideas, various types of social practices, rituals, and representations that are accepted as natural and as common sense. It is the result of the intersection of meaning and power in the social world. (p. 176)

Utilizing the Frankfurt School's notion of depth psychology, critical educational theorists see ideology as existing in the depth of the individual's psychological structure of needs. This supports the view that critical educators must take into account students' inner histories and experiences, they being central to questions of subjectivity as they are constructed by individual needs, drives, passions, and intelligence, as well as changing political, economic, and social foundations of the wider society. But further, ideology is also seen as existing in the realm of common sense. Here, *common sense* refers to the level of everyday consciousness with its many forms of unexamined assumptions, moral codes, contradictions, and partial truths (Giroux, 1981).

Also essential to a critical theory of education is the notion that ideology provides individuals with the means for critique. This occurs through its own structure of thought processes and practical activities. Hence, ideology becomes a critical pedagogical tool when it is used to interrogate the relationship between the dominant school culture and the contradictory lived experiences that mediate the reality of school life. Within this context, Giroux argues that three important distinctions provide the foundation for a theory of ideology and classroom practice:

First, a distinction must be made between theoretical and practical ideologies. . . . [T]heoretical ideologies refer to the beliefs and values embedded in the categories that teachers and students use to shape and interpret the pedagogical process, while practical ideologies refer to the

messages and norms embedded in classroom social relations and practices. Second, a distinction must be made between discourse and lived experience as instances of ideology and as the material grounding of ideology as they are embedded in school texts, films, and other cultural artifacts that make up visual and aural media. Third, these ideological elements gain part of their significance only as they are viewed in their articulation with the broader relations of society. (Giroux, 1983, p. 67)

One implication for classroom practice to be drawn from a theory of ideology is that it provides teachers with a context to examine how their own views about knowledge, human nature, values, and society are mediated through the commonsense assumptions they use to structure classroom experiences. Here, the concept of ideology provides a starting point for asking questions about the social and political interests and values that inform many of the pedagogical assumptions teachers take for granted in their work. Educators must evaluate critically their assumptions about learning, achievement, teacher-student relations, objectivity, and school authority.

Further, critical educational theorists support the notion that ideology as critique must also be used to investigate classroom relations that freeze the spirit of critical inquiry among students. These pedagogical practices must be measured against the potential to foster rather than hamper intellectual growth and social inquiry. This becomes particularly important for those students who experience daily humiliation and a sense of powerlessness due to the fact that their own lived experiences and cultural histories are in conflict with the dominant school culture (Giroux, 1983).

Ideology as critique is also an essential tool that can be used by teachers to understand how the dominant culture becomes embedded in the hidden curriculum. Understanding how curriculum materials and other artifacts produce meaning assists teachers in decoding the messages inscribed in both form and content. This is particularly significant in light of the results gathered by content analysis studies (e.g., Pokewitz, 1978; Anyon, 1979, 1980) that consistently reveal the prominence of dominant cultural values reflected in the majority of textbooks and curricula utilized in American schools.

Another significant factor in the production of self-awareness in teachers is the ability to decode and critique the ideologies inscribed in the form of structuring principles behind the presentation of images in curriculum materials. The significant silences of a text must be uncovered. Teachers must learn to identify the ideological messages in texts that focus on individuals to the exclusion of collective action, that juxtapose high culture and structures that reproduce poverty and exploitation, or that use forms of discourse that do not promote critical engagement by students (Giroux, 1983).

Critical educational theorists argue for a view of the hidden curriculum that encompasses all the ideological instances of the schooling process that silence students and structurally reproduce the dominant society's assumptions and practices. Such a focus is important because it shifts the emphasis away from a preoccupation with reproducing the status quo to a primary concern for cultural intervention and social action.

Hegemony

Critical pedagogy incorporates Gramsci's (1971) view that educators need to understand how the dominant worldview and its social practices are produced throughout society in order to shatter the mystification of the existing power relationships and social arrangements that sustain them. Through his theory of hegemony, Gramsci argues that there exists a powerful interconnection between politics, cultural ideology, and pedagogy.

Hegemony, as previously discussed, is systematically carried out through the moral and intellectual leadership of a dominant society over subordinate groups. This form of societal control is achieved not through physically coercive means nor arbitrary rules or regulations, but rather through winning the consent of the subordinated to the authority of the dominant class. The dominant society does not need to impose hegemony by force, since the oppressed actively subscribe to many of the values and objectives of the dominant class without being aware of the source of those values or the interests that inform them. Through hegemonic control, the dominant culture is able to exert domination over women, people of color, and members of the working class. This process

occurs whenever relations of power established at the institutional level are systematically asymmetrical—that is, when they are unequal and therefore grant privilege to some groups over others.

Given this view, teachers practice hegemony when they fail to teach their students how to question the prevailing social attitudes, values, and social practices of the dominant society in a sustained, critical manner. Thus, the challenge for teachers is to recognize, critique, and attempt to transform those undemocratic and oppressive features of hegemonic control that structure classroom experiences in ways that are not readily apparent (McLaren, 1985).

Critical educators recognize that hegemony, in whatever form that it manifests in society, must be fought for constantly in order to maintain the status quo. This, however difficult, is most successfully accomplished through various forms of co-optational forces that are constantly at work in the classroom and the society at large. But despite this oppressive quality, Giroux (1981) points to another significant aspect for critical educators. He argues that a theory of hegemony can also serve as an important pedagogical tool for understanding both the prevailing modes of domination and the ensuing contradictions and tensions existing within such modes of control. In this way, hegemony can function as a theoretical basis for helping teachers to understand not only how the seeds of domination are produced, but also how they may be overcome through various forms of resistance, critique, and social action.

Resistance and Counter-hegemony

Critical pedagogy incorporates a theory of resistance in order to understand better the complex reasons why many students from subordinate groups consistently fail in the educational system, and how this understanding may be used to restructure classroom practices and relationships as a form of *counter-hegemony*: “an alternative public sphere that is clearly guided by emancipatory interests” (Giroux & McLaren, 1987, p. 64)

Critical educators adhere to the philosophical principle that all people have the capacity to make meaning of their lives and to resist oppression. But they also recognize the fact that the capacity

to resist and understand is limited and influenced by issues of class, race, and gender. People will use whatever means at hand or whatever power they can employ to meet their needs and assert their humanity. But, unfortunately, since the solutions they often select arise from the ascribed beliefs and values of the dominant society, they may in fact lead themselves and others deeper into forms of domination and oppression (Weiler, 1985).

Giroux (1983) has addressed extensively this notion of resistance by suggesting that a construct of resistance points to a number of assumptions and concerns generally unexamined by traditional views of schooling:

First, it celebrates a dialectical notion of human agency that rightly portrays domination as neither a static process nor one that is ever complete; similarly, the oppressed are not viewed as being simply passive. [It] points to the need to understand more thoroughly [how] people mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experiences and the structures of domination. . . . Secondly, resistance adds . . . depth to Foucault's (1977) notion that power works so as to be exercised on and by people within different contexts that structure interacting relations of dominance and autonomy. . . . [P]ower is never unidimensional. . . . Finally, inherent in the notion of resistance is an expressed hope, an element of transcendence, for radical transformation. (Giroux, 1983, p. 108)

Central to a critical theory of resistance is the concern with uncovering the degree to which a student's oppositional act speaks to a form of refusal that expresses the need to struggle against elements of dehumanization. From this context, an understanding of resistance serves a critical function in analyzing behavior based on the specific historical and relational conditions from which it develops. This is vital to the process of critical pedagogy, for—without this process of critical inquiry—resistance could easily be allowed to become a category indiscriminately assigned to all forms of student oppositional behavior. It is the notion of emancipatory interests that must be central to determining when oppositional behavior constitutes a moment of resistance.

The pedagogical value of resistance is clearly linked to notions of structure and human agency and the concept of culture and self-formation, and situating these in a new problematic for

understanding the process of schooling. Giroux speaks to this concept of resistance:

It rejects a notion that schools are simply instructional sites, and in so doing, it not only politicizes the notion of culture [and ideology], but also points to the need to analyze school culture within the shifting terrain of struggle and contestation. Educational knowledge, values, and social relations are now placed within the context of lived antagonistic relations, and the need to be examined as they are played out within the dominant and subordinate cultures that characterize school life. (Giroux, 1983, p. 111)

Hence, elements of resistance are emphasized within a critical educational perspective in an effort to construct different sets of lived experiences—experiences in which students can find a voice and maintain and extend the positive aspects of their own social and historical realities. Freire and Macedo comment on the importance of this function of resistance for the critical educator:

Understanding the oppressed's reality, as reflected in the various forms of cultural production—language, music, art—leads to a better comprehension of the cultural expression through which people articulate their rebelliousness against the dominant. These cultural expressions [of resistance] also represent the level of possible struggle against oppression. . . . [A]ny radical educator must first understand fully the dynamics of resistance on the part of learners . . . to better understand the discourse of resistance, to provide pedagogical structures that will enable students to emancipate themselves. (Freire and Macedo, 1987, pp. 137–38)

At this point, it is necessary to recall that, at times, despite the well-intentioned interventions of critical educators, there are students whose oppositional behavior is directed toward holding firm to their hegemonic views of the world. Brian Fay (1987) explains that, having internalized the values, beliefs, and even worldview of the dominant class, these students resist seeing themselves as oppressed, and so they willingly cooperate with those who oppress them by maintaining social practices that perpetuate their subordinate position. Freire identifies this phenomenon as the initial stage of emancipation, where

the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors. . . . [T]he very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. . . . This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their experience, adopt an attitude of adhesion to the oppressor. . . . [T]heir perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression. . . . [T]he oppressed find in the oppressor their model. (Freire, 1970, pp. 29-30)

Thus, in light of the forms that resistance takes in the lives of oppressed students, the starting point of any counter-hegemonic pedagogy must be the world of these students, from the standpoint both of their oppression and their opposition. Essential to this process is the struggle for counter-hegemony and a movement toward more democratic institutional relationships and alternative value systems that are based on a critical understanding of the world and an overriding commitment to the inherent emancipatory nature of human beings.

Critical Discourse

An understanding of the power dynamics that embody the notion of discourse is essential to an understanding of the purpose that underlies critical pedagogy. For what critical pedagogy represents, in actuality, is an effort to develop a critical discourse in the face of a dominant discourse that has worked systematically to silence the voices of women, people of color, and other oppressed groups in the United States.

Discourse is derived as a system of discursive practices that reflect the values, beliefs, ideology, language, and economic constraints found within a particular set of inscribed power relations. As such, discursive practices refer to the rules by which discourses are formed, and thus determine what can be said and what must remain unsaid, who can speak with authority and who must listen. Hence, discourses and discursive practices influence how we live out our lives. They shape our subjective experiences, because it is primarily through language and discourse that social reality is given meaning (McLaren, 1988).

Critical educational theorists argue that, since knowledge is socially constructed, culturally mediated, and historically situated, dominant discourses function to determine what is relegated to the arenas of truth and relevancy at any given moment in time. Thus, they hold a view of truth as relational, in that statements considered true are seen as arising within a particular context, based on the relations of power operative in a society, discipline, or institution. This helps to explain why only those discourses that accommodate to the power relations prescribed by the dominant discourse are generally acknowledged, and how these are clearly linked to the question of what they produce and in whose interest they function (Freire, 1985).

Consequently, critical discourse must focus on those interests and assumptions that inform the generation of knowledge itself. But true to its emancipatory principles, it must also be self-critical and deconstructive of dominant discourses the moment they are ready to solidify into hegemonic knowledge. In this way, critical pedagogy can work to replace the "authoritarian discourse of imposition and recitation with a voice capable of speaking one's own terms, a voice capable of listening, retelling, and challenging the very grounds of knowledge and power" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 20).

Critical pedagogy relegates to critical reason the possibility of establishing the conditions of discourse for the raising and reconciling of controversial claims related to knowledge and power. Here, *critical reason* stands for liberation from all regulations of social intercourse and interactions that suppress the debatability of truth (Forester, 1987).

Many critical theorists turn to Habermas's (1970) theory of *practical discourse* and the *ideal speech situation* for a rational standard by which to judge existing discourses. Such a standard suggests that a system of communication can only be free from both internal and external constraints when all participants to a discourse possess equal opportunity to select and use speech acts. John Forester describes the process as having the following four requirements for all potential participants:

1. the same chance to employ communication speech acts, that is, to initiate and perpetuate the discourse. . . .

2. the same chance to employ representative speech acts to express attitudes, feelings, and intentions. . . .
3. equal chance to use regulative speech acts; they must be equally able to command and oppose, permit, and forbid arguments. They must also have equal opportunity to both make and accept promises and provide and call for justifications. . . .
4. equal opportunity to provide interpretations and explanations and also to problematize any validity claims so that in the long run no one view is exempt from consideration and criticism. (Forester, 1987, pp. 186-88)

What this concept clearly suggests to critical educational theorists is that respecting different discourses and putting into practice a theory committed to the plurality of voices will require nothing short of political and social transformation. Given this reality, *critical discourse as a transformative act* must assume an active and decisive participation relative to what is produced and for whom. Freire and Macedo address this notion in relation to the *reinvention of power*:

The reinvention of power that passes through the reinvention of production would entail the reinvention of culture within which environments would be created to incorporate, in a participatory way, all of those discourses that are presently suffocated by the dominant discourse. [This] legitimation of these different discourses would authenticate the plurality of voices in the reconstruction of a truly democratic society. (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 55)

Critical pedagogy addresses this transformative requirement through a discourse that rigorously unites the language of critique with the language of possibility. Here, Giroux (1985) calls for a process of schooling in which educators as *transformative intellectuals* recognize their ability to transform critically the world. In so doing, educators can carry out a counter-hegemonic project as they work to challenge economic, political, and social injustices, both within and outside schools. At the same time, teachers can work to create the conditions that give students an active voice in their learning, and support their development as social agents who have the knowledge and courage to struggle

for a discourse of hope, as they also struggle to overcome the discourse of despair that is so often found in the lives of both teachers and students of subordinate cultural communities.

Dialogue and Conscientization

Critical theorists unwaveringly support the Freirian notion of dialogue as an emancipatory educational process—a process that, above all, is dedicated to the empowerment of students through disconfirming the dominant ideology of the traditional educational discourse and illuminating the freedom of students to act on their world.

For critical educators, dialogue is never perceived as a mere technique to be utilized for appropriating students' affections or obedience. Instead, it is perceived as an educational strategy committed to the development of their critical consciousness; it is a process of *conscientization*. Freire defines his notion of dialogue in *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (Shor & Freire, 1987) using the following terms:

Dialogue must be understood as something taking part in the historical nature of human beings. It is part of our historical process in becoming human beings. . . . [D]ialogue is a moment where human beings meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it. . . . [T]hrough dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can act critically to transform reality. (pp. 98-99)

This dialogical method represents the basis for a critical pedagogical structure in which dialogue and analysis serve as the foundation for reflection and action. It is an educational strategy that clearly supports the principles of what Freire (1970) calls a *problem-posing educational approach*: an approach in which the relationship of students and teachers is, without question, dialogical—students learn from teachers; teachers must also learn from students. The content of this form of education takes into account the concrete lived experiences of the students themselves as the historical character of their experiences are explored through questions that often begin, "How did we come to be what we are?" And, "How could we change?" In this way, critical educators

encourage the free and uncoerced exchange of ideas and experiences. They demonstrate a caring for their students and provide them with emotional support to help them overcome their feelings of inadequacy and guilt as they become critics of the social world they inhabit (Fay, 1987).

What dialogue, then, represents is a human phenomenon in which students, with the guidance of the teacher, move into a discovery of themselves as social agents. It is through their encounter with reality that they are supported and yet challenged to assess their world critically and to unmask the central contradictions of their existence. And, in so doing, by way of praxis—the authentic union of their action and reflection—they enter into a process of conscientization.

For Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987), conscientization refers to the process by which students—not as recipients of knowledge, but as knowing subjects—achieve a deepening awareness of the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives and their capacity to recreate them. This implies the critical insertion of a conscientized individual into a demythologized reality. It is this state of conscientization that assists students to transform their apathy—formerly nourished by their disempowerment—into the *denunciation* of the previous reality and their *annunciation* into a viable, transformed existence. Further, conscientization is conceived as a recurrent, regenerating process that is utilized for constant clarification of what remains hidden within, while students continue to move into the world and enter into dialogue anew.

A CRITICAL BICULTURAL PEDAGOGY

From the above discussion of critical pedagogy, it is clearly evident that the theoretical constructs that constitute a critical perspective of education are also highly conducive to the educational needs of bicultural students. Coupled with a political construct of cultural democracy, this critical dimension can effectively provide a foundation for a liberatory practice of bicultural education that can genuinely prepare Black, Latino, Asian, Native American, and other bicultural students to become transformative agents in their world.

A critical bicultural pedagogy holds the possibility for a discourse of hope in light of the tensions, conflicts, and contradictions that students must face in the process of their bicultural development. A practice that is based on this framework of critical bicultural education will provide for students the opportunity to explore their own world as they seek also to understand how the dominant culture affects their lives and how they view themselves as human beings.

Through an understanding of hegemony and cultural invasion, critical bicultural educators can create culturally democratic environments where they can assist students to identify the different ways that domination and oppression have an impact on their lives. Through a process of dialogue, all students can examine and compare together the content of historical texts with their own personal and cultural histories and come to understand their role as social agents in society. In this way, bicultural students can also begin to experience democratic participation as part of their lived histories as they develop together a spirit of solidarity and an understanding of the common good.

A critical bicultural pedagogy can also create the conditions for bicultural students to develop the courage to question the structures of domination that control their lives. In this way, they can awaken their bicultural voice as they participate in opportunities to reflect, critique, and act together with other bicultural students who are also experiencing the same process of discovery. Hence, these students are not just provided with curricular content that is considered culturally appropriate and language instruction in their native tongues. Rather, they are actively involved in considering critically all curriculum content, texts, classroom experiences, and their own lives for the emancipatory as well as oppressive and contradictory values that inform their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Through this process, bicultural students develop their abilities to understand critically their lives and how to engage actively in the world.

If bicultural students are to succeed in American schools, critical bicultural educators must accept a commitment to work in transforming the traditionally oppressive structures of educational institutions and to struggle with bicultural students so they may

truly become beings for themselves. In summary, this can be best accomplished through a critical bicultural pedagogy that

1. is built on a theory of cultural democracy;
2. supports a dialectical view of the world, particularly as it relates to the notion of culture and the bicultural experience;
3. recognizes those forms of cultural invasion that negatively influence the lives of bicultural students and their families;
4. utilizes a dialogical model of communication that can create the conditions for students of color to find their voice through opportunities to reflect, critique, and act on their world to transform it;
5. acknowledges the issue of power in society and the political nature of schooling; and
6. above all, is committed to the empowerment and liberation of all people.

NOTE

1. For an excellent introduction to the historical and philosophical roots of dialectical theory, see *The Emergence of Dialectical Theory* (Warren, 1984).