TOWARDS A CRITICAL DEMOCRATIC PEDAGOGY:
A MARXIAN CRITIQUE®

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Abstract

As the trend towards the implementation of an instrumental pedagogical approach to education gains momentum under the impact of global economic imperatives, the attention among concerned educators is turning towards the formulation of a critical democratic pedagogy as a counterweight to the narrowing of educational aims set by government education policies.

However, if this liberal approach to pedagogy is to become an effective reality rather than remain a set of ideal principles the process of its formulation must include a critical evaluation not only of its assumptions and concepts but also of the nature of the education context in which the approach is expected to operate.

It is the aim of this paper to initiate such an evaluation from a Marxian standpoint which requires not only a critique of the ideals expressed in the notion of critical democratic pedagogy, but also a demonstration of a Marxian critique at work.

What this initial critique reveals is that there is a tendency among proponents of critical democratic pedagogy to assume that its concepts express universal principles whereas those principles are shaped to conform to the imperatives of the capitalist market economy which is also responsible for the implementation of the instrumental approach to education.
Key Words: Education policy, Pedagogy, Public schooling, Critical methodology, Philosophy of Education, Democracy, Pragmatism, Educational progressivism, Liberalism, Postmodernism

Introduction

There is little doubt that in the name of economic efficiency there has been a relentless trend in government education policies devised by supporters on the neo-liberal and neo-conservative Right of politics, particularly in the English-speaking developed nations of the West, to implement an instrumental pedagogical approach to education justified with reference to global competitive market conditions. In this context and as information becomes a major force driving the economy, so it is argued, education must be relevant, efficient and cost effective in producing the kind of technical knowledge and skills necessary for a nation’s economic survival.

This approach to education has tended to sideline the social values which ideally in a liberal democratic society are considered to be integral to every student’s education, namely, equal opportunity, good citizenship, critical democracy, the rule of law, protection of human rights and social justice for all. As noted by some educators this has led for instance to an apathetic attitude towards and an ignorance of civic, citizenship and democratic principles among students in Australia (Dobozy 2005, p. 2-6), and the persistence of inequality in the UK as well as the US based on class, race, gender, and education opportunity (Dave Hill 2001, Brosio 2000), while in the Netherlands educators, Jansen, Chioncel and Dekkers note:

Social cohesion and integration have become ‘hot topics’ for political, academic and public debates over the past decades. Insecurity about the consequences of global immigration and the rise of multicultural societies coincides with concern about growing divisions among the population, unease about vanishing values and norms, and anxiety about declining social trust and civic participation (Jansen et al 2006, p. 189).

Many educators have proposed something along the lines of a critical democratic pedagogy intended to redress the imbalance in the provision of education by introducing a civics oriented curriculum that will assist students to be come critical, autonomous, civic minded citizens who actively and democratically participate in decisions affecting their quality of life and the life chances of themselves and members of their community.

However, while in principle the proposal is a positive initiative towards widening the aims of education beyond the limits of a competency based learning mode of education it is important to make a critical assessment not only whether as envisaged the proposal can deliver on the hoped for outcomes given the economic and education context in which it is expected to operate because there are two possible outcomes which may or may not accord with the intended outcomes.
On the one hand it may be instrumental in challenging the current trends in the education system and ultimately the capitalist economy itself if the pedagogy succeeds in assisting all students to become critical and civic minded citizens insisting on exercising their democratic rights. On the other hand it may exert a reforming influence in order to ameliorate some of the worst aspects of the instrumental curriculum without jeopardising the status quo. In this case the ideals underlying the pedagogy, for example a community of democratically involved and self regulating groups or teams of citizens, can be domesticated and incorporated into the arsenal of techniques employed by business enterprises in the management of their workplaces.1

It is the aim of this paper with the aid of a Marxian critique to determine which alternative is the likely outcome in the contemporary situation where there is a considerable gap between the ideals of critical democratic citizenship and the reality marked by inequity, and the marginalisation and exploitation of a sizeable majority of people which, it has been shown, education systems tend to perpetuate.

The critique in the paper will concentrate on analysing Brosio's pedagogical text *Philosophical Scaffolding for the Construction of Critical Democratic Education* as epitomising the essential principles of the critical democratic approach to pedagogy. Although located within the context of the US education system and alongside US radical education theorists such as Apple, Giroux and McLaren Brosio offers his text to educators, particularly those working in the K-12 public sector, to assist them in the construction of a philosophy of education which is congruent with the liberal principles of social equality, individual autonomy and freedom, democratic empowerment, inclusive and critical participatory citizenship, social justice, respect for diversity, and a schooling and society that is more 'caring' (Brosio 2000, p. xi).

In the examination of the Brosio project I make a brief reference to the context in which US Left intellectuals and educators are forced to operate before moving on to discuss the aims of the Brosio project in which the primary problematic for him is the epistemological issue, and finally, the notion and categories of critical democratic pedagogy as he develops and demonstrates it as a methodology.

It needs to be kept in mind that the analysis is conducted at a high level of generality. This is not intended to ignore that there are qualitative differences in the provision of education in other nations. It should also be kept in mind that a comprehensive Marxian critique would include an analysis not only of the ideals and assumptions expressed in the notion of a critical democratic pedagogy but also the contexts within which is intended to operate. However, it is a project which is beyond the scope of this paper, but the demonstration of the Marxian critique that this paper seeks to provide may be useful to readers.

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1 The work of Wenger (1998) exemplifies this tendency.
The US Context

For those on the Left of the political spectrum these are demoralising times particularly for those like educators Brosio, Apple, Giroux and McLaren who operate within the US. John Bellamy Foster (1990, pp. 265-266) explains.

Because of the close relationship between capital and the state in the US the ruling elite have been able to project a hegemonic ‘consensus’ from above which has effectively marginalised a sizeable proportion of the American population by removing them from active participation in the democratic process in that country. To challenge the ‘consensus’ is deemed to be un-American so that US Left intellectuals, most of whom are the products of the rise of the new left in the 1960s, have come to realise that they have no alternative in advancing the interests of the marginalised but to adopt a radical liberal approach and attempt democratic reforms from a position within the dominant liberal democratic ideology.

The strategy, however, entails employing liberal ideological categories the worst aspect of which, according to Foster, is a refusal to view society as an organic whole and an acceptance of a democratic theory of knowledge in which all facts are deemed equally valid. In situating himself in the Deweyan tradition informed by education progressivism, philosophical pragmatism and political liberalism Brosio can be identified as operating within this radical liberal context.

The Brosio Project

The aims of Brosio’s project of advancing social justice in the realms of politics and education are twofold: one, to equip educators, particularly those working in K-12 US public schools, and citizens generally to become practicing philosophers; and two, to demonstrate in a pluralist society like the US where, according to Brosio, there is an absence not only of universally accepted principles but also a possible absence of truth certainty and standards of objectivity, how to engage in philosophical discourse with others to arrive at a consensus on a practical philosophy of education, so that on the basis of this learning they would be able to construct a democracy, and an education congruent with it, as an alternative to the oppression in schools and as a forum and vehicle of empowerment. Central to his project is the development of an epistemology, pedagogy and liberatory curriculum which promotes justice in relation to social class, racial/ethnic, gender and sexual orientation justice

In demonstrating the principles of his pedagogical approach, pluralist democratic inclusiveness and the democratic process he advocates, Brosio draws on an eclectic mix of ideas from those secular philosophers and thinkers whom he considers, best support and justify his propositions and accord with his frame of reference, one that is informed by education progressivism largely derived from Dewey, philosophical pragmatism and political liberalism (Brosio 2000, pp. xi-xiii, 2, 14-15, 21-22, 34-35).
In summary Brosio’s social justice agenda is dependent: one, on a philosophically literate population; two, on the universal acceptance of Dewey’s scientific problem-solving oriented method of inquiry; three, on the ability of people to pursue change through democratic processes without reference to truth claims to justify their propositions and interpretations; and four, on the existence of an ideal democratically supportive community. Central to his agenda, however, is the epistemological issue.

The Epistemological Issue

Brosio locates his epistemological position midway on a continuum between what he deems to be the dogmatism of truth certainty as represented in ‘grand narratives’ and in orthodox and authoritarian principles which, he claims, have hitherto dominated schooling, and the relativism of truth uncertainty as reflected in the philosophies of secularism through to postmodernism and cynicism. For Brosio if the goal is social and educational change for justice in a democratic and pluralist society both positions are equally untenable.

The only alternative is to occupy a democratic and pragmatist middle ground based only on the possibilities of truth certainty and uncertainty. For at issue is not truth claims but a pragmatic empiricist approach in which people in a democratic setting can collectively arrive at a consensus regarding what is problematic for them subjectively on the basis of persuasive philosophical argument and rational scientific inquiry. People are then supposedly enabled to pursue a course of action for change. Wood (1995, pp. 256, 258) describes this position as the new pluralism of the Left which celebrates the unity of diverse human beings in a democratic community without allowing these differences to become relations of domination and oppression.

Solving the epistemological dilemma is Brosio’s first priority rather than an analysis not only of the role that contemporary capitalism plays in perpetuating the issues he is concerned to address but also of the difficulties of achieving a consensus in a heterogeneous society like that in the US which sanctifies the ideology of individualism, pluralism and a democratic vision amid a reality that for many people is one of gross inequity and discrimination.

The question for a critical analysis, however, is whether Brosio’s assumptions are justified that democratic majority decision-making as the means of resolving the truth question at least temporarily is a positive way forward out of Brosio’s epistemological dogmatism vs. relativism dilemma.
For an answer we have to refer to the 18th century philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who on his own presuppositions was forced to conclude that in the last analysis we cannot know reality as it is in itself apart from our mental constructs of it. On this basis it can be argued that the only truth certainty we can hope for is our subjective mental construction based on our own individual experiences, and that therefore the subjective constructs of all individuals are equally valid. However, if through persuasive philosophical argument backed by the rationality of something like Dewey's scientific method of inquiry and supported by references to acknowledged philosophers and scholars—if by these means we can convince others in the context of a liberal empowering democracy that their constructs and experiences parallel ours—then we will have chosen a middle way through the epistemological dilemma and it might be possible to achieve a consensus on what is the possible truth of a situation and how it might be changed.

As a demonstration of this approach Brosio draws on a comprehensive and impressive range of scholarly views which include the works not only of the classical Greek philosophers, but also of those whom he terms ‘Various Reds’; the praxis and scientific methods of Marx and Dewey whose thinking he considers to be complementary; and the works of existentialists, liberationists, postmodernists, identity politics, and even the Greens.

On the surface the concepts he appropriates appear to support his principles of liberation from oppression. Yet, in their original philosophical, theoretical and historical frameworks, many of the concepts he appropriates and the works he draws on are not compatible, nor do they necessarily fit on the place he assigns them on his continuum. In the process of appropriation Brosio does not appear to recognise that these concepts tend to lose their context-specific meaning and function. As a result they tend to become abstract ciphers without substance derived from some concrete reality.

Two examples illustrate the point. The US democratic tradition is said to be modelled on the classical Athenian experience. In the context of a class-bound society as in the city-state of Athens the notion of democracy meant the rule of the people deemed to be economically independent citizens whether artisans or aristocrats. Under these conditions it follows among other factors that women, slaves and indigenous people were not included because they either did not reside in Athens or were not economically independent. As the concept has been appropriated be a bourgeois ruling class the fact that Athenian citizens were empowered to exercise their political rights because they were economically independent has been conveniently ignored. Without economic independence there cannot be empowerment, political rights notwithstanding.

The other example is Brosio’s claim that there is a close kinship between Marx’s notion of praxis and Dewey’s notion of the scientific method of inquiry. Again, abstracting the categories of praxis and the scientific method of inquiry from their respective frames of reference serves to mask the real fault lines which divide the two thinkers. Marx, for instance, intended his method to be a weapon for workers in the class struggle for transformative change against capitalism’s oppression and domination. Dewey for his part accepted capitalism as a given, but paradoxically, for his ‘learning-by-doing’ pedagogy to be effective, it required an ideal democratic community setting, like some oasis in a capitalist desert so to speak. On both counts Dewey’s scientifically
based method as a dynamic force for transformative change is severely weakened.

These examples show that the process of abstraction in which concepts and categories are taken out of the real context that has shaped them tends to weaken their dynamic possibilities.

However, while Brosio’s eclectic approach is impressive, it does not resolve the truth certainty-uncertainty dilemma. Rather, in order to provide some basis on which truth questions can be determined he shifts the onus of ‘proof’ as a concern of logic to the socio-political arena. In this context validation is subject to the arbitration of the democratic ‘will of the people’ which amounts to an aggregation of individual subjective volitions and judgements. This means that validation depends on socio-political criteria which are variable, mutable and situational, but which above all within the existing social class relations characteristic of capitalism, are subject to quite wide ranging differentials in the exercise of power.

Depending on the social relations in some ideal democratic universe, which has yet to be realised, socio-political criteria may be a viable alternative, but in the circumstances in which capitalist market relations are embedded in all aspects of social life, shifting the burden of ‘proof’ to the political arena exposes epistemological validation to the relativism Brosio rejects and therefore to manipulation either for personal advantage or in the interests of supporting ruling class ideologies. For example, it provides the advocates of capitalism, including propagandists, ‘spin doctors’ attached to politicians and corporations, and neo-liberal ideologues for instance, with ammunition by means of which they are able to distort or mask reality and to discredit opponents for their own ends in the name of democracy.

It also has the effect of undermining the necessary solidarity and concerted political attempts seriously to challenge the unfettered rule of market capitalism. In fact, by maintaining ideological divisions over the truth question, as well as the social divisions and inequality of which they are an expression, it can be shown that capitalism actually requires and partly flourishes on such divisions (Raduntz 2005b). In this divide-and-rule situation it is possible to strike a balance against bias not only between ideological opponents so that one side does not gain traction over the other. It can also, it might be said, achieve a semblance of balance between the imperatives of capitalism and those of democracy without threatening either.

Under these circumstances it would be virtually impossible to establish wide consensus as a necessary condition, in Brosio’s terms, within which questions of truth certainty could be settled without working towards changing the nature of capitalism’s class relations and establishing the kind of democracy Brosio advocates.
**Critical Democratic Pedagogy and its Categories**

**Democracy & Class**

On the surface US representative democracy is meant to convey the notion that it entails rule by the people in what is held to be a largely egalitarian society. In fact, as it is drafted in the US Constitution, the representative form of democracy is designed to favour the propertied oligarchy (Wood 1995, p. 219). As a consequence, because the ‘will of the people’ is filtered through representatives who are deemed most qualified to do so, the ‘people’ are distanced not only from the political sphere but also geographically from the centre of federal power. The ‘people’ are no longer defined, like the Athenian demos, as a community of democratically participating citizens. Rather the ‘people’ are composed of a disaggregated collection of private individuals whose public interests is represented by a distant central state.

The redefinition of the idea of democracy is, on Wood’s account (1995, p. 224ff), related to the social structure of capitalism in which the universality of political rights leaves property relations and the power of appropriation in tact. A style of democracy therefore has been constituted in which formal equality of political rights has a minimal effect on the inequalities and on the relations of domination and exploitation in other spheres, particularly in the sphere of the capitalist economy. In fact, the capitalist economy has acquired a life of its own which situates it outside the ambit of citizenship, political freedom, and democratic accountability. As a result, economic inequality and exploitation can exist side by side with political equality and democratic rights.

Nor does the liberal form of democracy improve the situation because within its ideological parameters freedom from the market as a kind of empowerment and liberation from domination is absolutely unthinkable.

The very condition that makes it possible for us to define democracy as we do in this way, is the separation and the immunity of the economic sphere from democratic power, so that protecting that immunity has even become an essential criterion of democracy. It is a definition which paradoxically allows for democracy to be invoked against the empowerment of the people in the economic sphere, even for it to be invoked in defence of a curtailment of democratic rights in other spheres if that is what it takes to protect property and the market against democratic power which may threaten the basis on which capitalism stands.

On this account it becomes evident that without democratic participants acquiring a measure of economic independence that roughly conforms to the Athenian experience and without abolishing the class division inherent in capitalism there is little prospect of Brosio’s conception of democracy being realised.

Mention of class raises the question of Brosio’s identification of class, not so much with the struggle for transformative change, but with one form of identity among others, including gender, race and ethnicity. On this basis
class loses its privileged position as the object of transformative change. Yet, again paradoxically, it is as class conscious workers that Brosio exhorts teachers to work towards altering the contradictory imperatives of capitalism and democracy in favour of the latter. However, merely altering the contradictory imperatives makes the problem appear as an out of kilter balancing act in need of adjustment, whereas a much more vigorous and dynamic effort is required for the benefit of democracy to dislodge the class relations on which capitalism’s imperatives depend.

The key role that the class relation plays in maintaining the status quo takes the category beyond the politics of identity. This is because class by definition is a structural relation of inequality and power (Wood 1995, p. 258). It would therefore be difficult to reconcile it on moral grounds as an identity of difference along with gender, race and ethnicity in a vision of an ideal democratic community, one which unites diverse human beings in freedom and equality without suppressing their differences.

Because capitalism is constituted by class exploitation it is more than a system of oppression. It is a ruthless totalising process which shapes every aspect of our lives and subjects all social life to the requirements of the market (Wood 1995, p. 262). Without an appreciation of the role that class plays in maintaining capitalism’s imperatives in education and in society at large the power of Brosio’s project is severely weakened.

**Critique**

Like the category of ‘democracy’ the meaning and dynamics of critique too are determined by the philosophical framework and the socio-economic context within which it functions. Since the Enlightenment the category has entered the lexicon of social reformers and revolutionaries as a mark of their radical credentials. However, in its various incarnations, including Brosio’s usage of the term, the concept has lost much of its hoped for dynamism as a force for transformative change.

In order to account for this it is necessary to refer to Kant’s failure to resolve the epistemological dichotomy, Hegel’s determination to resolve it, and the adoption by Marx of Hegel’s epistemological principles as the ‘rational kernel’ of his formulation of critique as a force for transformative change (Raduntz 2001).

While Hegel vehemently rejected Kant’s epistemological conclusion that we cannot know reality as it is in itself, and thus, supposedly putting paid to the truth certainty question, he recognised that Kant’s notion of critique could provide the medium through which we could understand reality in itself as a historical process with reference to a logic which centred on the dynamics of change, known as the dialectic.

In Hegel’s dialectic Brosio’s contention that truth certainty and truth uncertainty are two tenable extremes leaves the dichotomy unresolved even when, as noted above, the arbitration of truth validity is left to democratic decision making. The opposite of collective wisdom can be, of course, collective ignorance. Hegel offers a possible solution. For him through
our critical faculties we can come to an understanding that truth certainty and truth uncertainty do not constitute alternative epistemological alternatives, nor opposite ends of a continuum of knowing possibilities as Brosio asserts. Rather they represent two moments in the process of knowing which moves back and forth from a state of knowing to a state of not knowing as we try to make sense of and operate within our constantly changing world.

This means that we are continually shaken out of our ‘comfort zone’ of knowing with certainty to a zone of uncertainty of not knowing as historical forces of change impinge upon our consciousness. Criticism helps us to negotiate our understanding of our historical reality as it is in itself because both historical change and development and the logic of change as embedded in our critical faculties operate according to the same laws of change.

For his part, while rejecting Hegel’s idealist frame of reference, Marx (1954, p. 29; 1968, p. 30). nevertheless recognised in the former’s dialectic as the ‘rational kernel’ for a critique which does not merely contemplate and interpret the world but functions to effect transformation change. In this case it does not accept anything, even capitalism, as given and therefore beyond historical change.²

By dismissing Hegel for his so-called absolute idealism, and therefore placing him at the truth certainty end of the spectrum, Brosio misconstrues the rational kernel of Hegel’s dialectic, which accounts for the dynamism of critique. From a Marxian standpoint critique acquires its dynamism from the subject matter it is investigating in recognition of the fact that, as Hegel insisted, to know a thing is to grasp it as a ‘moment’ in time in the process of development and inevitable decline.

On this account the Marxian form of critique functions to negate for instance what is a momentary stage in the development of education dominated by competency-based learning, which is proving to be a barrier to the realisation of a socially oriented education provision, and to run with the positive forces of change, in the growing realisation that a better future is possible if the positive benefits of the capitalist economy are distributed socially and more equitable across all peoples. By attaching the term ‘critical’ to the notions of democratic and pedagogy without incorporating the dynamics of change in the notion is to compromise its potency as a force for transformation change and reduce it to a merely negative reflection on an existing situation. Lacking the ‘mortar’ of critique in its dynamic sense Brosio’s construction of a critical democratic education becomes a mechanical rather than an organic process arising out of the contradictory economic and social imperatives with which educators have to deal in their work.

Instead it turns out that within his frame of reference, which includes educational progressivism, philosophical pragmatism and political liberalism, the impoverishment of critique in Brosio’s schema is due to the fact that like the term ‘democracy’ it is defined by the discourse of bourgeois liberalism. This renders the possibility of Brosio’s pedagogy becoming a force for

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² For a more comprehensive exposition focussed on the nature and development of critique within the Hegelian-Marxian tradition see Radunz (2001)
transformative change difficult to contemplate because the liberal ideology is formulated to support rather than undermine the capitalist market economy.

The Notion of Critical Democratic Pedagogy as a whole

As the analysis of Brosio’s pedagogical text demonstrates the project of realising a critical democratic pedagogy that will overcome the issues exercising the minds of concerned educators and citizens is not encouraging without seeking an explanation in the imperatives of the capitalist economy which is behind the drive towards extracting maximum benefits for capital at the least cost from education. The introduction of an instrumental curriculum approach is one way of doing this.

Those imperatives have their source in the constant and continuous drive for ever expanding private capital growth which is the means of overcoming capitalism’s endemic economic crises. It is in this context that the contemporary change in education and the issues of social values which they raise are to be explained.

As a means of resolving its current capital accumulation crises capitalism is impelled to exploit and expand into any avenues, including education, which are deemed to be potentially profitable (See Harvey 1982). In the process it attempts to restructure institutions and services to conform to market capitalisation efficiencies to the detriment of the social needs which they are meant to serve. Paradoxically, these tendencies have the effect of undermining the very social conditions on which the economic system depends.

Inevitably, the situation gives rise to social problems of which those identified at the beginning of this paper are an expression. In this regard the initiative of a critical democratic pedagogy is a positive contribution towards introducing change in the current direction of education. However, the typical response to the social problems created by capitalism is the formulation of a set of utopian ideas which merely function as temporary bandaid solutions without addressing the root cause.

This is evident not only in Brosio’s work but in much of the work emanating from a liberal Left standpoint which while proposing reforms remains imprisoned within the dominant liberal ideology. An example of these features can be found in the educational progressive ideas which Brosio draws from Dewey.

The realisation of this form of education is dependent on an ideal, pre-existing, supportive democratic community which Dewey’s scientific problem-solving method and learning-by-doing pedagogy are meant to be instrumental in constructing. Without Dewey’s problem-solving strategy being directed towards resolving the problem of capitalism itself as a means of resolving social crises, his learning-by-doing pedagogy is, as someone has remarked, like learning to swim without entering the water.

A good beginning for instance would be to mount an immanent critique of George W. Bush’s education legislation of 2002 No Child Left Behind, its instrumental character and the politics behind it which, I understand, is
likely to place severe limits on the provision of quality education on which the realisation of the kind of democracy Brosio envisages is dependent (Mayer 2004).

While Brosio makes a passing reference to the circumstances of educators’ work under current education policy regimes in the US he does not elaborate on the actual impact of capitalist market forces on their work as these penetrate education, nor on the impact of scientific management techniques on schools. Both of these leave little room or energy for educators, particularly in public schools, to teach for democracy by doing or to work towards educational change beyond the strictly government prescribed curriculum mostly informed by neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies.

Taken as a whole the notion of critical democratic pedagogy for active participatory citizenship, as Brosio presents it, can be seen to emerge with what is essentially a bourgeois capitalist discourse, culture and ideology. There is the sense that those US educators like Brosio, who situate themselves on the Left of the political spectrum seek to engender reforms that accord with the prescribed utopian ideals which find expression in the ‘American Dream’ ideology, more through persuasive rhetoric than through challenging the capitalist system as it operates within the US.

For K-12 US educators working in public schools at the chalkface trying to live up to the ‘American Dream’ and charging their students to do the same within the framework of a critical democratic pedagogy must be a demoralising educative experience.

**Conclusion**

The foregoing critique has shown that reference to context establishes why educators are motivated to propose something of the order of a critical democratic pedagogy as a response to the sidelining of social and civic values in education in favour of a competency-based learning curriculum.

Given the entrenched ideology of liberalism and the strength of the relationship between capital and the state particularly in the US challenging what amounts to liberal motherhood statement with which few would disagree is an intimidating experience. Mounting such a challenge against it, let alone against the economic system which it protects and legitimates almost constitutes apostasy. As a consequence these educators open themselves to attack from today’s equivalent of the Spanish Inquisition.

The situation goes some way towards explaining why radical educators in the US like Brosio decide instead to take up a position which endeavours to make the ideology of liberalism and its more practical expressions in progressive education and pragmatism a universal actuality.

However, as shown, such a course leads only to bandaid reform because it does not address the root cause which can be traced to a capitalist economy dependent and even thriving on inequity, discrimination, exploitation and social divisions. In these circumstances reforms have little chance of permanency.
There is no doubt that the proponents of a critical democratic pedagogy make a very positive contribution towards rethinking the problems educators face at the chalkface and how they can be resolved in a socially acceptable way. The error, however, lies in accepting liberal principles as universals and therefore rendering them ahistorical whereas they can be shown to be ideological expressions of a historically specific bourgeois social formation, of which the US is a forward example, which is necessarily transient.

It follows in this historical context that transformative change does not occur in response to a set of utopian ideas, but organically from a critical evaluation of an actual problematic situation. It is the kind of epistemology, of knowing historical reality as it is in itself, which challenges Brosio’s democratic solution to his epistemological dilemma, likewise the notion that the form of pedagogy required to resolve the problematic cannot be determined before a rigorous critique has made an evaluation not only of proposals like Brosio’s but also of the context within which the problematic has emerged and to which such proposals are a response.

As the Marxian critique has demonstrated through an analysis of Brosio’s pedagogical 'construction' there is little prospect of a critical democratic pedagogy becoming a dynamic force for transformative change that will eliminate the problems it is meant to resolve.

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