Reflections on contemporary challenges and possibilities for democracy and education

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Reflections on contemporary challenges and possibilities for democracy and education

This paper is one of two which bring together leading educational researchers to consider some of the key challenges facing democracy and education during the twenty-first century, including rising social and economic inequality, political instability, and the existential threats of global pandemics and climate change. In this paper, key educational scholar–activists respond to the challenges and possibilities for democracy and education, with consideration of the importance of reimagining education as being for democracy. The questions asked in this paper have particular salience for educational leaders, who must be at the centre of any commitment to democratic education.

Keywords: democratic values; public education; social justice; educational values

Introduction | Stewart Riddle, Amanda Heffernan and David Bright

As the world continues to face a lethal pandemic, climate crisis and rising social and economic inequality, the 'long democratic recession', according to Freedom House, 'is deepening' (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021). While liberal–democratic governments have significantly restricted freedoms, authoritarian regimes have intensified efforts to subdue and coerce their populations in a bid for increased power and control, the spread of misinformation through social media and mainstream platforms has proliferated, and armed conflict, disease and famine continues to ravage many parts of the world, all while a commitment to tackle the climate crisis remains out of reach. The outlook for democracy this century appears highly uncertain.

The relationship between education and democracy is both complex and longstanding. How we understand the connections between the two depends on what we mean by both education and democracy: as learning, as growth, as a public or private good, as a way of living, as a set of social structures and institution, or as an essential human freedom. At a basic level, the development of language, cognition and understanding are crucial to how we engage with the natural world, with ourselves, and with each other, with what it means to be human. However, how we understand and engage with the world as humans is also mediated by what we value and what have learnt (and been taught) to value and desire, be they public or private goods, institutions and experiences. Much educational work remains to be done—from early childhood through to higher education—to explore what we are capable of as democratic citizens and how we might more fully realise our capacities to work together in collaborative and sustainable ways through democratic modes of human endeavour.

Educational leaders play an important role in shaping vision, strategy, and the path into the future, in ways that must be responsive to local needs and contexts, while recognising the particular challenges facing education settings within their broader communities. Critical perspectives on leadership—those concerned with questions of social justice, power and emancipation (Niesche & Heffernan, 2020)—closely align

with the questions addressed in this collaborative paper. The contemporary challenges facing society are the questions that educational leaders must face in the everyday enactment of their roles in schools, universities, early childhood education and care, and other formal and informal sites of education.

The questions addressed in this paper are the same fundamental questions that leaders ask every day—what the responsibility of education as a social institution should and could be in response to contemporary issues, including rising social and economic inequality, the climate crisis, and the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These questions, while framed by current concerns, are not new. For as long as democracy and education have been considered in tandem, the tensions between realising the potential of democratic action and a commitment to civic participation and the public good have come into conflict with the structures, traditions and curriculum of schooling.

Any attempt to put a democratic ethos at the heart of schooling requires the full-hearted engagement and commitment from educational leaders, who can drive change at the levels of policy and practice. This paper builds on a body of research which has shown the possibilities for educational leadership which is grounded in a commitment to education as a public good. For example, Gunter and Courtney (2021, p. 194) called for *educative* leadership which reflects this commitment, noting that:

> The curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are therefore sites where not only can all participants be involved but which can also raise questions about the context in which deliberations and decisions are taking place. The inclusive exercise of power can expose, name and make contributions to resolving social injustices within educational services and the wider context in which teaching and learning are happening.

The call for leaders to expose, name, and make contributions to resolving social injustices in education can begin with a reimagining of what democracy *for* education can and should be about. As part of this special issue on contemporary challenges and possibilities for education, policy and democracy, several leading scholars were invited to collaborate in a response to the task of ensuring that education in the twenty-first century can be *for* democracy, given the complex array of challenges facing young people as they move through formal and informal education, including early childhood care settings, schools, universities and further education. This paper is one of two, which bring together multiple perspectives on the contemporary challenges facing democracy and education.

The challenges to democracy in the twenty-first century are clear: populism, egocentrism, patriarchy, racism, inequality, technological capitalism and neoliberalism all threaten democracy as both a form of government and as a way of life, playing out in conflict, climate emergency, and the intensification of authoritarianism and restriction of liberties amidst a lethal pandemic. That education is central to the flourishing of democracy is also clear. As Anna Yeatman observes, education would not be necessary if we were not the peculiar species that we are, and however we define democracy, as Biesta explores, it has implications for how we act as humans in society, aware of ourselves and our others. How we educate for democracy, however, is less clear.

These important questions and considerations about education and democracy can serve as a starting point for educational leaders who are concerned with enacting

new approaches aimed towards strengthening education as a public good, redressing inequities, and ensuring young people are supported to live well in a world worth living in (Kemmis et al., 2014). Education *for* and *as* democracy necessarily involves duty, resistance, creativity, imagination, collective action, and civic courage, which must sit at the heart of any project to reshape societies in the twenty-first century to be more inclusive and sustainable. The following contributions provide some engaging starting points for further dialogue and consideration by school leaders, teachers, policymakers and communities, in the hope of collectively seeking more democratic educational futures. We suggest that these contributions be read together with the accompanying collaborative paper and other papers included in the special issue to provide a richly contextualised set of historical and contemporary challenges and opportunities for education and democracy.

Rethinking democracy and education: On infrastructure and resistance |

Gert Biesta

The relationship between education and democracy has been a leading theme of modern education. Some credit John Dewey with putting this issue on the educational agenda. While the title of his book on the topic does suggest that questions about democracy, education and their relationship are a central concern, I tend to think that Dewey's treatment is rather limited, both with regard to the discussion of education and the discussion of democracy (see Biesta 2016). And while his contention that democracy is 'more than a form of government' but 'primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience' is helpful as a reminder that democracy is about the way in which we conduct our common lives, there is a risk that it downplays the importance of democratic structures, principles and institutions, particularly those that can play a role when democracy is under attack (about which more below).

Yet I tend to think that the explicit connection between democracy and (modern) education was actually established earlier, namely towards the end of the eighteenth century when, at a time of revolutions against monarchies and totalitarian regimes, it become important for citizens *to be able* to make up their own mind and, as Kant put it so very clearly in his essay on the question 'What is Enlightenment?', also for everyone to have the *courage* to make up their own mind (see Kant 1784). This turned education from a process of 'perfection'—a tradition still with us today in conceptions of *Bildung*—into a process of encouragement or, with the very appropriate phrase introduced by Dietrich Benner, into a process of 'Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit'; that is, a 'summoning to self action' (see Benner 2015). This is not the injunction to be yourself—which is the question of identity which, as I will mention below, has become a major problem in our time—but rather the injunction to be *a* self, that is, not to forget oneself and walk away from what the world is asking from you, to put it briefly (see, for more detail, Biesta 2020, 2021).

So what does all this mean for democracy and education in our time? One thing I wish to suggest, is that much hangs on how we understand both notions. This is not because all problems will be solved once we have the 'right' understanding, but because how we understand democracy and education has important implications for how we will act, both in the sphere of education and the sphere of politics.

A common way in which democracy is being articulated, is in terms of such phrases as 'the will of the people' or 'the will of the majority'. Such an *arithmetic* conception of democracy makes sense at one level—democracy seeks to give voice to

everyone—but is nonetheless insufficient for a proper understanding of what is at stake in democracy. In recent years this has particularly become visible in the rise of populism, which is an expression of the idea that *any* will of the people is necessarily democratic *because* it is an expression of the people's will. The predicament that seems to emerge here is that it would allow for a democratic abolishment of democracy itself if it turns out that there is a majority for doing so. Yet to think that the democratic values of liberty, equality and solidarity can only be in place as long as there is a majority in favour of them, and thus can 'democratically' be abolished if this is no longer the case, relies on a misunderstanding of the particular 'nature', so we might say, of these values—or perhaps 'position' and 'function' are more precise notions here.

One way to make the point, is by highlighting that democracy is not about *any* will of the people or *any* majority that can be constructed around particular values, but that democracy is about the *democratic* will of the people, that is, any will of the people that is bound by the values of liberty, equality and solidarity (for such a 'hegemonic' approach to democracy and populism see, e.g., Mouffe 2019). Perhaps an even better way to respond to populist attacks of democracy, is to highlight that the democratic values of liberty, equality and solidarity are not 'structural', so to say, but rather are 'infrastructural'. They have to be in place to make it possible for people to have values in the first place. They are in place, in other words, to make a plurality of values and visions and, as it is often called in liberal political theory, conceptions of the good life possible. This is an antidote against those who argue that the democratic values are just an arbitrary set of values that can easily be replaced by another set of values should there be a majority in favour of them. But it is also an antidote against those who wish to defend democracy by just emphasising the need for all citizens to subscribe to these values—which often creates uncomfortable tensions between the 'public' values of democratic societies and the 'private' values that citizens within such societies wish to uphold.

A comparison with sport may be helpful here because one could argue that anyone who wishes to play football, and wishes their team to win, should not just have an orientation to winning from all other teams, but should at the very same time carry a responsibility for the condition of the playing field upon which teams can play against each other. The values of democracy, then, do not belong to the winning team; they are the infrastructure that needs to be in place so that football can be played, and are thus a common concern for all who want to play the game.

The latter point—that of 'wanting to play the game'—makes the connection to education, because one thing that does become clear when looking at democracy in this way, is that it all centres around what we might term a *desire* for plurality, that is, the belief that it is good and desirable that there is room for people to have their 'own' values and their own ways of living their lives. This is what democracy seeks to ensure, which is precisely why democracy is not to be conflated with other normative hegemonies, particularly not those that seek to make plurality impossible. Some might argue that the desire to live in plurality is a natural desire but one that, through societal dynamics, becomes suppressed when children grow up. Others might argue that human beings are necessarily egocentric and therefore need to be encouraged to overcome their initial egocentrism.

Irrespective of our views about what is 'original' and what is 'acquired', this brings into view that there is important educational work to be done in providing the new generation with opportunities to meet the world, natural and social, and meet their desires in relation to the world, particularly to explore to what degree, in what way, and to what extent such desires are possible or desirable, and where, how and under what

conditions there are limits and limitations. The important educational 'work' here, in other words, is to provide opportunities for a 'reality check', that is, to find out within everything that is desired or that emerges as a desire which of these are actually *desirable*. There is always the need for judgement here—the question as to what is desirable is never clear-cut—but educators who understand that the central and ultimate orientation of their efforts should not be about students and the facilitation of their learning, growth or measurable progress, but about the ways in which students can meet the world and meet themselves in relation to the world, will engage with the challenges of education and democracy quite differently than those who see education just as giving students (and their parents) what they desire. They will understand that rather than just having a duty to *serve*, perhaps the first educational duty is the duty to *resist* (see Biesta 2015; Meirieu 2007), and to make the encounter with resistance meaningful, both for the sake of education and the for the sake of democracy.

The good of the whole: An idea of education for the twenty-first century | Anna Yeatman

There are 'overarching moments that give shape and meaning to life by relating the human venture to the larger destinies of the universe', Thomas Berry suggests. At such times we (human beings) are called to think deeply about who we are in relation to the universe and take such thought into new ways of living and organising ourselves. Now is such an overarching moment as we discover how a modern technological capitalism threatens the life systems of our planet and human society with them. This moment involves a crisis for the Western self-image and patterns of thought, a crisis that has been provoked by movements of epochal significance in the twentieth century that continue into the twenty-first. These are both intellectual and social movements (e.g., phenomenology, post-Freudian psychoanalysis, feminism, anti-racism, disability, queer activism) that call into question the binaries of mind/body, culture/nature, reason/instinct, spirit/matter, human/animal, and progressive/primitive, which have structured the patriarchal hierarchy and inequalities of modern technological capitalism. Phenomenological (especially Heideggerian) and feminist thought have shown that these binaries characterise the entire tradition of Western metaphysics that has guided the organisation of Western society from the ancient Greeks to the present. Not least of these binaries has been that of oikos and polis which leads to a conception of freedom as freedom from the claims of human embodied being. As we have been discovering, our conception of politics is profoundly limited by its historical association with these patriarchal binaries.

The modern Western conception of things public, including the great twentieth century achievement of a democratic-constitutional welfare state, has been caught within these binaries and their systemic features. As post-colonial, anti-racist and feminist movements gathered steam in the 1950s and beyond, their critique helped to reveal how much the idea of the welfare state was entrapped within these binaries. A resulting loss of faith in the welfare state as an inclusive democratic phenomenon has been exploited by neoliberal advocates of the extension of the principles of a capitalist market economy to government administration and provision of welfare services, including education (Yeatman, 2018). This has created a profound crisis for the sustaining of these services as public in character. It is a crisis that can be resolved only if we can find a new conception of publicness that is oriented in terms of an integrated idea of the human (both as a community and as individuals), one that is no longer

structured in terms of the patriarchal system of binary terms. If education, in particular, is to be recovered as a public phenomenon it must be oriented in terms of the question of what it means to be human at this time, a time when we have a profoundly new understanding of human immersion within the life systems of planet earth in context of the new science of the evolution of the universe.

Education would not be necessary if human beings were not the peculiar species that they are, a species that in Brian Greene's words is a form of life that is not only aware but aware of being aware. Language, cognition, and understanding are central to this thinking form of life. Language is the vehicle by which humans seek to know and make sense of the world in which they find themselves, and it is language that ties humans into a shared universe of stories about who they are, where they come from, how they are should organise themselves and how they should manage their affairs. These stories turn out to be trans-historical, marking out a great human inheritance of story-telling that is expressed especially but not only in the cosmologies of the Indigenous wisdom traditions, myth, the great world religions, and the new science of the universe. It is the new science of the universe that makes it possible for human beings to understand the miracle of life itself, that their being is possible only because they belong to the only known planet where life has occurred. In this new cosmological account of life in relation to the universe, for the first time historically, humans can appreciate their planetary-global unity *and* understand their profound kinship with all the human societies that have preceded them. For the first time too in context of a modern way of being human it becomes clear that the creation cosmologies of Indigenous traditions and the great world religions anticipated much of what is now coming to light in the new science of the universe. In these creation cosmologies the human being, always a communal being, has a special role precisely because human self-awareness directs an enquiring orientation to the whole of which the human is a derivative part. Such awareness leads into an ethical sense of responsibility for developing a mode of being and becoming that sustains the whole.

Human self-awareness, of course, is complicated. To mature as a human being means that each individual human engages in the lifelong process of 'know thyself' so that she comes to explore and know more about how her uniqueness invites her to manifest her human possibilities. In this she has to learn how to disentangle her uniqueness from egoism, and this is a profound and ongoing developmental challenge: how can she discover herself without asserting her own agency, and how does she learn how to assert herself in ways that heed the separate reality of her fellow existents (human and more than human)? In the Hasidic tradition of Judaism, egoism refers to a cutting away of the self from its link to, and derivation from, the divine source so that the self becomes an empty shell, unable to realise its creative possibilities as a unique being because it refuses the spark of the divine that inheres within it. The great wisdom traditions of humanity all offer something like this conception of egoism as a mistaken breaking of connection to the whole. Psychoanalytic elaborations of these older traditions emphasise the defensive character of egoism, an adaptive strategy that keeps the individual focused on norms of achievement and performance, and unable to integrate her 'darkness', all the ways in which she been involved in the pain and trauma of human oppressive and exploitative practices.

Self-awareness involves the cognitive, imaginative, creative, lingual, emotional and somatic dimensions of the individual. The process of maturation is one of striving to integrate these dimensions in how the individual acts both in relation to herself and in relation to others. It is a striving for wholeness, and it makes sense only in relation to asking that the community to which one belongs also strives for self-knowledge and

wholeness. Self-awareness has to be facilitated. The individual has to be educated in the challenge of what it means to be human, a challenge that is always historically contextual. Such work of education happens at the hands of parents and community-trusted educators who work together in the facilitation of the development of each new generation. The facilitators/educators cannot do their work without being committed to their own practices of self-awareness as facilitators/educators.

At this time all our institutions of education are being degraded by the neoliberal form of capitalism. Capitalism is organised in terms of the binary of the subject/object (the will to power and all that is cast as 'standing reserve' in relation to the will to power) and it cannot tend to let alone facilitate the integrity of each human being or any other living being. Not only this: capitalism celebrates egoism, norms ego-centred performance and achievement, and releases egoism from any accountability to self-awareness. There is no community in or for capitalism. Nor is there any sense of indebtedness to and connection with a rich set of human inheritances and traditions because capitalism seeks a freedom from all claims of reality including those that belong to the history of being human.

Like all the other institutions of the twentieth century welfare state, our education institutions in Australia as elsewhere are vulnerable to a capitalist takeover because for some time they have been unable to articulate a timely sense of their publicness. If our education institutions are to weather the onslaught of neoliberal capitalism they will have to actively and creatively embrace the new twenty-first century story of the whole to which human society belongs and must serve. Inherent within this story is the coming together of science and religion: they become transformed as they inform each other into an integrated and twenty-first century worldview. Not only that, but we twenty-first century human beings have the exciting challenge of a post-patriarchal understanding of what it is to be an individual or unique human being. This permits us to address the old binaries that are baked into the traditions of education that we have inherited and to pursue new conceptions and practices of becoming whole, integrated beings.

Teacher unions as agents of thick democracy | Michael W. Apple

For years, critical educators have thought seriously about education's role in both defending and extending democracy. One of the key recognitions involved in this is the importance of asking who the agents of these democratic actions are. Among these agents should be and often are teacher unions—if they are socially committed *both* to defending teachers' working conditions, skills, autonomy, and respect and to what is called social justice teacher unionism. The latter asks for collective actions on educational issues, but just as strong additional commitments to working with communities and activists, especially among oppressed and marginalised communities on a wide array of issues such as housing, anti-racism, incarceration, health care, food security, economic inequalities, and many more (see Charney, Hagopian and Peterson 2021; Apple 2013b).

In engaging in such actions, we will have to face the fact that teacher unions in general in many areas of the world have been and are under threat. This has a long history. For example, as I discuss in more detail in *Can Education Change Society?* (Apple 2013a), during the period of military rule in South Korea, I was in Seoul giving a lecture on critical education to faculty, students, teacher union activists and others. What I had to say was seen by the regime as highly controversial—and I was arrested

along with several other critically oriented academics and union activists soon after my lecture.

This governmental action was part of a longer history of both stifling dissent and strongly acting against honest and critical curricula and teaching and the organisations that supported such actions. This is clearly evident in the fact that the independent and critically minded Korean Teachers Union was 'illegal' then and has had to fight for official legitimacy multiple times.

As many readers will be aware, similar fights over union legitimacy and an expansive voice have a long history in an extensive number of nations. The growing power of rightist movements in Brazil, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, India, and the list gets longer with each passing year, testify to this (e.g., Verma and Apple 2021). In the United States, teacher unions, as well as unions in general, have been under concerted attack. This is evident in legislation in the State of Wisconsin which has radically limited public worker and especially teacher union rights (Nichols 2012) and the all too numerous efforts by major corporations throughout the state and the country to defeat their workers' attempts to form unions. I have devoted a good deal of my academic and political efforts to countering these attacks and to supporting such collective organisations both nationally and internationally. Speaking honestly, this has required that I and many union members and community activists take risks. I know from personal experiences with members of activist teacher unions that understanding the context of dominant power relations inside and outside of schools that lead to the reproduction of inequalities, recognising what needs to be done, and taking risks to change them collectively and individually are key components of their work. In many ways, for years they have provided models of living their commitments in real schools and communities, as well as making public what this all means and how to justify and do it.

I mention these things to remind us that the issues surrounding social justice unionism are not new by any means. Teachers individually and collectively have had to confront them for decades, sometimes successfully but sometimes with significant internal and external tensions and resistances. There are risks involved, but those educators who are struggling today to assist in the process of creating and defending 'thick' forms of democracy in education and the larger society stand on the shoulders of a long history of people who in their professional, political, and personal lives have helped to build and defend the traditions embodied in social justice teacher unions. Knowing this history both nationally and internationally can provide us with resources to more successfully engage with current conditions and possibilities (Apple, Gandin, Liu, Meshulam and Schirmer 2018; Charney, Hagopian and Peterson 2021).

But even with my very strong support of the organised labour of teaching, let me enter a word of caution here. We should never be overly romantic about teacher unions or unions in general. While I and many other educators correctly support them, in real life at times their actions have been and can be problematic. They can be progressive along one set of power dynamics and simply unable to recognise the importance of other ones. At times, they can be racist and sexist. They can marginalise oppressed communities. They can defend exclusionary politics. The major teacher organisations in the US and elsewhere have had to struggle long and hard to overcome some of these tendencies and to change what used to be a dominant common sense about so many things (Perillo 2012). The recognition that this internal work still needs to continue actually makes the arguments for social justice unionism even more significant for existing teachers and administrators. But this recognition is just as important for students in teacher education programs. With the retirement of a large percentage of

teachers because of age, the deterioration of respect and of working conditions, and the realities of life and labour during a pandemic, those who take their place need to much more fully understand what is at stake in schools and communities and how organised bodies of teachers and other educators in an ever-expanding coalition with progressive movements outside of schools can respond to these realities in critically democratic ways.

There are examples we can draw upon. The teacher strikes and collective mobilisations in the US in Chicago, West Virginia, Los Angeles, and elsewhere and the existence of strong community support of teacher mobilisations document how one can blend together the dual commitments to teacher rights, respect, and autonomy and progressive social change (e.g., Blanc 2019; Uetricht 2014). Indeed, there is clear recognition by an increasing number of progressive teacher unions that the future will require even more social commitments to community needs and values and to a commitment to put these larger social and economic needs at the forefront of teacher concerns. Thus, the Chicago teacher union has taken up the struggle for affordable and respectful housing as a key part of their agenda. Similar commitments are visible throughout the US and elsewhere.

It is heartening that it is increasingly clear that both locally and nationally these more expansive movements and alliances are growing. In teacher union activist Bob Peterson's words, they are increasingly guided by an enhanced understanding and commitment to the principles that underpin social justice unionism. As he puts it, 'A social justice lens should be omnipresent throughout *all* union work whether it is wages and working conditions, professional and pedagogical issues, internal union matters, or broader policy concerns (Peterson 2021, 100). The integration of these commitments as core elements of teachers' organisations and actions provides us with a sense of collective agency, of ways of coming together to build thicker forms of critically democratic education and community life that construct and defend a more robust vision of the common good. In a time of rightist resurgence, such expansive collective agency is more important than ever.

Rethinking higher education as a force for democracy | Henry A. Giroux

Education at its best should be defined as a public good; one that takes seriously the need to create critical, informed and engaged citizens. As such it not only should offer literacy, knowledge, the best of the Enlightenment and other traditions to students but should also infuse the liberal arts if not all elements of higher education with a sense of social, ethical, and public responsibility. Higher education is one of the few spheres left in democratic societies where students and other can learn the knowledge and skills of democratic citizenship. It is not the job of the university to confuse education with training nor it is the job of the university to only educate students for the workforce. The job of higher education is not to build 'human capital' but to educate young people and others to address the most crucial problems of the day, extending from climate change and systemic racism to the threat of nuclear war. The purpose of the university should be on the side of democracy not increasing the bottom line. Higher education needs to build a bridge between its faculty, citizens, students, and administrators and the larger world. The broader public needs to understand the relevance of the university as an institution for the public good, rather than simply an adjunct of corporations or military interests. In a time of tyranny, incipient authoritarianism, and an insurgency of white supremacy, it is especially important to raise the question of what the university stands for or as Paul Allen Miller has stated, 'where does the university stand [and] what does

the university owe the truth?' (Miller, 2021).

As higher education has become more corporatised and not perceived as a public good, several significant changes have taken place that undermine the democratic role of higher education. All of these must be reversed. First higher education has been radically defunded because providing free or cheap access to wider populations is seen as a threat to far right and conservative groups and think tanks. As an engine of democracy, higher education poses a threat to conservatives who since the 1960s have launched a counter-revolution against higher education, seen most recently in the US and UK in what is euphemistically called the war against Critical Race Theory, which is a war against higher education as a centre of critique and critical pedagogy as an empowering practice. The public defunding of the university has been matched by massive increases in tuition and the ballooning of student debt, which makes education less accessible to working class students, especially Black and brown students.

Second, faculty have been both removed from having any control of the nature of their labour and had their job security eliminated. In the US, two-thirds of faculty are now on short-term contracts, living in fear and in some cases poverty. Third, the governing structure of the university is not just top-heavy with administrators but is largely shaped by a form of managerialism modelled after a business culture. The university has become more than a model of corporate governance, it has become a high-powered factory run by a clueless managerial class more interested in grants, the bottom line, and profits than in high quality education for everyone. Neoliberal governing structures have turned destructive in their disregard for tenure, the rush for departmental mergers, and their ongoing disregard for academic freedom—a long-standing inheritance of the Reagan and Thatcher period when universities were increasingly defined through the lens of a business ideology and culture (Giroux, 2019).

Fourth, as corporate values replace academic values, knowledge is reduced to a commodity and any academic field or subject that does not translate into the worse form of profit-making and instrumental rationality is viewed as unnecessary. In this logic, the educating young people for the social good or encouraging faculty to be public intellectuals who can relate their academic work to alleviating human suffering, reducing the wastefulness of corporate barbarism, directing crucial resources back to communities in needs, and using their research to address the dangerous threat of climate changes does not appear to warrant any consideration. In fact, faculty tend increasingly to be punished who engage in this type of work. Under the rule of neoliberal capitalism, students are now considered clients, the curricula are dumbed down, and faculty have been stripped of their power. All of this must be challenged both by educators and those groups and social movements outside of the university who recognise that education is a crucial force for a democracy to survive.

It is also crucial to acknowledge that education cannot be reduced to schooling in an image-based culture. It must be broadly understood as taking place in various locations and defined, in part, through its interrogation on the claims of democracy. As Ariel Dorfman argued, it is time to produce cultural institutions and empowering pedagogical conditions in multiple places extending from the mainstream press to the online digital world in order 'to unleash the courage, energy, joy and, yes, compassion with which rebellious millions [can] defy fear and keep hope alive in these traumatic times' (Dorfman 2020). Such sites are important in the efforts to engage education as a political force. Pierre Bourdieu rightly observed that 'important forms of domination are not only economic but also intellectual and pedagogical and lie on the side of belief and persuasion [making it all the more] important to recognize that intellectuals bear an enormous responsibility for challenging this form of domination' (Bourdieu and Grass

2002, 2). This is an especially crucial demand at a time when the educational and pedagogical force of the culture works through and across multiple places. Schooling is only one site of education, while movies, television, books, magazines, the Internet, social media, and music are incredibly significant forces in shaping world views, modes of agency, and diverse forms of identification.

At a time when truth has become malleable, and people are being told that the only obligation of citizenship is to consume, language has become thinner, and more individualistic, detached from history and more self-oriented, all the while undermining viable democratic social spheres as spaces where politics brings people together as collective agents willing to push at the frontiers of the political and moral imagination. Too many people across the globe have forgotten their civic lessons, and in doing, so cede the ground of history to the purveyors of lies, militarism, and white supremacy (Giroux, 2021). Terror comes in many forms and one powerful expression is when people no longer have the words to either understand or challenge the world in which they live. Not only does such linguistic deprivation fail to ward off the plague of propaganda, but it also contributes 'to an annihilation of the self and the destruction of the capacity to recognize the real world' (Seaton, 2018). If the university no longer engages in the search for truth, and matters of justice become irrelevant, the university can become what it was under the Nazis, an institution that placed 'learning in service to a nationalist and militant culture, a mechanism for producing political legitimacy, ideological conformity, and economic value to be used and deployed by others' (Miller 2021). As educators and intellectuals, it is crucial to remember that there is no genuine democracy without the presence of citizens willing 'to recognize the real world', hold power accountable, engage in forms of moral witnessing, break the continuity of common sense, and challenge the normalisation of anti-democratic institutions, policies, ideas, and social relations.

Making education fundamental to politics suggests that as academics, researchers, and artists we ask uncomfortable questions about what Arundhati Roy (2001, 3) called 'our values and traditions, our vision for the future, our responsibilities as citizens, the legitimacy of our 'democratic institutions', the role of the state, the police, the army, the judiciary, and the intellectual community'. In short, there is no democracy without an educated public and there is no educated public without the support and existence of institutions that define education as a public good, and as a crucial public sphere. Educators, artists, intellectuals, and other cultural workers have a moral and political responsibility to put into place those pedagogical sites and practices that enable the critical agents and social movements willing to refuse to equate capitalism and democracy and uphold the conviction that the problems of ecological destruction, mass poverty, militarism, systemic racism, staggering economic inequality, and a host of other social problems cannot be solved by leaving capitalism in place. Both higher education and other spheres of education must do justice to democracy and the conditions that make it possible by writing the future in the language of struggle, hope, equality, compassion, and the fundamental narratives of freedom and equality.

To be on the side of justice, educators must take seriously the notion that history is open, and that it is necessary for people to think otherwise to act otherwise, especially if they take seriously that the role of higher education is to enable young people and others to be able to imagine and bring into being alternative democratic futures and horizons of possibility. This is a vision infused with a mix of justice, hope, and struggle has never been more important than it is today. Moreover, in the face of the rise of right-wing movements across the globe, it is time to address the issue of what is the role of higher education in a time of tyranny. This suggest that it is time to heed the call to

merge a sense of moral outrage with a sense of civic courage and collective action. At the very least, education is central to politics because it provides the foundation for those who believe that democracy is a site of struggle, which can only be engaged through an awareness of both its fragility and necessity. What educators cannot do is look away. Goya was right when he warned, 'the sleep of reason produces monsters'.

Where do we go from here? | Peter McLaren

Today's global justice movement is a network-based movement that too often results in the disarticulation of domination, pushing the goal of self-determination and autonomy, promoting self-governance and democracy and too often ignoring broader class-based initiatives (Munck 2020). In the face of informalisation and precarisation of work, and the progressive depoliticisation of civil society, there has been a noticeable absence of class-consciousness within the labour movement and an emphasis on ethnic identity politics, individual and cultural rights, social mobility and the politics of inclusion. There has also been a rise in ecological social movements promoting environmental legislation.

We need a break from capital, and require a global strategy to make a viable socialist alternative to capitalism achieve hegemonic ascendency. Here we need to follow Marx's view stated in the *Communist Manifesto* that a social revolution could be successful only if it was the product of 'the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority'. And as Marx further argued, the proletarian revolution 'cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air'. The insights of Marx are especially pertinent at a time when we are witnessing the crisis of capitalism, the ascendency of a post-truth politics, the expansive reach of an increasingly militarised surveillance state and the rampant consolidation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution characterised by a fusion of technologies that have blurred the lines between the physical, digital, ideological and biological spheres.

Clearly we need a structural conversion from capitalism to socialism. Just as the plutocratic and sadistic tendencies of authoritarian neoliberal regimes fail to incarnate the reality of the lived experiences of its citizenry, so do we need to envision new modes of resistance predicated on a vision of a new society drawing on the remaining humanistic tendencies existing inside the very structures of capitalist society—structures that are in deep need of transcendence.

The great possibility of a socialist alternative to neoliberal capitalism rests on a bold affront to the perverse intent and ideological imperatives of the ruling elite, dominant conceptions of learning, civic engagement wrapped in the banner of patriotism, and the feverish spasms of hate provoked by fear of the other. One important and all-too-obvious step is to reject all alienating social relations, just as we reject the depravity of racism, that habituates people of colour outside the social contract meant to guarantee human dignity for all. Under capitalism, workers become reified and objectified merely as a means to an end (profits or monetary value) rather than being seen as ends in themselves. We are robbed of our very essence, our subjectivity, our being. Peter Hudis has recommended an anti-racist approach grounded in the work of Frantz Fanon, whose phenomenological approach (stressing the irreducible interaction between subject and object) transcends a purely idealist approach (where human beings reduce the world to the activity of an abstract consciousness) and an empirical approach (where the consciousness of human beings reduce the world as given and immutable). Here, as Hudis (2020) noted, we must take up the challenge of capitalism, while at the

same time recognising its role in systemic racism. Hudis correctly argued that we revisit the work of Frantz Fanon and make disalienation our cause, recognising that Blacks inhabit 'a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge' (Fanon 2008, xii). We must overcome alienation and serve as allies of those whose subjectivity is entirely invisibilised. The colonial mind constantly and consistently sees blackness as nothingness, rendering any ontology of blackness a mere fantasy. Of course, this is a challenge taken seriously within the field of revolutionary critical pedagogy where the human being is considered the revolutionary subject, a subject in search of freedom and emancipation, a subject who strives for liberation from alienating social relations. It is a refusal to allow ourselves and others to be treated as relations between things.

Another obvious step is that we need to support a regionalism on a mass scale; one that is not afraid to challenge the authority of the G-7 or transnational global corporations. We cannot afford to sit in our tiny caves and view the dialectic of history unfolding towards a sublime endpoint; history is more arbitrary, more discontinuous, more contingent, with populations marginalised by race, class, gender and sexuality suffering disproportionally. The arc of history is catching us unaware by variously aligning with the most evil ideologies of the era, as history has revealed to us in the form of Mussolini and Hitler, and more recently, Trump and Bolsonaro. Cyber terrorism is running rampant and the digital warriors of deranged conspiracy cults such as QAnon are gaining credibility exponentially the mores they slouch towards their makeshift madness. The creation of false problems by conspiracy theorists—that Democrats are paedophiles secretly sacrificing children to Satan and drinking their blood, and that 'woke culture' (political correctness) is worse than the Holocaust—is part of today's diversionary tactics among Republicans, which prevents us from focusing on the real problems related to the crisis of capitalism. We focus on the gothic dreams provided by consumer culture, that flood our subjectivities with promises of consumer happiness for the economically exploited classes so long as socialism is kept at arm's length or demonised as one of the greatest threats to American democracy. This amounts to 'the creation of aspirations within capitalism that destroy the political platform for a post-capitalist society' (Prashad, 2019). To live in despair has evolved as the more convincing outcome of modernity as lunacy becomes the frequent companion of the aggrieved. Fascism is made out by Trumpsters to be more appealing than democracy, while the word fascism is reserved by the right to describe the left. Fascism is identified by Ernst Bloch (1991) as a 'swindle of fulfilment' in that it promises the conditions of possibility for opportunistically living unfulfilled dreams and desires, which have fallen short under capitalism (see Bloch 1991; Bloch and Ritter 1977; Rabinbach 1977; Toscano 2017).

Right-wing xenophobic nationalism with its crypto dialectics is undermining the very fabric of democracy, revealed in the authoritarian populism stage-managed by Bolsonaro, Orbán, Erdogen, Modi, and of course by Trump and others. Human history has a tendency of portraying citizens who lived in fascist countries—but did nothing to resist fascism—as victims. This presents us with a series of questions: Assuming the human race survives the next few generations, will future generations of Americans come to believe that their grandparents were victims of Trumpism rather than its perpetrators? Is the suffering forced upon much of the wretched of the earth inevitable and their disenfranchisement unsolvable, despite our best efforts at implementing a justice-based praxis? How long can we hold off capitalism's ability for the utter destruction of the planet? We do need Blochian hope, and we do need to conjugate it

with revolutionary praxis, and begin to join social movements and create and share our own networks to enable those movements to grow and flourish. We must emphasise the threat of nuclear war, climate destruction, the choice between socialism or barbarism, and work in our schools to develop programs in critical media literacy. And yes, fight for Critical Race Theory and other critical theories, including revolutionary critical pedagogy.

There is a need for large scale struggles that move beyond the aerosol postmodern identity politics that deal mainly with cultural issues (important as they are) while avoiding organising people against capitalist exploitation and alienating social relations of production and in the service of both the political (creation of a democratic public sphere that includes the economic sphere following socialist relations of production) and human emancipation (the struggle for socialism) that is embedded in his guiding notion of the education of our 'species-being' (*Gattungswesen*) by means of a humanist philosophy.

The key is to build an anti-capitalist political movement that at the same time champions human rights (meaning political and economic rights). We must be wary of making our struggle a fashionable guerrilla apostasy by asking ourselves the extent to which our political outlawry actually threatens the interests of global capitalist institutions. Here we may remain in solidarity with the efforts by feminist, environmentalist and socialist movements who maintain promisingly that the current global crisis has its roots in the capitalist system and cannot be solved within the system. Yet social movements are easily co-opted by centre-left regimes or even centre-right regimes. Nevertheless, critical educators must work tirelessly to broaden their political project and develop national and international cadre structures in transnational effort at socialist revival and renewal, strengthening their organic links with everyday anti-capitalist struggles, and linking economic conditions to direct political action.

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