Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits

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Two literatures have shaped much of the writing in the educational foundations over the past two decades: Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy. Each has its textual reference points, its favored authors, and its desired audiences. Each invokes the term "critical" as a valued educational goal: urging teachers to help students become more skeptical toward commonly accepted truisms. Each says, in its own way, "Do not let yourself be deceived." And each has sought to reach and influence particular groups of educators, at all levels of schooling, through workshops, lectures, and pedagogical texts. They share a passion and sense of urgency about the need for more critically oriented classrooms. Yet with very few exceptions these literatures do not discuss one another. Is this because they propose conflicting visions of what "critical" thought entails? Are their approaches to pedagogy incompatible? Might there be moments of insight that each can offer the other? Do they perhaps share common limitations, which through comparison become more apparent? Are there other ways to think about becoming "critical" that stand outside these traditions, but which hold educational significance? These are the questions motivating this essay.

We will begin by contrasting Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy in terms of their conception of what it means to be "critical." We will suggest some important similarities, and differences, in how they frame this topic. Each tradition has to some extent criticized the other; and each has been criticized, sometimes along similar lines, by other perspectives, especially feminist and poststructural perspectives. These lines of reciprocal and external criticism, in turn, lead us to suggest some different ways to think about "criticality."

At a broad level, Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy share some common concerns. They both imagine a general population in society who are to some extent deficient in the abilities or dispositions that would allow

them to discern certain kinds of inaccuracies, distortions, and even falsehoods. They share a concern with how these inaccuracies, distortions, and falsehoods limit freedom, though this concern is more explicit in the Critical Pedagogy tradition, which sees society as fundamentally divided by relations of unequal power. Critical Pedagogues are specifically concerned with the influences of educational knowledge, and of cultural formations generally, that perpetuate or legitimate an unjust status quo; fostering a critical capacity in citizens is a way of enabling them to resist such power effects. Critical Pedagogues take sides, on behalf of those groups who are disenfranchised from social, economic, and political possibilities. Many Critical Thinking authors would cite similar concerns, but regard them as subsidiary to the more inclusive problem of people basing their life choices on unsubstantiated truth claims — a problem that is nonpartisan in its nature or effects. For Critical Thinking advocates, all of us need to be better critical thinkers, and there is often an implicit hope that enhanced critical thinking could have a *general* humanizing effect, across all social groups and classes. In this sense, both Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy authors would argue that by helping to make people more critical in thought and action, progressively minded educators can help to free learners to see the world as it is and to act accordingly; critical education can increase freedom and enlarge the scope of human possibilities.

Yet, as one zooms in, further differences appear. The Critical Thinking tradition concerns itself primarily with criteria of epistemic adequacy: to be "critical" basically means to be more discerning in recognizing faulty arguments, hasty generalizations, assertions lacking evidence, truth claims based on unreliable authority, ambiguous or obscure concepts, and so forth. For the Critical Thinker, people do not sufficiently analyze the reasons by which they live, do not examine the assumptions, commitments, and logic of daily life. As Richard Paul puts it, the basic problem is irrational, illogical, and unexamined living. He believes that people need to learn how to express and criticize the logic of arguments that underpin our everyday activity: "The art of explicating, analyzing, and assessing these 'arguments' and 'logic' is essential to leading an examined life" (Paul 1990, 66). The prime tools of Critical Thinking are the skills of formal and informal logic, conceptual analysis, and epistemology. The primary preoccupation of Critical Thinking is to supplant sloppy or distorted thinking with thinking based upon reliable procedures of inquiry. Where our beliefs remain unexamined, we are not free; we act without thinking about why we act, and thus do not exercise control over our own destinies.

For the Critical Thinking tradition, as Harvey Siegel states, critical thinking aims at self-sufficiency, and "a self-sufficient person is a liberated person...free from the unwarranted and undesirable control of unjustified beliefs" (Siegel, 1988, 58).

The Critical Pedagogy tradition begins from a very different starting point. It regards specific belief claims, not primarily as propositions to be assessed for their truth content, but as parts of systems of belief and action that have aggregate effects within the power structures of society. It asks first about these systems of belief and action, *who benefits*? The primary preoccupation of Critical Pedagogy is with social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations. At some point, assessments of truth or conceptual slipperiness might come into the discussion (different writers in the Critical Pedagogy tradition differ in this respect), but they are in the service of demonstrating how certain power effects occur, not in the service of pursuing Truth in some dispassioned sense (Burbules 1992/1995). Indeed, a crucial dimension of this approach is that certain claims, even if they might be "true" or substantiated within particular confines and assumptions, might nevertheless be partisan in their effects. Assertions that African-Americans score lower on IQ tests, for example, even if it is a "fact" that this particular population does on average score lower on this particular set of tests, leaves significant larger questions unaddressed, not the least of which is what effect such assertions have on a general population that is not aware of the important limits of these tests or the tenuous relation, at best, between "what IQ tests measure" and "intelligence." Other important questions, from this standpoint, include: Who is making these assertions? Why are they being made at this point in time? Who funds such research? Who promulgates these "findings"? Are they being raised to question African-American intelligence or to demonstrate the bias of IQ tests? Such questions, from the Critical Pedagogy perspective, are not external to, or separable from, the import of also weighing the evidentiary base for such claims.

Now, the Critical Thinking response to this approach will be that these are simply two different, perhaps both valuable, endeavors. It is one thing to question the evidentiary base (or logic, or clarity, or coherence) of a particular claim, and to find it wanting. This is one kind of critique, adequate and worthwhile on its own terms. It is something else, something separate, to question the motivation behind those who propound certain views, their group interests, the effects of their claims on society, and so

forth. That sort of critique might also be worthwhile (we suspect that most Critical Thinking authors would say that it *is*worthwhile), but it depends on a different sort of analysis, with a different burden of argument — one that philosophers may have less to contribute to than would historians or sociologists, for example.

The response, in turn, from the Critical Pedagogy point of view is that the two levels cannot be kept separate because the standards of epistemic adequacy themselves (valid argument, supporting evidence, conceptual clarity, and so on) *and the particular ways in which these standards are invoked and interpreted in particular settings* inevitably involve the very same considerations of who, where, when, and why that any other social belief claims raise. Moreover, such considerations inevitably blur into and influence epistemic matters in a narrower sense, such as how research questions are defined, the methods of such research, and the qualifications of the researchers and writers who produce such writings for public attention.

But neither the Critical Thinking nor the Critical Pedagogy tradition is monolithic or homogeneous, and a closer examination of each reveals further dimensions of these similarities and differences.

Critical Thinking

A concern with critical thinking in education, in the broad sense of teaching students the rules of logic or how to assess evidence, is hardly new: it is woven throughout the Western tradition of education, from the Greeks to the Scholastics to the present day. Separate segments of the curriculum have often been dedicated to such studies, especially at higher levels of schooling. What the Critical Thinking movement has emphasized is the idea that specific reasoning skills undergird the curriculum as a whole; that the purpose of education generally is to foster critical thinking; and that the skills and dispositions of critical thinking can and should infuse teaching and learning at all levels of schooling. Critical thinking is linked to the idea of rationality itself, and developing rationality is seen as a prime, if not *the* prime, aim of education (see, for example, Siegel 1988).

The names most frequently associated with this tradition, at least in the United States, include Robert Ennis, John McPeck, Richard Paul, Israel Scheffler, and Harvey Siegel. While a detailed survey of their respective views, and the significant differences among their outlooks, is outside our

scope here, a few key themes and debates have emerged in recent years within this field of inquiry.

To Critical Thinking, the critical person is something like a critical consumer of information; he or she is driven to seek reasons and evidence. Part of this is a matter of mastering certain skills of thought: learning to diagnose invalid forms of argument, knowing how to make and defend distinctions, and so on. Much of the literature in this area, especially early on, seemed to be devoted to lists and taxonomies of what a "critical thinker" should know and be able to do (Ennis 1962, 1980). More recently, however, various authors in this tradition have come to recognize that teaching content and skills is of minor import if learners do not also develop the dispositions or inclination to look at the world through a critical lens. By this, Critical Thinking means that the critical person has not only the capacity (the skills) to seek reasons, truth, and evidence, but also that he or she has the drive (disposition) to seek them. For instance, Ennis claims that a critical person not only should seek reasons and try to be well informed, but that he or she should have a tendency to do such things (Ennis 1987, 1996). Siegel criticizes Ennis somewhat for seeing dispositions simply as what animates the skills of critical thinking, because this fails to distinguish sufficiently the critical thinker from critical thinking. For Siegel, a cluster of dispositions (the "critical spirit") is more like a deep-seated character trait, something like Scheffler's notion of "a love of truth and a contempt of lying" (Siegel 1988; Scheffler 1991). It is part of critical thinking itself. Paul also stresses this distinction between skills and dispositions in his distinction between "weak-sense" and "strong-sense" critical thinking. For Paul, the "weak-sense" means that one has learned the skills and can demonstrate them when asked to do so; the "strong-sense" means that one has incorporated these skills into a way of living in which one's own assumptions are re-examined and questioned as well. According to Paul, a critical thinker in the "strong sense" has a passionate drive for "clarity, accuracy, and fairmindedness" (Paul 1983, 23; see also Paul 1994).

This dispositional view of critical thinking has real advantages over the skills-only view. But in important respects it is still limited. First, it is not clear exactly what is entailed by making such dispositions *part of* critical thinking. In our view it not only broadens the notion of criticality beyond mere "logicality," but it necessarily requires a greater attention to institutional contexts and social relations than Critical Thinking authors have provided. Both the skills-based view and the skills-plus-dispositions view are still focused on the individual person. But it is only in the context

of social relations that these dispositions or character traits can be formed or expressed, and for this reason the practices of critical thinking *inherently* involve bringing about certain social conditions. Part of what it is to be a critical thinker is to be engaged in certain kinds of conversations and relations with others; and the kinds of social circumstances that promote or inhibit that must therefore be part of the examination of what Critical Thinking is trying to achieve.

A second theme in the Critical Thinking literature has been the extent to which critical thinking can be characterized as a set of generalized abilities and dispositions, as opposed to content-specific abilities and dispositions that are learned and expressed differently in different areas of investigation. Can a general "Critical Thinking" course develop abilities and dispositions that will then be applied in any of a range of fields; or should such material be presented specifically in connection to the questions and content of particular fields of study? Is a scientist who is a critical thinker doing the same things as an historian who is a critical thinker? When each evaluates "good evidence," are they truly thinking about problems in similar ways, or are the differences in interpretation and application dominant? This debate has set John McPeck, the chief advocate of content-specificity, in opposition to a number of other theorists in this area (Norris 1992; Talaska 1992). This issue relates not only to the question of how we might teach critical thinking, but also to how and whether one can test for a general facility in critical thinking (Ennis 1984).

A third debate has addressed the question of the degree to which the standards of critical thinking, and the conception of rationality that underlies them, are culturally biased in favor of a particular masculine and/or Western mode of thinking, one that implicitly devalues other "ways of knowing." Theories of education that stress the primary importance of logic, conceptual clarity, and rigorous adherence to scientific evidence have been challenged by various advocates of cultural and gender diversity who emphasize respect for alternative world views and styles of reasoning. Partly in response to such criticisms, Richard Paul has developed a conception of critical thinking that regards "sociocentrism" as itself a sign of flawed thinking (Paul 1994). Paul believes that, because critical thinking allows us to overcome the sway of our egocentric and sociocentric beliefs, it is "essential to our role as moral agents and as potential shapers of our own nature and destiny" (Paul 1990, 67). For Paul, and for some other Critical Thinking authors as well, part of the method of critical thinking involves fostering dialogue, in which thinking from the perspective of others is also

relevant to the assessment of truth claims; a too-hasty imposition of one's own standards of evidence might result not only in a premature rejection of credible alternative points of view, but might also have the effect of silencing the voices of those who (in the present context) need to be encouraged as much as possible to speak for themselves. In this respect, we see Paul introducing into the very definition of critical thinking some of the sorts of social and contextual factors that Critical Pedagogy writers have emphasized.

Critical Pedagogy

The idea of Critical Pedagogy begins with the neo-Marxian literature on Critical Theory (Stanley 1992). The early Critical Theorists (most of whom were associated with the Frankfurt School) believed that Marxism had underemphasized the importance of cultural and media influences for the persistence of capitalism; that maintaining conditions of ideological hegemony were important for (in fact inseparable from) the legitimacy and smooth working of capitalist economic relations. One obvious example would be in the growth of advertising as both a spur to rising consumption and as a means of creating the image of industries driven only by a desire to serve the needs of their customers. As consumers, as workers, and as winners or losers in the marketplace of employment, citizens in a capitalist society need both to know their "rightful" place in the order of things and to be reconciled to that destiny. Systems of education are among the institutions that foster and reinforce such beliefs, through the rhetoric of meritocracy, through testing, through tracking, through vocational training or college preparatory curricula, and so forth (Bowles & Gintis 1976; Apple 1979; Popkewitz 1991).

Critical Pedagogy represents, in a phrase, the reaction of progressive educators against such institutionalized functions. It is an effort to work within educational institutions and other media to raise questions about inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity and merit for many students, and about the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life. Some of the authors mostly strongly associated with this tradition include Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Ira Shor. In the language of Critical Pedagogy, the critical person is one who is empowered to seek justice, to seek emancipation. Not only is the critical person adept at recognizing injustice but, for Critical Pedagogy, that person is also moved to change it. Here Critical Pedagogy wholeheartedly takes up Marx's Thesis XI on Feuerbach: "The philosophers

have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Marx 1845/1977, 158).

This emphasis on change, and on collective action to achieve it, moves the central concerns of Critical Pedagogy rather far from those of Critical Thinking: the endeavor to teach others to think critically is less a matter of fostering individual skills and dispositions, and more a consequence of the *pedagogical relations*, between teachers and students and among students, which promote it; furthermore, the object of thinking critically is not only against demonstrably false beliefs, but also those that are misleading, partisan, or implicated in the preservation of an unjust status quo.

The author who has articulated these concerns most strongly is Paulo Freire, writing originally within the specific context of promoting adult literacy within Latin American peasant communities, but whose work has taken on an increasingly international interest and appeal in the past three decades (Freire 1970a, 1970b, 1973, 1985; McLaren & Lankshear 1993; McLaren & Leonard 1993). For Freire, Critical Pedagogy is concerned with the development of *conscienticizao*, usually translated as "critical consciousness." Freedom, for Freire, begins with the recognition of a system of oppressive relations, and one's own place in that system. The task of Critical Pedagogy is to bring members of an oppressed group to a critical consciousness of their situation as a beginning point of their liberatory *praxis*. Change in consciousness and concrete action are linked for Freire; the greatest single barrier against the prospect of liberation is an ingrained, fatalistic belief in the inevitability and necessity of an unjust status quo.

One important way in which Giroux develops this idea is in his distinction between a "language of critique" and a "language of possibility" (Giroux 1983, 1988). As he stresses, both are essential to the pursuit of social justice. Giroux points to what he sees as the failure of the radical critics of the new sociology of education because, in his view, they offered a language of critique, but not a language of possibility. They saw schools primarily as instruments for the reproduction of capitalist relations and for the legitimation of dominant ideologies, and thus were unable to construct a discourse for "counterhegemonic" practices in schools (Giroux 1988, 111-112). Giroux stresses the importance of developing a language of possibility as part of what makes a person critical. As he puts it, the aim of the critical educator should be "to raise ambitions, desires, and real hope for those

who wish to take seriously the issue of educational struggle and social justice" (Giroux 1988, 177).

For both Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy, "criticality" requires that one be moved to do something, whether that something be seeking reasons or seeking social justice. For Critical Thinking, it is not enough to know how to seek reasons, truth, and understanding; one must also be impassioned to pursue them rigorously. For Critical Pedagogy, that one can critically reflect and interpret the world is not sufficient; one must also be willing and able to act to change that world. From the standpoint of Critical Pedagogy the Critical Thinking tradition assumes an overly direct connection between reasons and action. For instance, when Ennis conceives Critical Thinking as "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or to do," the assumption is that "deciding" usually leads relatively unproblematically to the "doing" (Ennis 1987). The model of practical reasoning on which this view depends assumes a relatively straightforward relation, in most cases, between the force of reasons and action. But for Critical Pedagogy the problems of overcoming oppressed thinking and demoralization are more complex than this: changing thought and practice must occur together; they fuel one another. For Freire, criticality requires *praxis* — both reflection and action, both interpretation and change. As he puts it, "Critical consciousness is brought about not through intellectual effort alone but through *praxis* — through the authentic union of action and reflection" (Freire 1970a, 48).

Critical Pedagogy would never find it sufficient to reform the habits of thought of thinkers, however effectively, without challenging and transforming the institutions, ideologies, and relations that engender distorted, oppressed thinking in the first place — not as an additional act beyond the pedagogical one, but as an inseparable part of it. For Critical Thinking, at most, the development of more discerning thinkers might make them *more likely* to undermine discreditable institutions, to challenge misleading authorities, and so on — but this would be a separate consequence of the attainment of Critical Thinking, not part of it.

A second central theme in Freire's work, which has fundamentally shaped the Critical Pedagogy tradition, is his particular focus on "literacy." At the ground level, what motivated Freire's original work was the attempt to develop an adult literacy program, one in which developing the capacity to read was tied into developing an enhanced sense of individual and collective self-esteem and confidence. To be illiterate, for Freire, was not only to lack the skills of reading and writing; it was to feel powerless and

dependent in a much more general way as well. The challenge to an adult literacy campaign was not only to provide skills, but to address directly the self-contempt and sense of powerlessness that he believed accompanied illiteracy (Freire 1970b). Hence his approach to fostering literacy combined the development of basic skills in reading and writing; the development of a sense of confidence and efficacy, especially in collective thought and action; and the desire to change, not only one's self, but the circumstances of one's social group. The pedagogical method that he thinks promote all of these is *dialogue*: "cultural action for freedom is characterized by dialogue, and its preeminent purpose is to conscientize the people" (Freire 1970a, 47).

Richard Paul says similarly that "dialogical thinking" is inherent to Critical Thinking (Paul 1990). However, there is more of a social emphasis to dialogue within Critical Pedagogy: dialogue occurs between people, not purely as a form of dialogical thought. Here again Critical Pedagogy focuses more upon institutional settings and relations between individuals, where Critical Thinking's focus is more on the individuals themselves. In other words, dialogue directly involves others, while one person's development of "dialogical thinking" may only indirectly involve others. Yet the work of Vygotsky and others would argue that the development of such capacities for individuals necessarily involves social interactions as well. Paul addresses this point, but it does not play the central role in his theory that it does for Freire and other Critical Pedagogues — still, Paul appears to us to be somewhat of a transitional figure between these two traditions.

The method of Critical Pedagogy for Freire involves, to use his phrase, "reading the world" as well as "reading the word" (Freire & Macedo 1987). Part of developing a critical consciousness, as noted above, is critiquing the social relations, social institutions, and social traditions that create and maintain conditions of oppression. For Freire, the teaching of literacy is a primary form of cultural action, and as action it must "relate speaking the word to transforming reality" (Freire 1970a, 4). To do this, Freire uses what he calls *codifications*: representative images that both "illustrate" the words or phrases students are learning to read, and also represent problematic social conditions that become the focus of collective dialogue (and, eventually, the object of strategies for potential change). The process of *decodification* is a kind of "reading" — a "reading" of social dynamics, of forces of reaction or change, of why the world is as it is, and how it might be made different. Decodification is the attempt to "read the world" with

the same kind of perspicacity with which one is learning to "read the word."

In this important regard, Critical Pedagogy shares with Critical Thinking the idea that there is something *real* about which they can raise the consciousness of people. Both traditions believe that there is something given, against which mistaken beliefs and distorted perceptions can be tested. In both, there is a drive to bring people to recognize "the way things are" (Freire 1970a, 17). In different words, Critical Pedagogy and Critical Thinking arise from the same sentiment to overcome ignorance, to test the distorted against the true, to ground effective human action in an accurate sense of social reality. Of course, how each movement talks about "the way things are" is quite different. For Critical Thinking, this is about empirically demonstrable facts. For Critical Pedagogy, on the other hand, this is about the intersubjective attempt to formulate and agree upon a common understanding about "structures of oppression" and "relations of domination." As we have discussed, there is more to this process than simply determining the "facts"; but, in the end, for Freire as for any other Marxist tradition, this intersubjective process is thought to be grounded in a set of objective conditions.

Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy

In the discussion so far, we have tried to emphasize some relations and contrasts between the Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy traditions. To the extent that they have addressed one another, the commentary has often been antagonistic:

> The most powerful, yet limited, definition of critical thinking comes out of the positivist tradition in the applied sciences and suffers from what I call the Internal Consistency position. According to the adherents of the Internal Consistency position, critical thinking refers primarily to teaching students how to analyze and develop reading and writing assignments from the perspective of formal, logical patterns of consistency....While all of the learning skills are important, their limitations as a whole lie in what is excluded, and it is with respect to what is missing that the ideology of such an approach is revealed (Giroux 1994, 200-201).

> Although I hesitate to dignify Henry Giroux's article on citizenship with a reply, I find it hard to contain myself. The

article shows respect neither for logic nor for the English language....Giroux's own bombastic, jargon-ridden rhetoric...is elitist in the worst sense: it is designed to erect a barrier between the author and any reader not already a member of the "critical" cult (Schrag 1988, 143).

There are other, more constructive engagements, however. Certain authors within each tradition have seriously tried to engage the concerns of the other — although, interestingly, the purpose of such investigations has usually been to demonstrate that all of the truly beneficial qualities of the other tradition can be reconciled with the best of one's own, without any of the purported drawbacks:

> It should be clear that my aim is not to discredit the ideal of critical thinking. Rather, I question whether the practices of teaching critical thinking...as it has evolved into the practice of teaching informal logic is *sufficient* for actualizing the ideal. I have argued that it is not sufficient, if "critical thinking" includes the ability to decode the political nature of events and institutions, and if it includes the ability to envision alternative events and institutions (Kaplan 1991/1994, 217, emphasis added).

> Postmodernism, or any other perspective which seriously endorses radical or progressive social and educational change, requires an epistemology which endorses truth and justification as viable theoretical notions. That is to say: Postmodern advocacy of radical pedagogies (and politics) requires Old-Fashioned Epistemology (Siegel 1993, 22).

From the perspective of Critical Thinking, Critical Pedagogy crosses a threshold between teaching criticality and indoctrinating. Teaching students to think critically must include allowing them to come to their own conclusions; yet Critical Pedagogy seems to come dangerously close to prejudging what those conclusions must be. Critical Pedagogy see this threshold problem conversely: indoctrination is the case already; students must be brought to criticality, and this can only be done by alerting them to the social conditions that have brought this about. In short, we can restate the problem as follows: Critical Thinking's claim is, at heart, to teach how to think critically, not how to think politically; for Critical Pedagogy, this is a false distinction.

For Critical Pedagogy, as we have discussed, self-emancipation is contingent upon social emancipation. It is not only a difference between an emphasis on the individual and an emphasis on society as a whole; both Critical Pedagogy and Critical Thinking want "criticality" in both senses (Missimer 1989/1994; Hostetler 1991/1994). It is rather that, for Critical Pedagogy, individual criticality is intimately linked to social criticality, joining, in Giroux's phrase, "the conditions for social, and hence, self-emancipation" (Giroux 1988, 110). For Critical Thinking, the attainment of individual critical thinking may, with success for enough people, *lead to* an increase in critical thinking socially, but it does not depend upon it.

These traditions also explicitly differ from one another in the different problems and contexts they regard as issues. Critical Thinking assumes no set agenda of issues that must be addressed. To try to bring someone to criticality necessarily precludes identifying any fixed set of questions about particular social, moral, political, economic, and cultural issues, let alone a fixed set of answers. As already noted, this is not to say that those involved in the Critical Thinking movement do not think that social justice is an important issue; nor to say that people such as Ennis, Paul, and Siegel do not wish to see those sorts of issues addressed — in fact, they occasionally assert quite explicitly that they do. It is rather that, as Critical Thinking understands criticality, "impartiality" is a key virtue. They strive not to push their students along certain lines, nor to impose certain values (the fact/value distinction is a central thesis of the analytical tradition that informs much of Critical Thinking). Socially relevant cases might be pedagogically beneficial as the "raw material" on which to practice the skills and dispositions of Critical Thinking, because they are salient for many learners in a classroom. But they are not intrinsically important to Critical Thinking itself; in many cases purely symbolic cases could be used to teach the same elements (as in the use of symbols or empty X's and Y's to teach logic).

Hence, Critical Thinking tends to address issues in an item-by-item fashion, not within a grand scheme with other issues. The issues themselves may have relations to one another, and they may have connections to broader themes, but those relations and connections are not the focus of investigation. What is crucial to the issue at hand is the interplay of an immediate cluster of evidence, reasons, and arguments. For Critical Thinking, what is important is to describe the issue, give the various reasons for and against, and draw out any assumptions (and only

those) that have immediate and direct bearing on the argument. This tends to produce a more analytical and less wholistic mode of critique.

When Critical Pedagogy talks about power and the way in which it structures social relations, it inevitably draws from a context, a larger narrative, within which these issues are framed; and typically sees it as part of the artificiality and abstractness of Critical Thinking that it does not treat such matters as central. Critical Pedagogy looks to how an issue relates to "deeper" explanations — deeper in the sense that they refer to the basic functioning of power on institutional and societal levels. For Critical Pedagogy, it makes no sense to talk about issues on a nonrelational, item-by-item basis. Where Critical Thinking emphasizes the immediate reasons and assumptions of an argument, Critical Pedagogy wants to draw in for consideration factors that may appear at first of less immediate relevance.

We do not want to imply merely that Critical Pedagogy wants people to get the "big picture" whereas Critical Thinking does not. Oftentimes, their "big pictures" are simply going to be different. The important point is why they are different, and the difference resides in the fact that whereas Critical Thinking is quite reluctant to prescribe any particular context for a discussion, Critical Pedagogy shows enthusiasm for a particular one — one that tends to view social matters within a framework of struggles over social justice, the workings of capitalism, and forms of cultural and material oppression. As noted, this favoring of a particular narrative seems to open Critical Pedagogy up to a charge of indoctrination by Critical Thinking: that everything is up for questioning within Critical Pedagogy except the categories and premises of Critical Pedagogy itself. But the Critical Pedagogue's counter to this is that Critical Thinking's apparent "openness" and impartiality simply enshrine many conventional assumptions as presented by the popular media, traditional textbooks, etc., in a manner that intentionally or not teaches political conformity; *particular* claims are scrutinized critically, while a less visible set of social norms and practices — including, notably, many particular to the structure and activities of schooling itself — continue to operate invisibly in the background.

In short, each of these traditions regards the other as *insufficiently* critical; each defines, in terms of its own discourse and priorities, key elements that it believes the other neglects to address. Each wants to acknowledge a certain value in the goals the other aspires to, but argues that its means are inadequate to attain them. What is most interesting, from our standpoint, is not which of these traditions is "better," but the fascinating way in which

each wants to claim sovereignty over the other; each claiming to include all the truly beneficial insights of the other, and yet more — and, as we will see, how each has been subject to criticisms that may make them appear more as related rivals than as polar opposites.

Criticisms of Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy

It will not have been lost on many readers that when we listed the prime authors in both the Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy traditions, all listed were male. There are certainly significant women writing within each tradition, but the chief spokespersons, and the most visible figures in the debates between these traditions, have been men. Not surprisingly, then, both traditions have been subject to criticisms, often from feminists, that their ostensibly universal categories and issues in fact exclude the voices and concerns of women and other groups.

In the case of Critical Thinking, as noted earlier, this has typically taken the form of an attack on the "rationalistic" underpinnings of its epistemology: that its logic is different from "women's logic," that its reliance on empirical evidence excludes other sources of evidence or forms of verification (experience, emotion, feeling) — in short, that its masculinist way of knowing is different from "women's ways of knowing" (for example, Belenky et al. 1986; Thayer-Bacon 1993). Other arguments do not denigrate the concerns of Critical Thinking entirely, but simply want to relegate them to *part* of what we want to accomplish educationally (Arnstine 1991; Garrison & Phelan 1990; Noddings 1984; Warren 1994). Often these criticisms, posed by women with distinctive feminist concerns in mind, also bring in a concern with Critical Thinking's exclusion or neglect of ways of thought of other racial or ethnic groups as well — though the problems of "essentializing" such groups, as if they "naturally" thought differently from white men, has made some advocates cautious about overgeneralizing these concerns.

Critical Pedagogy has been subject to similar, and occasionally identical, criticisms. Claims that Critical Pedagogy is "rationalistic," that its purported reliance on "open dialogue" in fact masks a closed and paternal conversation, that it excludes issues and voices that other groups bring to educational encounters, have been asserted with some force (Ellsworth 1989; Gore 1993). In this case, the sting of irony is especially strong. After all, advocates of Critical Thinking would hardly feel the accusation of being called "rationalistic" as much of an insult; but for Critical Pedagogy,

given its discourse of emancipation, to be accused of being yet another medium of oppression is a sharp rebuke.

Are these criticisms justified? Certainly the advocates of these traditions have tried to defend themselves against the accusation of being "exclusionary" (Siegel 1996; Giroux 1992c). The arguments have been long and vigorous, and we cannot recount them all here. But without dodging the matter of taking sides, we would like to suggest a different way of looking at the issue: *Why* is it that significant audiences see themselves as excluded from each of these traditions? Are they simply misled; are they ignorant or ill-willed; are they unwilling to listen to or accept the reasonable case that advocates of Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy put forth in response to their objections — or is the very existence of disenfranchised and alienated audiences a reason for concern, a sign that Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy do not, and perhaps cannot, achieve the sort of breadth, inclusiveness, and universal liberation they each, in their own way, promise? We find it impossible to avoid such a conclusion: that if the continued and well-intended defense and rearticulation of the reasons for a Critical Thinking or a Critical Pedagogy approach cannot themselves succeed in persuading those who are skeptical toward them, then this is prima facie evidence that *something* stands beyond them — that their aspirations toward a universal liberation, whether a liberation of the intellect first and foremost, or a liberation of a political consciousness and praxis, patently do not touch all of the felt concerns and needs of certain audiences, and that a renewed call for "more of the same," as if this might eventually win others over, simply pushes such audiences further away.

For this reason and others we do not want to see an "erasure" of Critical Thinking by Critical Pedagogy, or vice versa. Though each, from its own perspective, claims sovereignty over the other, and purports to have the more encompassing view, we prefer to regard the tension between them as beneficial. If one values a "critical" perspective at all, then part of that should entail critique from the most challenging points of view. Critical Thinking needs to be questioned from the standpoint of social accountability; it needs to be asked what difference it makes to people's real lives; it needs to be challenged when it becomes overly artificial and abstract; and it needs to be interrogated about the social and institutional features that promote or inhibit the "critical spirit," for if such dispositions are central to Critical Thinking, then the conditions that suppress them

cannot be altered or influenced by the teaching of epistemological rigor alone (Burbules 1992, 1995).

At the same time, Critical Pedagogy needs to be questioned from the standpoint of Critical Thinking: about what its implicit standards of truth and evidence are; about the extent to which inquiry, whether individual or collective, should be unbounded by particular political presuppositions; about how far it is and is not willing to go in seeing learners question the authority of their teachers (when the teachers are advocating the correct "critical" positions); about how open-ended and decentered the process of dialogue actually is — or whether it is simply a more egalitarian and humane way of steering students toward certain foregone conclusions.

And finally, both of these traditions need to be challenged by perspectives that can plausibly claim that other voices and concerns are not addressed by their promises. Claims of universalism are especially suspect in a world of increasingly self-conscious diversity; and whether or not one adopts the full range of "postmodern" criticisms of rationality and modernity, it cannot be denied that these are criticisms that must be met, not pushed off by simply reasserting the promise and hope that "you may not be included or feel included *yet*, but our theoretical categories and assumptions can indeed accommodate you without fundamental modification." The responses to such a defense are easily predictable, and understandable.

One of the most useful critical angles toward both the Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy traditions has been a poststructural examination of how they exist within a historical context as discursive systems with particular social effects (Cherryholmes 1988: Gore 1993). The contemporary challenge to "metanarratives" is sometimes misunderstood as a simple rejection of any theory at all, a total rejection on anti-epistemological grounds; but this is not the key point. The challenge of such criticisms is to examine the effects of metanarratives as ways of framing the world; in this case, how claims of universality, or impartiality, or inclusiveness, or objectivity, variously characterize different positions within the Critical Thinking or Critical Pedagogy schools of thought. Their very claims to sovereignty, one might say, are more revealing about them (and from this perspective makes them more deeply akin) than any particular positions or claims they put forth. It is partly for this reason that we welcome their unreconciled disputes; it reminds us of something important about their limitations.

Here, gradually, we have tried to introduce a different way of thinking about criticality, one that stands outside the traditions of Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy, without taking sides between them, but regarding each as having a range of benefit and a range of limitation. The very tension between them teaches us something, in a way that eliminating either or seeing one gain hegemony would ultimately dissolve. Important feminist, multiculturalist, and generally postmodernist rejections of *both* Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy, which we have only been able to sketch here, are of more recent provenance in educational discourse — but about them we would say the same. There is something about the preservation of such sustained differences that yields new insights, something that is lost when the tension is erased by one perspective gaining (or claiming) dominance. But the tension is also erased by the pursuit of a liberal "compromise"; or by the dream of an Hegelian "synthesis" that can reconcile the opposites; or by a Deweyan attempt to show that the apparent dichotomy is not real; or by a presumption of incommensurability that makes the sides decide it is no longer worth engaging one another. *All* of these are ways of making the agonistic engagement go away. We prefer to think in terms of a criticality that is *procedural*: What are the conditions that give rise to critical thinking, that promote a sharp reflection on one's own presuppositions, that allow for a fresh rethinking of the conventional, that foster *thinking in new ways*?

Toward an Alternate Criticality

The starting point of this alternative is reflecting upon criticality as a *practice* — what is involved in actually thinking critically, what are the conditions that tend to foster such thinking, and so on. Here we can only draw the outlines of some of these elements, each of which merits extended discussion.

First, criticality does involve certain abilities and skills, including but not limited to the skills of Critical Thinking. These skills have a definite domain of usefulness, but learning them should include not only an appreciation for what they can do, but an appreciation for what they cannot do. For example, methods of analysis, across different disciplines from the scientific to the philosophic, involve removing the object of study from its usual context in order (1) to focus study upon it and it only and (2) to be able to parse it into component elements. This is true of all sorts of analysis, whether the analysis of an organism, a chemical analysis, or an analysis of a concept. There is value to doing this, but also a limit, since removing a thing from its usual context changes it by eliminating the network of

relations that give rise to it, interact with it, and partly define it. If any amount of wholism is true, then such decontextualizing and/or dissecting into components *loses* something of the original.

In addition to these logical and analytical skills, we would emphasize that criticality also involves the ability to think outside a framework of conventional understandings; it means to think anew, *to think differently*. This view of criticality goes far beyond the preoccupation with not being deceived. There might be worse things than being mistaken; there may be greater dangers in being only trivially or banally "true." Ignorance is one kind of impotence; an inability or unwillingness to move beyond or question conventional understandings is another. This is a point that links in some respects with Freire's desire to move beyond an "intransitive consciousness," and with Giroux's call for a "language of possibility." But even in these cases there is a givenness to what a "critical" understanding should look like that threatens to become its own kind of constraint. Freire's metaphor for learning to read is "decodification," a revealing word because it implies a fixed relation of symbol to meaning and reveals an assumption usually latent within Critical Pedagogy: that the purpose of critical thinking is to discern a world, a real world of relations, structures, and social dynamics, that has been obscured by the distortions of ideology. Learning to "decode" means to find the actual, hidden meaning of things. It is a revealing choice of words, as opposed to, say, "interpretation," which also suggests finding a meaning, but which could also mean *creating* a meaning, or seeking out several alternative meanings. This latter view could not assume that "critical" literacy and dialogue would necessarily converge on any single understanding of the world. Yet it is a crucial aspect of Critical Pedagogy that dialogue does converge upon a set of understandings tied to a capacity to act toward social change — and social change of a particular type. Multiple, unreconciled interpretations, by contrast, might yield *other* sorts of benefits — those of fecundity and variety over those of solidarity.

Much more needs to be said about how it is possible to think anew, to think otherwise. But what we wish to stress here is that this is a kind of criticality, too, a breaking away from convention and cant. Part of what is necessary for this to happen is an openness to, and a comfort with, thinking in the midst of deeply challenging alternatives. One obvious condition here is that such alternatives exist and that they be engaged with sufficient respect to be considered imaginatively — even when (especially when) they do not fit in neatly with the categories with which one is familiar. This

is why, as noted earlier, the *tensions* between radically conflicting views are themselves valuable; and why the etic perspective is as potentially informative as the emic. Difference is a condition of criticality, when it is encountered in a context that allows for translations or communication across differences; when it is taken seriously, and not distanced as exotic or quaint; and when one does not use the excuse of "incommensurability" as a reason to abandon dialogue (Burbules & Rice 1991; Burbules 1993, forthcoming).

Rather than the simple epistemic view of "ideology" as distortion or misrepresentation, we find it useful here to reflect on Douglas Kellner's discussion of the "life cycle" of an ideology (Kellner 1978). An ideology is not a simple proposition, or even a set of propositions, whose truth value can be tested against the world. Ideologies have the appeal and persistence that they do because they actually *do* account for a set of social experiences and concerns. No thorough approach to ideology-critique should deny the very real appeal that ideologies hold for people — an appeal that is as much affective as cognitive. To deny that appeal is to adopt a very simplistic view of human naiveté, and to assume that it will be easier to displace ideologies than it actually is. Both the Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy traditions often make this mistake, we believe. As Kellner puts it, ideologies often have an original appeal as an "ism," as a radically new, fresh, challenging perspective on social and political concerns. Over time, the selfsame ideologies become "hegemonic," *not because they change, but because circumstances change while the ideology becomes more and more concerned with its own preservation*. What causes this decline into reification and stasis is precisely the absence of reflexiveness within ideological thought, the inability to recognize its own origins and limitations, and the lack of opportunities for thinking differently. In the sense we are discussing it here, criticality is the opposite of the hegemonic.

This argument suggests, then, that one important aspect of criticality is an ability to reflect on one's own views and assumptions as themselves features of a particular cultural and historical formation. Such a reflection does not automatically lead to relativism or a conclusion that all views are equally valid; but it does make it more difficult to imagine universality or finality for any particular set of views. Most important, it regards one's views as perpetually open to challenge, as choices entailing a responsibility toward the effects of one's arguments on others. This sort of critical reflection is quite difficult to exercise entirely on one's own; we are enabled to do it through our conversations with others, especially others not like us.

Almost by definition, it is difficult to see the limitations and lacunae in our own understandings; hence maintaining both the social conditions in which such conversations can occur (conditions of plurality, tolerance, and respect) *as well as* the personal and interpersonal capacities, and willingness, to engage in such conversations, becomes a central dimension of criticality — it is not simply a matter of individual abilities or dispositions. The Critical Pedagogy tradition has stressed some of these same concerns.

Yet at a still deeper level, the work of Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, and others, challenges us with a further aspect of criticality: the ability to question and doubt even our own presuppositions — the ones without which we literally do not know how to think and act (Burbules 1995). This seemingly paradoxical sort of questioning is often part of the *process* by which radically new thinking begins: by an aporia; by a doubt that we do not know (yet) how to move beyond; by imagining what it might mean to think without some of the very things that make our (current) thinking meaningful. Here, we have moved into a sense of criticality well beyond the categories of both Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy; to the extent that these traditions of thought and practice have become programmatic, become "movements" of a sort, they may be less able — and less motivated — to pull up their own roots for examination. Their very success as influential areas of scholarship and teaching seems to have required a certain insistence about particular ways of thinking and acting. Can a deeper criticality be maintained under such circumstances? Or is it threatened by the desire to win over converts?

The perspective of viewing criticality as a practice helps us to see that criticality is a way of being as well as a way of thinking, a relation to others as well as an intellectual capacity. To take one concrete instance, the critical thinker must relish, or at least tolerate, the sense of moving against the grain of convention — this isn't separate from criticality or a "motivation" for it; it is part of what it means to *be critical*, and not everyone (even those who can master certain logical or analytical skills) can or will occupy that position. To take another example, in order for fallibilism to mean anything, a person must be willing to *admit* to being wrong. We know that some people possess this virtue and others do not; we also know that certain circumstances and relations encourage the exercise of such virtues and others do not. Once we unravel these mysteries, we will see that fostering such virtues will involve much more than Critical Thinking instruction typically imagines. Here Critical Pedagogy may be closer to the

position we are proposing, as it *begins* with the premise of social context, the barriers that inhibit critical thought, and the need to learn through activity.

Furthermore, as soon as one starts examining just what the conditions of criticality are, it becomes readily apparent that it is not a purely individual trait. It may involve some individual virtues, but only as they are formed, expressed, and influenced in actual social circumstances. Institutions and social relations may foster criticality or suppress it. Because criticality is a function of collective questioning, criticism, and creativity, it is *always* social in character, partly because relations to others influence the individual, and partly because certain of these activities (particularly thinking in new ways) arise from an interaction with challenging alternative views (Burbules 1993).

These conditions, then, of personal character, of challenging and supportive social relations, of communicative opportunities, of contexts of difference that present us with the possibility of thinking otherwise, are interdependent circumstances. They are the conditions that allow the development and exercise of criticality as we have sketched it in this essay. They are, of course, *educational* conditions. Criticality is a practice, a mark of what we do, of who we are, and not only how we think. Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy, and their feminist, multiculturalist, and postmodern critics, apprehend parts of this conception of criticality. Yet, we find, the deepest insights into understanding what criticality is come from the unreconciled tensions amongst them — because it is in remaining open to such challenges without seeking to dissipate them that criticality reveals its value as a way of life.

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