Confronting Neoliberalism: Classroom Practice and Social Justice Teaching

Christine Sleeter, May 2, 2014
Hegemony: “Domination, influence, or authority over another, especially by one political group over a society or by one nation over others”

en.wiktionary.org

Curriculum planning web, Kia Aroha College, NZ
http://grassrootscurriculum.org/
Chicago Grassroots Curriculum

- Themes such as housing rights, privatization, city budget cuts, organization of movements
- Projects such as production of video documentaries
- Students produce as well as consume knowledge
- University preparation

Textbook plus Student Learning Action Journal

http://grassrootscurriculum.org/
Figure 2: Average Household After-Tax Income
Including Public and Private Benefits, 1979 and 2006

- $1,200,000
- $1,000,000
- $800,000
- $600,000
- $400,000
- $200,000
- $0

- 11% rise
- 18% rise
- 21% rise
- 32% rise
- 55% rise

- 1979
- 2006

Poorest fifth
Second fifth
Middle fifth
Fourth fifth
80th-99th Percentiles
Top 1 Percent
Incomes rise fastest at the top
Percentage growth in household income, by rank on income scale, 1979–2007
WHAT THEY WOULD LIKE IT TO BE

Source: Michael I. Norton, Harvard Business School; Dan Ariely, Duke University
There are large differences in levels of income inequality across OECD countries.

Gini coefficient of household disposable income and gap between richest and poorest 10%, 2010.

- Gini coefficient (♂)
- S90/S10 income decile share (right scale)

Countries listed from left to right: Iceland, Slovenia, Norway, Denmark, Czech Republic, Finland, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Hungary, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Poland, Ireland, Korea, New Zealand, Italy, Estonia, Canada, Australia, Japan, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Israel, Turkey, Mexico, Chile, OECD-34.

The United States is highlighted with a red circle.
Restoration of Elite Power

Share in national income of top 0.1% of population

War, New Deal, Growth of large unions, Civil rights movements, Van Hayak

Neoliberalism proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve the institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (Harvey, 2005)
NEO LIBERALISM

- The rule of the market
- Privatization
- Minimal public expenditures for social services
- Deregulation of capital
- Elimination of the concept of the public good or community
Restoration of Elite Power

Share in national income of top 0.1% of population

David Harvey (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism.*
Drop in Corporate Taxes

Effective Corporate Tax Rate

Source: BEA & OMB
Corporate Profits After Tax (CP)
Source: U.S. Department of Commerce: Bureau of Economic Analysis

Shaded areas indicate US recessions.
2012 research.stlouisfed.org
Shrinking Middle Class

Percent of Households With Annual Income Within 50% of the Median

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CEA Calculations from Current Population Survey
As union membership decreases, middle class income shrinks.
## Loss of Public Money for Public Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Humanitarian Immigrants Who Are Elderly or Have Disabilities Losing SSI Benefits as a Result of The Seven-Year Limit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2,483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>6,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total to Date</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,053</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>4,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Social Security Administration estimates.  

Note: The actual number of humanitarian immigrants who are no longer receiving SSI benefits as a result of the time limit is likely modestly lower than these figures. The estimates for 2003-2006 do not capture individuals who lost SSI benefits but later qualified for SSI benefits based on having attained citizenship or based on their work history. In addition, the estimate for 2006 does not take into account circumstances unrelated to the time limit that would have affected eligibility, such as death or marriage.

http://www.cbpp.org/10-16-03tax.htm
Loss of Public Money for Public Services

Paying for College
Since 2001, government support, measured per student, has plunged while tuition has increased faster than inflation. Below, educational revenues per student for public colleges and universities, adjusted for inflation in 2004 dollars.

$8,000
STATE AND LOCAL APPROPRIATIONS

6,000

4,000
TUITION

2,000

0
'92 '94 '96 '98 '00 '02 '04

Source: State Higher Education Executive Officers

The New York Times
Student share of cost of education: US

Student share of cost increased by > 70%

Note: Net tuition revenue used for capital debt service is included in net tuition revenue, but excluded from total educational revenue in calculating the above figures.

Source: SSDB
Loss of Public Money for Public Services
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two Paradigms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central goal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards Mvt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching/learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ culture, background</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards Mvt.</th>
<th>Multicultural/Equity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Raise test scores; improve US global standing</td>
<td><strong>Central goal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Result of lax curriculum, poor teaching</td>
<td><strong>Achievement gap</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consensus over basics; standardize; content acquisition trumps thinking</td>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cover standards, use scientifically-validated programs</td>
<td><strong>Teaching/learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Irrelevant, treat everyone the same</td>
<td><strong>Students’ culture, background</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trend in NAEP reading average scores for 9-year-old students, by race/ethnicity
Trend in NAEP reading average scores for 13-year-old students, by race/ethnicity
Trend in NAEP reading average scores for 17-year-old students, by race/ethnicity
Neoliberal equity-blind reforms

- Standardize curriculum, enforce through testing, teach what is tested
- Competition, market as reform strategy; rank schools, teachers based on student test scores; treat parents as consumers
- Privatize (e.g., privately managed charter schools, test and tutoring companies), education for profit
- Venture philanthropists as reformers
Venture Philanthropy

Wealth driving education policy for the poor, bypassing democratic process and public deliberation where a wider array of policies might be considered and funded if public money were available.

Mainly White men, shaping education for the poor and students of color, around principles that worked for them financially:

- Market competition (school choice/vouchers, expanded private options, charter schools, elimination of teacher tenure)
- Standardization (curriculum standards)
- High-stakes accountability (student testing, teacher evaluation by student test scores)
- Deregulation

Benjamin Jealous, Former President and CEO, NAACP

"Organized people can overcome organized money."

"Learn your history and transform your anger into action."
Teaching for Democracy that speaks back to Neoliberalism

• Students critically question the world around them
I wanted to bring the issues of democracy and discrimination to the surface in my school environment. I involved my students because I believe, as Freire did, that,

“as they look at their environment, they will find the autonomy to become the problem solvers of institutional inequality.”
Problem: oppressive hierarchy within the school

At my school, students treat each other differently because they’re in different social groups.

1 = Strongly Agree   2 = Agree   3 = Not Sure   4 = Disagree   5 = Strongly Disagree
At my school, students treat each other differently because of race.

Problem: oppressive hierarchy within the school

1 = Strongly Agree  2 = Agree  3 = Not Sure  4 = Disagree  5 = Strongly Disagree
How kids depicted US society

President

“Bums”
Ancient Egypt

- Geography
- Social structure
- Cultural artifacts, belief systems

Grant & Sleeter, Turning on Learning, 5th ed., pp. 279-285
Hierarchical vs. Egalitarian Societies

Ancient Egyptian social structure: Role playing the “pyramid of power”

School social structure: Analyzing and changing our own “pyramid of power”

US society: Critically questioning the “pyramid of power” through literature (e.g., *Roll of Thunder Hear my Cry*)
Teaching for Democracy that speaks back to Neoliberalism

- Students critically question the world around them
- Students critically question structures of inequality, including class in addition to race, gender, sexual orientation, disability
Chicago Grassroots Curriculum

Land, Housing, and Communities (see URUR)

School and Education Struggles

Criminalization, Law, Policing, Prisons

(Im)migration Struggles

Health, Wellness and Health Crises (including environmental)

Community Culture and Media

Labor, Industry and Economics

Electoral Politics and Local Power
Chicago Grassroots Curriculum

Economics / Poverty
- City spending on tourism and downtown luxury vs. lower class communities
- Rising poverty in the region – esp. among African Americans and Latinos
- Technology integration / technology divide
- University of Chicago’s global neo-liberalization policies

Housing and Urban Planning
- Arsons for Profit
- Chicago 21 Plan – and community resistance against it
- Gentrification, displacement, urban renewal
- Local urban planning “masterplans”
- MLK in Chicago and how people actually responded to his assassination
- Open housing movement
- Public housing history - Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)
- Redlining and intentional segregation
- Restrictive covenants and forced ghetto living
- TIF districts and unequal investment in downtown areas
- University of Chicago and urban renewal planning

http://grassrootscurriculum.org/
Teaching for Democracy that speaks back to Neoliberalism

• Students critically question the world around them
• Students critically question structures of inequality, including class in addition to race, gender, sexual orientation, disability
• Students learn how organized action matters and has mattered historically
Kathy: 1st grade

“The conflict between what agriculture has become in this country and what it can be is at the heart of why I think that it is important to teach this unit, particularly in an area like ours where so many of my students’ parents work in agriculture, yet so few can be farmers. . . . In the late 50s, my uncle decided that he could no longer make a living from farming [the] land, and no one has tried to make a living from it since.”

Sleeter & Combleth, Eds. Teaching with Vision, Teachers College Press, Ch. 5
“Agriculture directly affects the lives of my students. Out of my twenty students, most have at least one parent who is employed in agriculture or an agriculture-related industry such as vegetable packing. The parents’ income and work schedules are determined by the crops and the large companies which grow them.”

Kathy wants the children to learn more about their parents’ work, not to become agricultural workers themselves, but to respect the work their parents do.

“Most of the parents don’t want their kids to grow up to be farm workers, . . . that’s why they want their children to get more education.”
“Last fall when on the ballot there was the tax to keep [the county hospital] open, one of my children brought that up in class and we talked about it....This one little girl said, Yeah, everybody has to go vote or they’re going to close the hospital, and there won’t be any place left to go. We talked about that. She’s heard her parents and aunts and uncles discussing it. The war in Iraq. A year ago one of the kids brought in a picture of the soldiers from Salinas that had appeared in the paper, soldiers from Salinas that were serving in Iraq. And so we talked about it.”
Monterey County Agriculture

Social studies
- Small farming vs. agribusiness
- Labor organizing
- Dust Bowl refugees

Language arts
- Farming and local history vocabulary

Music

Math
- Graphing
- More than/ less than

Science
- Plant growth

Farming and local history vocabulary
- Labor organizing songs
WHO WE ARE

The California chapter of the National Association for Multicultural Education is a group of teacher educators, teachers, students, parents, community activists, and others with a strong interest in creating socially just and equitable learning communities in California schools and classrooms.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

As a group we are committed to developing multicultural, anti-racist and anti-oppressive projects within an education system that fully embraces the diversity of California’s students, and that is rooted in the needs and interests of historically dominated and institutionally marginalized communities. We stand for the public good and community-based schools influenced primarily by teachers, students, and families. We have seen how the forces of neoliberal privatization have shifted the emphasis away from public ownership of schools, and we are experiencing the standardization of pedagogy and curriculum driven by the market forces that include textbook and testing corporations. We stand against a color-blind and oppression-blind ideology that attempts to erase, rather than embrace, any kind of difference.

WHAT WE DO

Recognizing how privatization, standardization, and color-blind ideology interlock and are fundamentally eroding public education in California, CA NAME has identified these as key focus areas for our organization—concentrations that grow from our political analysis of the forces impacting education today. Drawing from our capacity as a statewide organization and capitalizing on the unique strengths of our membership base, we hope to address these issues through the following strategies:

1. State level advocacy through coalition building—engaging in statewide education campaigns around key issues of equity in education and shaping state policy;
2. Establishing a public voice—through engaged scholarship and advocacy that challenges unjust educational policy and practices.
3. Resource sharing—teachers, parents, and teacher educators, along with community-based organizations, will share pedagogical, research, educational, and community resources;
4. Concrete education projects that nurture communities of praxis—through our Regional Networks, we will create alliances with grassroots, institutional, and other spaces;
5. Reclaiming Multicultural Education—CA NAME will promote and develop a critical, anti-racist Multicultural Education through various projects that grow out of the needs and interests of historically dominated and institutionally marginalized communities.
Teachers for Social Justice

**The Future of Our Schools**

**TSJ & CORE Invite You To**

A Public Forum w/ Lois Weiner
Fighting To Reclaim Public Education:
The Power of Teachers and Their Unions
Friday, February 8th, 7:00-9:00 PM
United Electrical Union Hall
37 S. Ashland
Lois Weiner is a lifelong union

**News/Upcoming Events**

TSJ & CORE Public Forum w/ Lois Weiner
Fighting to Reclaim Public Education:
The Power of Teachers and Their Unions
Fri., Feb 8th
7-9 pm
UE Hall
37 S. Ashland

Community Hearings on School Closings
Throughout February, there will be community meetings on school closings. Please attend as you are able to support our neighborhood schools from being closed. Click [here](#) for a complete list of meetings.
LEAD: Honoring Member Activism

The entire world now believes in the power of the Chicago Teachers Union. It is past time to honor our member-activists. The time is now to follow their lead and engage our lawmakers. Come to 2012 LEAD and share a meal with your legislators.
RSVP for NYCoRE's Oct. General Meeting – Friday, October 19th
Join NYCoRE for its October General Meeting This month's

Desde las entrañas del monstruo: Article about NYCoRE in Chilean Education Magazine
Desde las entrañas del

APPLY NOW FOR AN UNDOING RACISM WORKSHOP SCHOLARSHIP!
Last fall NYCoRE organized an

10.24.12 – Book Talk: Educational Courage
Educational Courage was just

9.21.12: Welcome Back, Come to NYCoRE's First Meeting of 2012-13

Urgent call from the social
education for liberation network

EdLib Lab—an online “laboratory” for finding, discussing and developing social justice teaching materials. The lab features a searchable curriculum database that allows you to find materials, post your own or comment on others. We also publish the lab report, a monthly summary of the materials that are posted and host an occasional discussion series called talkin’ bout.

Virtual Community—our Facebook site where you can create your own member profile, participate in online discussions, chat with fellow educators and read the latest headlines from the fight for a just education. You can also stay in touch via our listserv.

Free Minds, Free People—a national conference on liberatory education that took place in Chicago in 2007 and Houston in 2009. The next conference will take place in Providence, July 7 to 10, 2011. Please visit www.freemindsfreepeople.org for more information and to register.


Social Justice Expo—a New York City expo for high school students doing social justice projects.

Research Database—a searchable collection of research materials related to Education for Liberation. You can also stay in touch with other researchers via the research listserv.

http://www.edliberation.org/
“There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” Freire