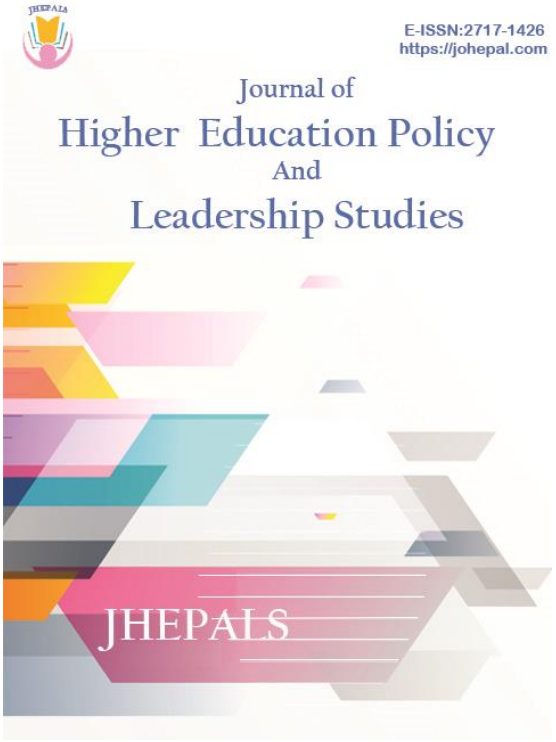
Journal of
Higher Education Policy
And
Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

https://johepal.com



The Perilous Road to Justice: An Interview with Prof. Peter McLaren

Peter McLaren

Distinguished Professor in Critical Studies, The Donna Ford Attallah College of Educational Studies, Chapman University, USA

Email: mclaren@chapman.edu

Interview Questions Submitted	Interview Responses Received	Published Online
2021/01/28	**2021/03/13**	**2021/04/10**

Cite interview as:

McLaren, P. (2021). The perilous road to justice: An interview with Peter McLaren. *Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies*, *2*(1), 145-156. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.29252/johepal.2.1.145

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

The Perilous Road to Justice: An Interview with Prof. Peter McLaren

Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies (JHEPALS)

E-ISSN: 2717-1426
Volume: 2 Issue: 1
pp. 145-156
DOI:
10.29252/johepal.2.1.145

Peter McLaren *

Peter McLaren is Distinguished Professor in Critical Studies, College of Educational Studies, Chapman University. He is Co-Director and International Ambassador for Global Ethics and Social Justice of the Paulo Freire Democratic Project, College of Educational Studies, Chapman University. He has served as Chair Professor, Northeast Normal University in Changchun, China, where he is Honorary Director of the Center for Critical Studies in Education. A Marxist humanist, he lectures widely in Latin America, North America, Asia, and Europe.

Professor McLaren is the author and editor of approximately 50 books and hundreds of professional publications on education and social justice. His writings have been translated into over 25 languages. He received his Ph.D. in education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada. He is the co-founder of Instituto McLaren de Pedagogia Critica y Educacion Popular.

He has received numerous lifetime achievement awards, book awards and honorary doctorates.

Keywords: Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy; Paulo Freire; Pandemic; Worker Cooperative; Knowledge Capitalism

*Corresponding author's email: mclaren@chapman.edu

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

Interview

It is with honor and privilege to welcome Prof. Peter McLaren for an interview concerning the main challenges and crises which universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) experience worldwide.

Prof. McLaren with his critical standpoint is acknowledged as a globally recognized critic of the injustices, inequalities, biases, and malpractices within the realm of education with an enormous experience of collaboration with global educational and political leaders in teaching, research, and leadership positions. Considering the aims and scope of our journal as well as our readers' zeal and zest to learn your novel innovative ideas; we would greatly appreciate it if you could provide feedback concerning the following queries:

Question: What is the truth behind the scene in universities' performance; the challenges and crises that universities confront worldwide; sense-making in universities and higher education institutions as an organization; and your current as well as future portrayal of higher education!

Answer: It is clear from your questions that you are speaking deeply from a very specialized field of study. I am not a specialist in the study of organizations nor do I teach in the field of Higher Education, although I have taught educational leadership and policy studies in various universities most of my life. So I can only speak from my own lived experiences in attempting to respond to the general import of your questions, My doctorate is in Curriculum Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, but I am more comfortable working in the fields of political sociology, symbolic anthropology (the study of ritual) and critical theory (the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Marx, Hegel, Freire historical materialism, phenomenology, post-physicalist studies of consciousness, neurotheology).

I have been challenged by humankind's inability to know completely the laws of nature, unconscious learning, and what this entails. I taught at a public university, Brock University, in my native Canada for a year, at a public university--the University of California, Los Angeles—for twenty years, and prior to that I taught for nearly a decade at another public institution—Miami University of Ohio—that was founded in 1809. The school of education at Miami University of Ohio is located across the street from the McGuffey House and Museum that was where William Holmes McGuffey created one of the first set of mass produced textbooks for US schools, replacing the New England Primer that was animated by colonial ideology and strict Calvinist religion. His textbooks lasted from the 1830s to the 1920s. I worked in a Department of Educational Leadership while at Miami University of Ohio in a school that is now called the College of Education, Health and Society. While at UCLA I became familiar with the Department of Higher Education which was famous for its survey research of trends among college students across the United States and for its studies of educational systems. Both schools were staffed with excellent faculty but in 2013 I decided that I needed to work in a small campus away from Los Angeles and joined the faculty at the Donna Ford Attallah College of Educational Studies, Chapman University.

In 2006 I had been identified by a rightwing organization at the "most dangerous professor at UCLA" and was placed on the top of a list of 30 left-wing professors who became known as "the dirty thirty." We were attacked for criticizing US foreign and domestic policies (the invasion of Vietnam, Iraq, drone strikes against US citizens, overthrow of democratically elected presidents of foreign countries) and for our descriptions of the US as a settler colonial state and for its history of genocide against Native Americans and crimes against humanity (slavery, Jim Crow laws). I was put on top of

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

the list, most likely for working with President Hugo Chavez at the time—this was 2006—and because of my support for the Cuban revolution. I was very vocal in my support for President Chavez and for supporting the educational efforts of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela—all of this was considered anti-American. Students were offered a hundred dollars to provide audiotapes of my lectures and fifty dollars for notes they had taken on my lectures. I stayed on at UCLA until 2013 and decided I needed a change of venue for personal and political reasons. Chapman University seemed as good a place as any to start. I had heard that Martin Luther King had given a speech there in 1961.

A wonderful group of Freirean professors asked if I would consider coming to Chapman and I could not resist. I am referring to a group of professors who had known Paulo and to whom Paulo had given his blessings to create The Paulo Freire Democratic Project at Chapman. Some of them shared my Marxist politics, and some were more progressive than Marxist but all of them were wonderful human beings committed to building a better future for the surrounding communities. Prior to joining Chapman I had visited and given talks in approximately 30 countries, attempting to create an informal global network of critical educators. The professors at Chapman were experts in building relationships between the university and surrounding community, especially in one mostly Mexican community not far from our campus. I was taking a more macro view and they were taking a more granular, micro examination of the surrounding neighborhoods. They were also involved in helping mothers whose children were in juvenile detention centers (prison for youth under 18 years of age). I learned a great deal from them and continue to learn from them. During my free time I would travel to Mexico to help further the mission of Instituto McLaren de Pedagogia Critica, which was originally conceived by Professor Sergio Quiroz Miranda in 2006. Professor Miranda helped to create the Partido de los Comunistas Mexicanos in December of 1997 and he held conferences called Volver a Marx (Return to Marx) all over Mexico with participants that included el Partido Popular Socialista, el Movimiento Comunista Mexicano, la Asociación de Educadores de América Latina y el Caribe, la Fundación McLaren de Pedagogía Crítica, el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, el Movimiento de Bases Magisteriales y el Frente Sindical Mexicano. These were important events that included many university professors and workers, including indigenous groups. How wonderful to be free of the mildly liberal politics of the North American university! Our guest speakers included Marta Harnecker, who helped Fidel Castro in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution and whom I had first met in an office in Miraflores Palace where I had the good fortune of meeting President Hugo Chavez.

I have very much appreciated my experiences at Chapman. At Chapman we have a small but inspirational group of doctoral students. Many of them have come from diverse cultural and ethnic groups: Muslim students from the U.S. and various other countries, African-American students, Chinese-American students and Chinese students from Shanghai, Latino/a students from the Los Angeles and Orange County area. We've had indigenous students and visiting scholars I brought to Chapman from Northeast Normal University in Changchun, Jilin Province, China (occupied by the Japanese during WW2). However, our student population at Chapman is mostly white and we are exploring ways of making our educational programs more diverse. Most of the students I have worked with are practicing high school and elementary school teachers. I'm the oldest faculty member in our college. And I am always learning so much from my younger colleagues and from my students.

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

Interview

Question: In the context of commodification of education and within the discourse of neo-liberalism, how higher education leadership can deal with educational inequalities and injustices in academia?

Answer: Tragically, academia now serves as a key evangelist for neoliberalism. What accounts for at least part of the problem of injustice and inequality in academia is how we approach the concept of social class. It should come as no surprise that in the North American academy we find truncated and eviscerated understandings of class, the result, in part, of following a neo-Weberian conception of class that reduces the concept of class from an objective location in social relations of exploitation to that of status relations and lifestyle patterns. These are conventional and standardized neo-Weberian shortcomings that virtually erase the very existence of ruling class domination and exploitation that is premised on value augmentation, that is, on the production of profits. What we fail to appreciate is a Marxist analysis of class in our educational research. Many people who analyze social class and inequality today think of social inequality as natural to capitalist society, as a legitimate and inevitable result of class stratification within capitalist society—that is, something that is natural to social life—rather than a conflict over the appropriation of capitalist production. These researchers fail to address capitalist exploitation by means of the capitalist mode of production and division of labor in which one class directs the process of production while the other classes serve as direct producers and serves the dominant class. We are not simply referring to the control of material production by the dominant class—by the administrative clerics and the redactors-in-chiefs who serve as sentinels of the empire of capital—but the production of ideas. We could refer to this as cognitive capitalism. Marx was correct when he maintained that the ruling class produces the ruling ideas as well as benefits from the forces and relations of production. What is missing from higher education is an analysis of the logic of capital. Such a logic needs to be targeted, challenged, and negated by a robust historical materialist analysis and such a logic—what we call neoliberal capitalism—is at the heart of the darkness that is permutating life in the twenty-first century. One only has to consider the businessification of universities with its emphasis on the "brand" of the university, its World University rankings, and its technical-rational bureaucratic solutions to human problems—all of which create unconscious accomplices to the neoliberal system. Here we need to engage the idea of cognitive capitalism and the knowledge economy and the production of inequality through a negative dialectics—and I'm thinking here of the many critical theorists that we discover in the field of critical pedagogy. We live at a time when we are becoming impacted by mobile devices with unprecedented processing power, storage capacity, and access to knowledge. New discoveries in the fields of artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, and quantum computing are turning us away from critical citizenship and repurposing humanity as consumer citizens where our personal subjective decisions are being controlled, and our collective and moral consciousness is being guided along an arc that no longer serves the common good—in fact, it serves the rich one percent of humanity. A Fourth Industrial Revolution is happening right before our eyes characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres. All of these new technological advances and innovations are impacting the objective forces of capitalist production but also the culture of capitalist society. And I don't believe that the universities are adequately preparing students with critical languages to be able to understand how these changes are shaping our future. Hence, we need an infusion of critical pedagogy into higher education.

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

I have taught in colleges of education for most of my life—it's been over thirty years—and rarely have I found classes focused on the history of capitalism or that have engaged in exploring the shifting dynamics of capitalist production in relation to the military industrial complex, to accumulation by dispossession and by repression, or that deal with the impact that post-digital science has contributed to changes in capitalist production, accumulation, circulation and distribution and the transformation of the cultural commons. Or the ways in which capitalism has historically been entangled in racism, white supremacy and what is now called the coloniality of power—in omnicide, ecocide, genocide or epistemicide. In North America it is clear that there remains a motivated amnesia about capitalism, it's become very much a taboo topic because it has been so naturalized and it has been positioned by the mainstream media against the alternative social universe of socialism. And with the exception of advocates such as Bernie Sanders, socialism has not fared well as a topic in schools and colleges of education. In fact, socialism has become a dangerous word that attracts much criticism from conservative groups who act as watchdogs for our schools. That said, the fundamental prerequisite for all education classes in colleges of education should, in my opinion, be the study of the history of capitalism, and how, up to the present, capitalist relations of production have reproduced through structured hierarchies willfully compliant and efficient workers who have little or no understanding of socialist alternatives. Of course, I'm advocating a Marxist critique of political economy. We have enough neoclassical economists wreaking havoc. Universities participate in a myriad of ways in reproducing class society—they are complicitous in what we call social reproduction, more specifically the production of intergenerational hierarchies related to class location. A good economist will offer students research that reveals just how fragile the global economy really is, and how it has never fully recovered from the 2008 financial collapse and how it is poised to collapse again with even more dire consequences given the permutations of disaster produced by the pandemic. In the U.S., emergency executive powers remain in the hands of state governors, and during the present pandemic, many governors have acted responsibly in closing down all but essential businesses until the situation improves. But now major conservative groups are pushing to limit these emergency executive powers that are currently being used to close down business and stop the spread of Covid-19. Some governors are actually getting rid of mask mandates. Conspiracy theories are proliferating at alarming rates about vaccinations, about the 'globalist' Democrats attempting to create a new world order. One conspiracy theory in particular has emerged that reproduces itself like a virus—each time one of its portentous predictions fails to materialize, it resets by 'moving the goalposts', that is, by redefining the boundaries of the conspiracy. I'm referring to the QAnon cult.

QAnon cult adherents claim that President Trump is waging a secret war against a cabal of Democrats consisting of elite Satan-worshipping pedophiles in government, business and the media. They claim that this cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles control the 'deep state' government. QAnon cultists are waiting anxiously for 'the Storm' and the 'Great Awakening' when former president Trump will order a mass arrest of the Satanic pedophiles, including popular Hollywood actors such as Tom Hanks. They also believe that former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton will be arrested and executed.

A handful of Republican members of Congress including Marjorie Taylor Greene who was elected to represent Georgia's 14th Congressional District in November, has been accused of amplifying QAnon conspiracy theories--- that the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers were an 'inside job' and that the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School never occurred but was 'staged by paid actors'. To date, the Republican Party has not officially denounced Greene—

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

in fact many Republican members of Congress appear to support her—insisting that the Republican Party is committed to supporting "diversity". I see these occult movements that are percolating through United States culture as resembling in the most chilling way the occult influences on the formation of Hitler's Nazi Party.

The worldwide pandemic has revealed the dark underbelly of capitalism, has ripped away the façade that capitalism is the best of all possible ways of organizing around subsistence and need. Socialism as an alternative to capitalism seems off the table at present, and conspiracy theories connected to political ideology seems to have replaced conventional religious practices which formerly had a stabilizing influence on the population. The crisis of global capitalism is as much structural as it is political. Politically, the system faces a crisis of capitalist hegemony and state legitimacy. In 2018, the richest 1 percent of humanity controlled more than half of the world's wealth while the bottom 80 percent had to make do with just 4.5 percent of this wealth. Such grim global inequalities have become politically explosive issues for politicians and for university leaders, and to the extent that the system is simply unable to reverse them, it turns to ever more repressive forms of containment to manage immiserated and vulnerable populations. As inequalities escalate, the system produces more wealth than the mass of working people can actually consume. As a result, the global market cannot absorb the output of the global economy and what is left are surpluses of devalued capital and a lack of demand leading to economic stagnation. William Robinson has written cogently on this process.

Let's for a moment consider trends of income from 1975 to 2018—critical researchers have uncovered a transfer of wealth from the working-class to the ownership class estimated by the Rand Corporation at 47 trillion dollars. Nearly 50 trillion dollars has been redistributed from the working class to America's wealthiest 1%. Such inequality robs $2.5 trillion dollars from workers each year (an equitable growth counterfactual). Such egregious theft exemplifies the grievous legacy of neoliberal capitalism.

So what happens when massive amounts of capital (profits) are accumulated but corporations find themselves unable to reinvest this capital profitably? Do they put their capital to the interests of the commonwealth—the common good? Oftentimes corporations enjoy record profits during the same time that corporate investment is actually declining. We see indulgent worldwide corporate cash reserves yet few opportunities for transnational corporations to handsomely profit from reinvestment. How do the corporations unload those profits? The surplus is unloaded by means of financial speculation in what William I. Robinson calls "the global casino." Very often this is accompanied by the looting of public finances, debt-driven growth and state-organized militarized accumulation. Are these not the economic hallmarks of corruption? Most disturbing, Robinson argues, is the dependency of worldwide corporations on developing new systems of warfare, new weaponry, new technologies of public surveillance and new psychological methods of social and political repression in order to accumulate capital in the face of stagnation. How about creating private mercenary armies? How about militarizing the police? Is it any wonder that in the United States, many Black Lives Matter activists are calling for defunding the police? Robinson argues that "so-called wars on drugs and terrorism; the undeclared wars on immigrants, refugees, gangs, and poor, dark-skinned and working-class youth more generally; the construction of border walls, immigrant jails, prison-industrial complexes, systems of mass surveillance, and the spread of private security guard and mercenary companies, have all become major sources of profit-making." It is all too easy to blame the coronavirus pandemic for these problems. But there was a crisis of state legitimacy and a breakdown of capitalist hegemony long before the pandemic arrived like a thief in

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

the night. The old pro-capitalist establishment in the United States is trying desperately to keep socialists from gaining any significant power or influence, as they remain desperately committed to saving capitalism at any cost.

Teacher education programs too often train teachers to become spineless clerks of the empire by ignoring these developments following in the wake of neoliberal capitalism. We are, as a result, re-entering an age of dogma, in which the nuances of reason have been sacrificed to a politics of authoritarianism which has aligned itself with white supremacy, attacks on immigrants, Muslims, and Democrats. Just look at Trump! The influence of this fascist will be felt for generations. The numbers of precarious academic workers are increasing, and because they are paid to teach single courses, they end up in poverty, with no benefits provided by the university. Very likely, such adjunct work will force new doctoral graduates to rely on food stamps, or to re-mortgage their homes (if they are lucky enough to own a home).

Question: What are the main differences and similarities between your perception of Critical Pedagogy and Paulo Freire's understanding of CP?

Answer: My work is located more overtly within a Marxist theoretical orbit, that of revolutionary praxis and liberation theology, but my work in total is greatly indebted to Freire. Freire sets the standards very high, and it is difficult to be a Freirean at all moments. But it is worth trying. Paulo is the greatest educational thinker in modern history in my estimation. Paulo's approach is compatible with my interest in existential phenomenology, hermeneutics and process philosophy, understanding and analysis and brings much needed relief from neoliberalism's emphasis on quantified measurable outcomes. I find it also more compatible with the liberal arts than with STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) with its consumption-driven emphasis on employability. I can only answer this question by repeating what I have said in many interviews. Paulo is the most important educational philosopher by far, in my opinion. In fact, I believe he is the most significant educational philosopher of the twentieth century. I felt a close affinity with Paulo, and was struck by his brilliance, his humility and his kindness. He had a generosity of spirit that I have found unparalleled. He exhibited great courage and tenacity and had the tenderest of hearts. And the spirit of a warrior! When I first met him in one of the big hotels in Chicago during a conference, he was surrounded by dozens of admirers. When he entered a room, people stood up from their seats and there was loud applause. This happened everywhere he went. People were always making requests of Paulo, and he always exhibited such patience. He would sometimes approach me in a fatherly fashion and offer me advice. He was aware of my work when we first met in 1985, and I was quite stunned to learn that information since I was only beginning my work at that time. When I started to give lectures in various countries throughout Latin America, he cautioned me not to export his ideas across national borders but to invite teachers and activists from other countries to reinvent or to translate his ideas in the context of their own specific struggles. Reinvent me, he would repeat, don't export me. He meant that different groups should reinterpret his work, given their specific contexts and histories. Reinvention in Paulo's view meant reinterpretation.

President Chavez appreciated those of us who were working in Venezuela with Freire's ideas and once he emphasized to me that any critical pedagogy that would emerge from the struggle of Venezuelan communities would be Venezuelan. Chavez was an admirer of Freire and he knew enough about Paulo's ideas to understand the importance of what happens to theories when they

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

"travel" from one country to another. President Chavez followed the work of Simon Rodriguez, the tutor of Simon Bolivar. At the same time, he wanted to bring critical pedagogy to the educational institutions and schools of Venezuela. Paulo would always remind me that he saw the world through Brazilian eyes, and that the complex web of reality made it impossible to "export" his work into other countries without considering the contextual specificity of the communities involved—he understood that people would take up his work in different ways and recreate and reinvent his ideas according to their own beliefs, cosmovisions, cultures and histories—including their myths, and those forces that mediate their lifeworlds. He knew how important it was for struggling communities to navigate the contradictions inherent in asymmetrical political systems of power and privilege sustained by a patriarchal and colonial capitalist system. Paulo, it is worth remembering, was famously imprisoned in by Brazil's fascist junta in 1964 for helping campesinos to read by sharing their lived experiences as an oppressed group. He exhorted those who took up his ideas to re-read and re-write him in their own ways, that is, in the ways in which they have come to read the word and the world. Freire did not want his work to be imposed on various groups through mechanistic, technocratic, or instrumentalized methodologies. When I gave talks about Paulo's work, I would restrict myself to discussing how Paulo's work influenced me in my North American contexts—how Paulo's ideas helped me to re-read the word and the world in ways in which I had never considered. Likewise, other communities would judge the relevance of Paulo's work in relation to their own specific struggles. I never tried to impose Paulo's ideas. In a sense, a teacher can never teach anyone anything. All a teacher can do is create the context and conditions for others to learn. Freire was one such context for me. Marx was another.

Paulo was a philosopher of praxis. That is something we should remember at all times. Paulo's emphasis on praxis meant that such struggles could lead to outcomes that were achievable or potentially feasible. Paulo's work became a baseline for my work although I could never live up to the demands his work placed on me—such as Paulo's notion of unfinishedness and transcending our limit situations and transforming them into untested feasibilities as part of our ontological vocation to become more fully human and to create spaces where justice can be affirmed. Paulo was deeply religious and followed the path of liberation theology and wrote about problems with the Catholic Church hierarchy, but his faith sustained him in the darkest moments of his life.

Many of Paulo's critics accused Paulo of being a utopian. In response, I always tried to keep in mind Ernst Bloch's distinction between concrete and abstract utopias and the importance of an 'educated hope' emerging through the praxis of revolutionary movements, among grassroots organizations. Paulo taught me to focus on concrete utopian thinking rather than on abstract utopias which are often blueprints envisioned by bourgeois intellectuals to be put into effect at some distant point in the future. Abstract utopian thinking is often disconnected from the struggles of the immiserated, the impoverished, the disinherited. So in this way, Freire was a 'Hopean' educator. His work was animated by hope. And, of course, by love. My work is more directed at creating a socialist alternative to capitalism through social movements. I call my work revolutionary critical pedagogy since I work under the conviction that critical pedagogy has been politically domesticated by the politics of liberal progressivism over the past three decades. Much of the work in critical pedagogy in the United States has been somewhat deracinated or gutted of a critique of political economy—very few of its practitioners challenge capitalism and its growing incompatibility with democracy. They are more concerned with redistributing resources from the capitalists to the workers. Now this is a good thing but its reformism too often parallels the logic of the capitalism it is attempting to challenge. I do not want to unduly criticize progressivist agendas such as

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

redistributing wealth from the capitalists to the workers. The question is not reform or revolution but reform and revolution. The way forward is not either/or but both/and. My work has been venturing into the realm of liberation theology. When I say that Jesus was a communist, it doesn't go over too well in the United States. I have since 1995 tried to bring the field of education into conversation with a Marxist critique of political economy, with the anti-fascist work of the Frankfurt School, particularly that of Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, and with contributions from the tradition of Latin American Liberation Theology and Catholic social justice teaching. And of course, the teachings of Paulo Freire.

Question: What does Critical Pedagogy entail within the realm of current authoritarianism? How could Critical Pedagogy shape the schooling in neglected and disadvantaged nations and unprivileged countries?

Answer: I have been engaged in the development of critical pedagogy for thirty years, and since the ascendency of the Trump administration in 2016 and the contemporary resurgence of authoritarian regimes throughout Europe, I have been focusing more on present day fascism, and the Trump phenomena. I have also been challenging the religious fascism of much evangelical Christianity—those churches that support Trump—from the position or perspective of liberation theology, which combines the social gospel of Jesus with Marxist economic critique. Recognizing the pressing need of the Catholic Church to participate in wider arenas of social justice, Pope John XXIII challenged the Church to defend the oppressed and the poor through his leadership in the influential Second Vatican Council (famously known as Vatican II; 1962-1965). Recognizing the historical alliances the Church had made with colonial powers and their empires of pillage and plunder, Pope John XXIII, through the 1962 Second Vatican Council, attempted to reclaim the early roots of the Church—the Church of the first 300 years before it was recognized as the "persecuting Church" that had aligned itself with the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition and was reported to have been complicit in helping Nazis escape to Latin America after World War II. Historically, it is clear the Catholic Church participated in legitimizing colonial and fascist regimes, mainly through Italy's Christian Democrat Party that was little more than a variant of Spanish fascist dictator Franco's pro-imperialist Falange movement. The Conference of Latin American Bishops that was held in 1968 in Medellin, Colombia, marked the beginning of a seismic shift in the Catholic Church. It was here that bishops from all over Latin America agreed that the Church should take ''preferential option for the poor'' while developing a catechism of liberation undergirded by the teachings of Jesus so that the poor could liberate themselves from the ''institutionalized violence'' of poverty and capitalist exploitation. This was very Freirean. The philosophy undergirding liberation theology that combined Christianity with a Marxist critique of political economy was first drawn up at a meeting of Latin American theologians, initiated by Gustavo Gutierrez, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1964. Shortly thereafter Christian "base communities" inspired by Liberation Theology began to appear throughout Brazil and the rest of Latin America followed by meetings of theologians and priests held in Havana, Cuba; Bogotá, Colombia and Cuernavaca, Mexico in June and July 1965. Of course, today liberation theology comes in many forms: Chicano liberation theology; Latinx liberation theology; Native American liberation theology; African American liberation theology and Islamic liberation theology. Liberation theologians argue that politics and religion are often analyzed as unwarrantedly and artificially distinct. But politics and religion are inseparable. Furthermore, in the case of Catholicism, they help to determine when and where the hermeneutical dualism between sin and

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

capitalist structures and relations of exploitation are to be applied, creating a more authentically Christian covenant between Catholic teachings and the poor. Liberation Theology gained international attention after the government assassination of six Jesuit scholars, their housekeeper and her daughter on 16 November 1989 on the campus of Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador, El Salvador. These Jesuit priests who bucked ecclesiastic authority by supporting liberation theology were shot dead by soldiers because they had pushed for negotiations between the government and left-wing rebels. Prior to these horrific murders in 1980, (the now beatified) Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero had been assassinated in 1980 while offering mass in the chapel of the Hospital of Divine Providence after famously speaking out against poverty, social injustice, and torture and urging President Jimmy Carter to stop sending helicopter gunships to the Salvadorean military. I have been influenced by these martyrs, and their work has shaped my vision of liberation.

I have attempted to bring Liberation Theology into dialogue with critical pedagogy and I have referred to this work as revolutionary critical pedagogy to underscore its pro-socialist and anti-fascist position as well as drawing attention to the importance of spirituality that can provide us with a value system from which to ground our work. I have been criticized by secularists for bringing spirituality into critical pedagogy. Revolutionary critical pedagogy is still very much indebted to the work of the Frankfurt School comprised of a group of intellectuals who were forced into exile in 1933. During and after their exile, Theodor Adorno and many of his Frankfurt School colleagues became preoccupied with fascism as an object of cultural and sociological inquiry. Critical theory, in fact, emerged from this crucible. Adorno and his colleagues were convinced that fascism was not mainly a German problem but a threat to all modern societies. And as we have seen during the Trump administration, the United States came perilously close to fascism and the collapse of democracy.

Rebuilding the university is more urgent today when our world is on the verge of planetary catastrophe as a result of climate change and nuclear catastrophe. We are protagonists in the dark drama of the struggle for human civilization. The recent attacks by Trump supporters—including many ex-military—on the Capitol building has shown the growing appeal of fascism over democracy. Trump's penchant for symbolically delousing its new immigrant populations from the south by drawing attention to their alleged cultural inferiority, his egregious ideological alliance with white supremacy, his extreme nationalism, and his malignant narcissism and toxic masculinity has done little to allay the nation's trauma in a world harrowed by war, famine, racism, and ecological destruction—and now the pandemic. Our universities have come under assault by Trump supporters and Republicans for promoting what they call 'cultural Marxism"—code words for what they consider to be political correctness, feminism, gay and lesbian and transgender rights advocacy, and multicultural and anti-racist initiatives. Clearly there is an ideological battle occurring and the universities known as "culture wars". These have been intensifying. But getting lost in this debate is the role of teachers and teaching and the structural, spatial and ideological conditions of possibilities for reclaiming the universities for democracy.

Teachers have been considered transformative and public intellectuals (Henry Giroux), and researchers (Joe Kincheloe), and cultural workers (Freire). Neary and Joss Winn have also been rethinking the idea of the university as a worker-cooperative with teachers and students as producers, as protagonistic agents furthering the development of socialism for the commons, for the public good. University campuses can—and should, in my view—become redesigned and repurposed as workers communes--places of solidarity with social movements, new and old, as well as labor unions and teachers unions who may be open to socialist alternatives. I believe that arguments that have been put forward for reimaging universities on the model of the worker-

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

cooperative rather than corporation and along the lines of the student as producer are important to consider, if we are to make significant gains in creating a socialist alternative to capitalism. This work has been theorized by Josh Winn and Mike Neary and others. They have promoted this idea at length and there is much more work to be done in this area. The university as a worker-cooperative would be grounded in values around which the design of the university would be based. These would include, according to Winn: Self-help, Self-responsibility, Democracy, Equality, Equity, and Solidarity. The principles are Voluntary and Open Membership; Democratic Member Control; Member Economic Participation; Autonomy and Independence; Education, Training and Information; Co-operation among Co-operatives; and Concern for Community. Here, the international co-operative movement could be examined historically to provide an affirmative, working platform for building worker co-operatives and for rethinking the very idea of academic labor and cognitive capitalism. As they stand, Winn and Neary argue, universities are capitalist employers who reproduce academic labor in the form of student labor. Knowledge that is produced in this form of organization is powered through value production (the extraction of profits) and exists mainly as a commodity form, as dead labor. Dead labor in the Marxist sense, that is. But Winn, Neary and others have challenged the corporate university and developed important ideas for the transformation of the university into a worker-owned and managed co-operative university that would control the means of knowledge production and potentially produce new forms of social knowledge through a 'common ownership' form of property relations that transforms the distinction between 'public' and 'private' in order to create an 'academic commons' designed for the good of the community. This is important work that needs to be developed further. This may seem unrealistic to many readers. But that should not be an obstacle in moving ahead with this idea. Succeeding in this challenge would bring about a new type of student- teacher relationship through forms of solidarity, reciprocity, equality and mutuality in terms of the division of labor. Here, neoliberal business models based on institutional precedents could be replaced by Freirean dialogical models grounded in historical materialist analysis that stresses the development of critical consciousness and protagonistic agency (another way of describing a philosophy of praxis) and what Winn and Neary refer to as the Student as Producer. The community of scholars comprising the cooperative university would co-construct the curriculum with the students and the surrounding community (and other outside 'experts'), and this would likely involve political antagonisms since such a move would brush against the grain of the imperatives of capitalist value production. Now I also believe avenues for spiritual expression should also be made available, but certainly not the truncated political fascism we are seeing from many of the evangelicals who worship at the altar of Donald Trump. I am referring here to the importance of promoting ecumenism and the value of understanding the contributions of religions and science from many different faith traditions.

Universities need to be flexible in how they approach the relationship between epistemology and ethics and begin planning for future disruptions (such as more pandemics, geopolitical struggles over water, rising food prices and wars and famines) and to study ways of both anticipating and preventing them. There will be existential issues that demand answers. Clearly, we need to rethink the epistemological and ethical underpinnings of education. There are questions we must ask ourselves: How do we envision a social universe outside of capital's value form, outside of value augmentation or profit-creation? Can we take advantage of the post-pandemic new normal? How can we address the machinations of capitalism that has absolutely failed humanity in this time of the pandemic? Can we move away from our laser-focus on post-digital technocracy, outcomes-based models of learning, commercial interests and measurement and accountability schemes and place

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]

more value on dialectical reasoning, dialogue and revolutionary praxis? Can we shift away from the competitive branding and marketing of our universities to the pursuit of both truth and justice? Can we take seriously Freire's call for making education our ontological vocation for becoming more fully human? Can digitalization bring us closer together to becoming global citizens, and at what cost? What does performing to standard mean with respect to online classes? Can it have a democratizing effect? Or can the rules and the interactive digital platforms that have been established unwittingly favor the oppressor over the oppressed?

Let's look at the curriculum. First, education must be focused on creating alternatives to capitalism—from post-feudal times to present instantiations of financialization. Society, culture and social relations of production must be seen as interconnected. Systemic racism must be understood as it is inextricably linked to the legal system and the criminal justice system. Capital-perpetuated settler colonialism, sexism, racism, homophobia, and misogyny, misanthropy and misology must be examined for their interrelatedness, including the historically generated myths that have served to legitimize them. A curriculum for liberation should focus on the various systems of mediation that have produced us as 21stcentury compliant and self-censoring human beings who appear defenceless in the face of ethno-nationalist calls for war, for ethnic chauvinism, for narratives championing imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy and the coloniality of power. There should be a study of revolutionary social movements that have challenged these systems of mediation, and why some groups succeeded and why many of them failed.

Recreating the university along the lines of a worker-cooperative would create the ideal space for practicing a revolutionary critical pedagogy able to discern the dialectical contradictions that make up the world, and the ways in which labor assumes its value-form and how the labor power of knowledge workers is exploited in the interests of the owners of production. In such a space revolutionary critical pedagogy would be able to assume a practical formation that does not recapitulate the instrumentality of the social formations it attempts to transform. It would be capable of mustering a negative critique of the social formations and preconditions that makes the value-form of labor possible and in so doing transform them under the assumption that social relations always entail what they are not. In other words, the natural appearance of existing social relations are never entirely natural but reified, turned into abstractions, into congealed labor-time, as Adorno teaches us. Understanding this challenge will bring us closer to a social universe in which needs and human capacities are harmonized and accommodated.

[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.145]