

TRANSFORMATIVE PRINCIPLES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Marta P. Baltodano¹

Beyond Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism emerged in the 1960s as one of the major political conquests of the civil rights movement after the Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) officially eliminated racial segregation. It became a revolutionary social policy designed to integrate people of color and other marginalized groups into mainstream society with the same access to rights and resources as their White mainstream counterparts. Multiculturalism was visualized as one of the most effective counter-hegemonic practices to reverse centuries of racialized domination that through slavery made possible the capital accumulation that positioned the United States as one of the most powerful nations in the world.

However, despite different legislation, liberal policies, and educational strategies, schools were places where the beliefs about racial inferiority were deeply rooted in the practices of everyday life. Therefore, in 1977, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) included multicultural education as a vital element of its accreditation criteria as a way of enforcing the Supreme Court's desegregation mandate.

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According to Grant (1981), "multicultural education [was] recommended because most teacher education programs [were] not satisfactorily prepar[ing] their students to accept and affirm human diversity in race, class, sex, handicap, and age" (p. 95).

As Banks (1994) explains, the major goal of multicultural education at that time was to "reform the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups could experience educational equality" (p. 3).

Thus, multiculturalism became associated with a transformation in the curriculum. The inclusion of themes about ethnic groups, women, and some linguistic communities in the curriculum was considered enough to transform the hegemonic beliefs of the dominant social order. Teacher education programs began modifying their curriculum to include more lesson plans and courses about linguistic and ethnic diversity. There was the assumption that by including information about different cultures in teacher preparation programs, teachers would recognize and reduce ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender inequalities in schools (Banks, 1993a, 1993b, 1994; Bowen, 1979; Grant, 1981; Grant & Koskela, 1986; Grant & Secada, 1990).

However, what began as a counter-hegemonic movement has gradually been appropriated and has become a mainstream policy now more defined by the perspectives on diversity of the dominant class. As such, its ideas have remained stagnant and untouched by the complex economic changes that have transformed the welfare state of the 1960s to the transnational, globalized economy of the 21st century (Darder, 1991, 1995a, 1995b; McLaren, 1995, 1998; Kanpol and McLaren, 1995).

Ultimately, the recent trend towards accreditation by NCATE and state agencies has legitimized the appropriation of the discourse on diversity and has encouraged the

proliferation of the so-called social justice programs that are co-opting the few progressive dialogues in education. A review of the literature on multiculturalism and the prevalent political approaches to cultural diversity clearly reveals the co-option of this movement.

The Conservative Approach: The Deficit Myth

Forced by judicial and legislative decisions to integrate *colored people*, the advocate of this approach to cultural diversity "pays lip service to the cognitive equality of all races (the discourse of sameness) but charges unsuccessful minorities with having culturally deprived backgrounds and a lack of strong family-oriented values" (McLaren, 1995, p. 103). This approach is what McLaren (1995) calls "conservative or corporate multiculturalism," and the rationale behind the label 'children at risk' and English-only programs.

The "conservative multiculturalism" or "traditional multiculturalism" as Darder (1994) prefers to call it firmly believes in the supremacy of Western civilization values and "refuses to treat Whiteness as a form of ethnicity" (McLaren, 1995, p.104). The response to cultural diversity in these institutions is mainly a "cover up to the ideology of assimilation" (McLaren, 1995, p. 104). Multicultural education and bilingual programs are essentially designed to "add-on" culturally diverse students to the dominant culture and achieve standards of excellence. There is no question either about the nature and hierarchies of knowledge or about the "discourses and social and cultural practices that are implicated in global dominance and are inscribed in racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic assumptions" (McLaren, 1995, p. 105). Traditional or conservative institutions address diversity as a cultural deficiency. The deficit myth approach

categorizes "Otherness" as biologically and socially abnormal. From this view, multiculturalism is viewed as a policy to prevent deviance.

The Liberal Discourse: A Distributive Paradigm

This approach is based on the assumption that what prevents culturally diverse people from fully integrating in society is their lack of access to basic social services. The distributive paradigm is the underlying rationale of this approach which focuses on the possessions of material goods and social positions, and extends this concept of goods distribution to values such as self-respect, opportunity, impartiality, and equality (Young, 1990, p. 8).

As in the conservative approach, issues of domination and oppression are not questioned. Darder (1991) argues that "in spite of its humanistic posture, the traditional liberal discourse also degenerates into an ahistorical, undialectical, and apolitical view that functions ultimately to curtail the forms of critical thinking and constructive dialogue that could lead to a critical and productive education for bicultural (diverse) students" (p. 11). In that sense, multiculturalism is still addressed as a celebration of heroes and festivals, as a static process, a policy, and lesson plan rather than a radical transformation of attitudes, beliefs, and values. The liberal response to the idea of multiculturalism (as conceptualized by the dominant class) is a sort of check list for textbooks, lesson plans, institutional hiring practices, and so on, which calls upon the participant to make sure a minimal number of symbols from a given cultural groups are represented. Multiculturalism from this perspective is an abstraction and a dehumanizing paradigm; there is interest in *coloring* institutions with brown, black, and yellow bodies, but not with giving real power to these individuals or validating their experiences.

Limitations of a Distributive Paradigm in a Time of Globalized

Capitalism

In order to understand the limitation of the distributive paradigm to address social justice, it is necessary to grasp the complexity of the transformation of the U.S. economic system in the last ten years. The distributive paradigm emerged in the context of the liberal philosophy of the 1960s that allowed the formation of the welfare state. The social reforms that were implemented in that period—affirmative action, bilingual education, and welfare reforms—extended the concept of political liberties (right to due process and equality before the law, voting rights, rights to hold office and so forth) to economic, social, and cultural rights (Young, 1991, p.58). One of the major goals of the welfare state was to compensate the inequalities produced by its economic system. This tendency to “humanize” capitalism was based on what Young (1991) describes as the three most important principles of the welfare society that defined its distributive orientation:

- 1) the principle that economic activity should be socially or collectively regulated for the purposes of maximizing the collective welfare;
- 2) the principle that citizens have a right to have some basic needs met by society, and that where private mechanisms fail the state has an obligation to institute policies directed at meeting those needs;
- and 3) the principle of formal equality and impersonal procedures, in contrast to more arbitrary and personalized forms of authority and more coercive forms of inducing cooperation (p.67).

Obviously, the situation has changed. In the last twenty years the dismantled welfare state and the so-called demise of socialism have created the conditions for a “revitalized global order built around the logic of the free market” (McLaren, 1998). The “dangerous triumph of global capitalism,” as McLaren calls it, “has brought about material shifts in cultural practices and the proliferation of new contradictions between capitalism and labor” (p.431). Capitalism seems to have arrived at the “point of no return” as anticipated by Marxist theory. According to McLaren (1998), “. . . Corporate risk has been socialized “through public subsidization for private wealth, while benefits are privatized through the accumulation of personal assets. Welfare for the oppressed has been replaced by subventions to capital” (p.432).

Some educational theorists (Darder, 1991, 2001, 2002; McLaren, 1998, 2002; Young, 1991, 2002) argue that the inability of multicultural education to halt the cyclical re-emergence of conservative forces and its reliance on corporate capital may rest in its failure to address the deep structures of U.S. hegemony.

The following *transformative principles* for social justice seek to contend forthrightly with the existence of an ideology that is founded upon the capitalist logic of unbridled economic accumulation and expansionism, the economic imperative that fuels racism, patriarchy and poverty.

Contending with the Roots of Oppression

Thus, what is social justice? According to Young (1991) an enabling definition of social justice implies a clear vision of what this concept is intending to address: oppression. In order to maximize the understanding of of social justice Young (1990) deconstructs the large category of oppression into a set a conditions that are shared by

people who “suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings” (p.40). She describes what she calls the five faces of oppression. They are 1) exploitation; 2) marginalization; 3) powerlessness, 4) cultural imperialism; and 5) violence.

Exploitation—who works for whom—is a direct outcome of the economic system that makes possible the unjust distribution of labor, the control of the means of production, and the profit that results from that interaction. Young affirms that this oppression “occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another” (Young, p.49). Some examples of this face of oppression are related to gender, racial, and class exploitation.

Marginalization—who does not work--refers to the status of people whose labor is not used by the economic system. In late capitalist society, this category is related to racial oppression, however, other groups such as old people, single mothers and their children, unemployed, unskilled workers, mentally and physically disabled people, Indians on reservations, belong to this group. According to Young, “marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life, and thus, potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (p.53). However, in spite that this injustice can be mitigated with access to resources and possessions, the marginalization does not cease, because its scope reaches cultural, social, and emotional injuries that prevent people from fully interacting to their capacities.

Powerlessness—how the content of the work defines one institutional position relative to others— is also related to the division of labor, but also to the lack of

participation in the political and economic decision-making process. Powerlessness is related to the lack of authority or power by those individuals subjected to oppression. According to Young, “they are those over whom power is exercised” (p.56). The most common category of this oppression is found in immigrant workers who perform menial jobs, and more recently teachers who have been deskilled of their ability to teach.

Cultural Imperialism, according to Young, “involves the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (p.59). This oppression is the more subtle and naturalized of all the facets of domination. The very notion of equality and impartially discussed above is grounded on this concept of cultural imperialism. The “melting pot” myth and the standardized vision of schooling are some of the examples of how society structurally oppresses specific social groups. Social groups in third world countries and their populations in the United States particularly experience this dimension of oppression. In the words of Antonio Gramsci, cultural imperialism would be just a manifestation of hegemony and the procurement of consensus.

Violence is the most visible manifestation of domination and it is regarded as one of the most socially repulsive actions. It is a condition carried out by virtue of the ascription of some members of particular social groups that make them more viable to be assaulted. Young affirms that violence is not just “direct victimization, but the daily knowledge shared by all members of oppressed groups that they are *more likely* to be subject to violation, solely on account of their group identity” (p.62).

Young’s views on oppression have clearly implications for the advocacy of social justice as they primarily focus on the nature of the economic system. We live and

benefit from an advance economic order that in order to succeed needs to make profit and exploit; and in order to expand and grow needs to create a hegemonic process that naturalizes slavery, colonization, conquest, linguistic genocide, and military intervention. It is in this context that critical educators for social justice need to frame their work.

Education is one of the most powerful institutions implicated in the process of reproduction of social inequalities, and as such, we need to deal and engage with the totalizing nature of late capitalist societies manifested in the explosion of the global market, the creation of neo-liberal economic policies, and imperialism in all its form: cultural, economic, political, diplomatic, and military. Therefore, any standards, guidelines or framework for the protection of social and environmental justice must deal with an understanding of the geo-political forces that shape the current globalized economic order.

The following guidelines for the effective study and engagement with social justice are divided into three major sections: The curriculum: Unpacking hegemony); 2) The work of teachers: Protecting Teachers and their Work; and 3) Schools, Parents and Community (to be further developed).

I. Unpacking Hegemony

1. The official curriculum of K-12 education in the United States should contain a mandatory inclusion of the teaching of learning of human rights; including an examination of the development of the major international treaties and a clear discussion and knowledge of the countries that have ratified them. Among these seminal documents are the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the

Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Declaration of the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People, the Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (International Labour Organization, 1991), the Convention of Geneva, the Treaty of Tokyo and so forth.

2. The curriculum of K-12 public education in the United States shall be designed to include the teaching and learning of social and environmental justice, which must be connected to the teaching of literacy, numeracy, social studies, science, arts, sport, and technology. Every academic standard or benchmark should demonstrate a clear connection to social and environmental justice.
3. The curriculum of K-12 public education in the United States should be designed in thematic, learning units rather than dividing the instruction by subject matter. Therefore, each grade level should developmentally address the following learning units (for example):
 - a. The economic roots of slavery in the United States and the creation of racism;
 - b. The history of the labor movement;
 - c. The historical development of the struggle for social justice in the United States;
 - d. The gay and lesbian movement;
 - e. The women liberation and the suffragist movement;
 - f. The Genocide of the Red Nation: our founding fathers and mothers;

- g. The roots of multilingualism in the United States;
- h. Global Warming in Corporate America;
- i. The Doctrine of the Manifest Destiny and a Review of U.S. Military and Political Intervention;
- j. Political Geography and Colonization;
- k. Urban Studies and the History of Immigration;
- l. Philosophy 101;
- m. Political Processes, Ballot Initiatives.
- n. Civil society, Social Movements, Global Justice Movement, and Virtual Public Spheres
- o. Environmental Justice, The Politics of Health, and Consumerism;
- p. Welfare state and Late Capitalist Societies;
- q. Globalization, transnational financial markets, transnational capital flows, and the postnational production and distribution of goods and services (outsourcing).
- r. Poverty in First and Third World Countries, Hunger, Wealth, and Sustainable Development: *Maquiladoras*, Immigrant Workers, Sex Trade, and Child Labor;
- s. What is Neo-Liberalism: The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, the G-7, and the World Trade Organization;

- t. The Emergence of Free Trade Agreements: NAFTA, CAFTA, the Multilateral Agreement on Free Trade and Investment (MAFTI), and so forth.

II. Protecting Teachers and their Work

1. Teachers have the right to work and to freely choose where to work. This right shall include technical, professional guidance and training programs, policies and techniques to achieve steady, full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding their fundamental political and economic freedoms (Adapted from article 6 of ICESCR).
2. Teachers have the right to remuneration which provides with:
 - a. Fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work.
 - b. Safe and healthy working conditions. Including sanitary facilities, well equipped kitchen and cafeterias, healthy menus, safe playgrounds and parking lots, medical office, and ventilated classrooms free of pesticides or other toxic substances.
 - c. Equality for everyone to be promoted in their employment to an appropriate higher level, subject to no considerations other than those of seniority and expertise. Test scores, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or political values cannot be invoked as criteria for demotion, promotion or tenure.

- d. Rest, leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay, as well as remuneration for overtime work.
 - e. Class-size reduction that will allow for 20 students per classroom to maximize differentiated instructions (Adapted from article 7 of ICESCR).
3. Teachers have the right to form new trade unions, join the trade unions of their choice, and denounce those (union leaders as well as school leaders) who are not protecting the rights of teachers. (Adapted from article 8 of ICESCR)
4. Teachers unions have the right to establish national federations or confederations and to join international trade-union organizations (Adapted from article 8 of ICESCR).
5. Teachers have the right to strike. (Adapted from article 8 of ICESCR)
6. Teachers have the right to social security including decent health insurance, which should not be limited to HMOs only. ((Adapted from article 9 of ICESCR)
7. Teachers have the right to receive protection and assistance for their families, particularly for the care and education of their dependent children, spouses, same-sex partners, and living companions. (Adapted from article 10 of ICESCR)
8. Female and male teachers have the right to special protection before and after their birth of their children or the adoption of a new family member. During such periods working mothers and fathers should be accorded paid leave or leave with adequate social security benefits. Under no circumstances their jobs should be jeopardized and the maternity and/or paternity leaves do not constitute an excuse for transfers, demotion, or other veiled repercussion against teachers. (Adapted from article 10 of ICESCR)

9. Teachers have the right to teach human rights, social justice, and the concept of sustainable development. School policies should reflect a particular concern with the right to be free from hunger, which means, to teach and reflect on:
 - a. How to improve methods of production, conservation, and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources.
 - b. How to take into account the problems of both food-importing and food-exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need.
 - c. What causes hunger? What are their problems and who are the primary people and institutions responsible for that problem. (Adapted from article 10 of ICESCR)
10. Teachers have the right to pursue additional educational degrees and licenses, and schools have the obligation to support that endeavor and provide teachers with adequate time release to accomplish their goals.
11. Teachers have the right to create their own curriculum as long as it generally meets the benchmarks for grade level. No teacher should be forced to follow teacher-proof curricula, or being threatened, harassed or demoted for not implementing curricula that according to their criteria are detrimental to the emotional and educational well-being of their students.

12. Teachers have the right to academic freedom which means that school districts should undertake the appropriate measures to assure the freedom indispensable for scientific research, creative activity, and diffusion of knowledge.
13. No teacher should be forced to teach to the test or being bribed or punish to increase the test scores of their students. Teachers should be concerned about learning and teaching in a safe, stress-free educational environment.

Schools, Parents and Community

1. Parents have the right to reclaim schools as public spheres.
2. Parents should assume leadership of the schools by participating in the decision making (including curriculum design and administration of the school).
3. Parents and schools should work in partnership to confront and dismantle the practices of:
 - a. Tracking and grouping by ability level
 - b. Meritocracy
 - c. Lower academic expectations from teachers
 - d. Single reliance on standardized, norm-reference testing
 - e. Bribing schools and teachers to teach to the test.
4. The doctrine of preferential treatment should be applied to schools located in working class communities of color, which must be financially compensated by the state, city and other wealthy communities to offer their students all the

material and human resources to have access to quality education. (more standards to be continued...).

Conclusion

According to McLaren (1998),

...capitalism has entered a global crisis of accumulation and profitability . . . [and therefore], the new era of flexible accumulation requires a number of ominous conditions: the total dismantling of the Fordist-Keynesian relationship between capital and labor; a shift toward the extraction of absolute surplus value; the suppression of labor incomes; a weakening of trade unions; longer working hours; more temporary jobs; and the creation of a permanent underclass . . . Corporate risk has been socialized “through public subsidization for private wealth, while benefits are privatized through the accumulation of personal assets. Welfare for the oppressed has been replaced by subventions to capital ((p.432).

It is undeniable that the progressive transformation of capitalism into a corporate cannibalism has reconfigured social relations and particularly traditional forms of domination and oppression. It is in the context of this economic expansionism that a reconceptualization of social justice needs to take place. The devastating effects of globalization are being experienced not only by traditional disenfranchised groups but also by the large U.S. middle class. The increasing proliferation and intensification of poverty is alarming, and in this context, even the distributive paradigm to social justice do not compensate for the structural oppressive practices of the new economic model.

Teachers need to take into account this reconfiguration of the economic system and the oppressive practices that are keeping larger segments of society silenced and

subordinated. Only a clear integration of political economy in the discussion of social justice and multicultural education can create the conditions for a distinct correlation of power for historically disenfranchised social groups.

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