

CRITICAL EDUCATORS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

A SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP OF AERA
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This year we continue to extend our work at a variety of levels. Throughout this past year, SIG Representatives have continued to discuss and wrestle with the work of the SIG and our future direction. Our membership of 373 makes us one of the largest SIGs in AERA today. This is testimony, we believe, to the increased recognition of social justice issues in education evident in the voices of educators, activists and scholars who are committed to social change and justice through education. This year, we will push forward to form deeper connections between activism, scholarship and teaching in AERA. We hope to develop more collaborative work with other SIGS whose missions align with our own as we widen the band of social justice work that is emerging within AERA. We welcome all to our annual business meeting. This year, Mara Sapon-Shevin will speak and share some of her most recent work. We look forward to an exciting AERA reunion with all of you.

Sincerely,
CESJ: SIG Representatives and Elders

A Reflection on Educators for Social Justice

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Speech Presented at AERA 2004 San Diego California

In establishing a special interest group that focuses on social justice, there are two central questions that must foreground our efforts. The first question we must ask is what should be the role of the Social Justice organization in these times? And second, how do progressive educators continue to do this work when a highly conservative rhetoric about social justice abounds? I will attempt to briefly address these questions, recognizing that this short amount of time does not permit me to engage them necessarily in a linear or even systematic manner.

First, I believe that any group committed to social justice must be fundamentally linked to an effort to construct a new culture, in the midst of an

existing culture that, more often than not, has been informed by a traditionally conservative definition of social justice—that is the view that as long as everyone is treated “the same” then justice is served.

Unfortunately, this is a perspective that categorically ignores the historical and contemporary disparities that persist in material social conditions across populations, as well as the ideological, and structural inequalities that shape and reproduce all forms of human oppression or injustice within the capitalist state. Moreover, with the dismantling of the welfare state, the liberal idea that the State should provide for the needy has been supplanted by neo-liberal, conservative notions of social justice that now permeate the nation’s health, education and welfare agencies.

As critical educators, this means that we must recognize how schools function within an untenable contradiction. On one hand, schools are expected to respond to the needs of hierarchies associated with the capitalist labor force and the marketplace. And, on the other hand, schools are supposed to create equality of access to rights and opportunities for the nation’s citizens’ as promised within an ostensibly democratic republic—a republic that functions as an empire, given its impact on the current global state of affairs, whether that be the occupation of Iraq, foreign economic policy in Latin America, or the control of the world marketplace.

Critical educators who are concerned with questions of social justice must also grapple with what Henri Lefebvre (1971) calls the *colonization of the everyday life*—where every aspect of everyday life, including birth, death, marriage, family, work, leisure, parenthood, spirituality and so on is disconnected, compartmentalized, and placed at the mercy of economic imperatives. The consequence is a deep sense of dissatisfaction that results because of the inability of the marketplace to meet or satisfy authentic human needs. For authentic human needs can only be met through conditions that break the alienation and isolation so prevalent in educational institutions today. Given all this, we then need to work toward establishing a new working culture among us—one that cultivates human connection, intimacy, trust and honesty, within the context of this intellectual political project.

Unfortunately, in our efforts to construct such a culture, we must contend with the commodification of social life that has functioned to destroy a series of social relations and replace them with commodity relations that also translate into power relations. Meanwhile, persuasion, compulsion, and seduction (I might add) have become the predominant methods for constructing consensus, rather than authentic human relationships based on dialogue and struggle in our efforts to live and work together toward a democratic vision of schooling. Even more disconcerting is the manner in which the accent in many organizations and institutions is placed upon individual heroism. Within such a context, individuals can readily (or conveniently) forget that any opportunity can be garnered or shaped for one’s individual aggrandizement and/or for the collective good.

There is no question in my mind that the individualism of heroism or seeking to be the shining “star” can be linked directly to the competitiveness of the marketplace. Here, even our work as social justice educators can easily become just another rhetorical chip or “bit of theoretical capital” stashed in our expertise bag of tricks, devoid of any connection to a larger transformative project for social justice, human rights, and, least of all, economic democracy.

From a critical social justice perspective, the central role of schools should be to educate for the construction and participation of emancipatory life. But to carry this out requires that educators be willing to contend with two major forms of curricular mechanisms, which uphold the capitalist State: the media (television, popular culture, etc.) and schooling. Both are steeped in a hidden curriculum that disastrously functions to curtail historical memory and impose apolitical and ahistorical public transcripts of events, in concert with the imperatives of capitalism. As such, another role of critical educators for social justice must be not only the unveiling of the hidden curriculum in schools and society, but the reinstitution of a multiplicities of historical memories tied to the everyday lives of disenfranchised populations.

In our work, the realm of schooling represents an essential political project in the interest of not only engaging questions of racism, sexism, class inequality, compulsory heterosexism, homophobia, and disabilitism but of challenging the very politics of empire. This requires contending with the unfortunate consequences of heightened productivity and gross economic structural changes on working-class populations in this country and abroad, particularly in terms of constructing economic dependencies, reserve armies and incarcerated subjects.

To accomplish this through our teaching and research, we must cultivate a critical understanding of how U. S. global or neoliberal interests have perpetuated increasing material inequality and human suffering, in the name of economic development, democracy and social progress. Meanwhile, the consequences of modernity have resulted in a new wave of massive immigration to the center of the empire, along with inciting a revival of vicious attacks—both within the popular arena and the academy—against immigrants, particularly immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Racialized conjectures of immigrants have intensified within public policy debates on bilingual education, immigrant labor, and heighten surveillance and control of immigrant populations in the U.S.

Along the same vein, the pernicious legacy of racisms must be understood within the context of everyday inequalities and the formation of student identities, conditioned by a capitalist-inspired curriculum, steeped in gendered, racialized and patriotic notions of U.S. life. As such, critical educators must come to terms with the fact that inequality or injustice, as Sam Gindin (2002) argues, “is not an unfortunate aberration of capitalism, but an inescapable outcome and an essential condition of its successful economic functioning. Capitalism is—and this is surely as clear today as it ever was—a social system based on class and competition” (Gindin

2002, p.3). A globalized system which requires the deep impoverishment of a large sector of the world's population.

Given this reality, it is unfortunate that the language and attitudes adopted by many well-meaning educators function conveniently to deaden and annul opposition to the capitalist order, as it seeks to maintain social control, even in the wake of increasing impoverishment and incarceration. Meanwhile, the market, as Richard Brosio (1994) often reminds us, continues to move people from few, modest needs to the creation of many false needs through advertising and an ideology of consumption as happiness. There is no question that such an ideology results in the demise of class-consciousness. While the media breeds passivity and instills the notion that money is everything, capital rules, and all aspects of life are open-game to the wiles of profit.

In this context, we as critical educators for social justice must struggle to revive a politics of collective self-determination to our teaching and our research. However, to do we must acknowledge that self-determination requires energy that is not committed to paid labor, household problems and our enmeshment with non-fulfilling personal relationships.

Hence, if we are to continue developing a multiplicity of projects that might potentially challenge the politics of empire with its legacy of oppressions, we must work to construct together a common public dialogue and a counter-hegemonic sphere. This must be a sphere or network of relationships that is not anchored in materialistic interpretations of reality nor fueled by a drive for acquisition and accumulation. In our work, we must abandon the penchant for chasing after new intellectual experiences for the sake of obtaining personal fulfillment, recognition, or reward. Instead, what we need is to connect, rigorously and with perseverance, our labor within schools, universities, and communities to real conditions the produce inequalities, with a clear purpose and moral intent of transforming these conditions collectively in very concrete and meaningful ways.

Lastly, if we believe that a New World is possible, then we must begin by constructing that New World within the environments in which we live, work and teach. In doing this, we must not forget that even when we work in small interest groups, we are always in danger of the oppression that resides within and enacts itself in undemocratic ways when we struggle to work together. Moreover, we must keep in mind that special interest groups can also function to veil the reproduction of inequality in the larger body politic of an organization, as it does out in the world.

That is to say that by disaggregating society into fragments (particularly those who resist the hegemonic relations of the larger body politic), structural inequalities can persist without any real avenue for changing these structures. For this reason, it is important that our collective work not stop within the Critical Educators of Social Justice SIG. Instead, our work must conscientiously engage and interact with the work of other groups and communities. So, in this way, we might ultimately participate in changing the organizations and institutions that so strongly

impact our everyday lives—not only as educators, researchers and cultural workers, but as human beings.

References Cited

- Brosio, R. A. 1994. *A Radical Critique of Capitalist Education*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Gindin, S. (2002). "Anti-Capitalism and Social Justice." *Monthly Review*, Vol.53, No.9.
- Lefebvre, H. (1971). *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. London: The Penguin Press.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN A LEADERSHIP POSITION IN CESJ: SIG? - A CALL FOR NOMINATIONS -

This year, we are in need of nominations for two positions of leadership within the CESJ: SIG: SIG Representative and Communications Representative. These are two-year commitments.

The SIG Representative coordinates the overall work of the SIG and works with other Representatives to carry out the work of the SIG. This person maintains contact with other AERA SIGs on issues and projects related to the mission of our SIG. She/he co-facilitates our meetings and provides agendas for annual business meeting at AERA annual meeting. This person encourages and supports 'fire-starters' or small work groups of the SIG that focus on social justice work. This is a two-year position in which the elected person is asked to lead and support subsequent representatives to this position for at least one year following their term. Attendance at AERA is important and one additional meeting per year with other SIG Representatives is also required.

The Communications Representative keeps the minutes of official meetings. Oversees the webmaster and listserv. She/he recruits new members by providing information on website and in SIG newsletter on processes and procedures for joining the SIG, dues, etc. Creates the newsletter annually along with regular list-serve information and sends these out to all members. This is also a two-year position in which the elected person is asked to support subsequent representatives to this position for at least one year following their term.

Please come prepared to nominate yourself or another person for this position at the General Business Meeting on Tuesday, April 12 in Montreal. If possible, prepare a short statement of your qualifications and commitment to this position.

Treasurer's Report 2004

As of December, 2004, we have \$4,951. 44 in our treasury. Last year, we helped sponsor several events at AERA, 2004 including the Reception for Latinos and Education Journal, the Edge of Each Others Battles reception and Welcoming Reception for Scholars of Color. This year, we will again help to sponsor a number of worthy events at AERA. We currently have 373 active members.

Program Chairs Report, 2004 -05 Sally Thomas and Nola Byrrd

We are pleased to present to the SIG membership our program for AERA 2005. We received a number of excellent proposals, 41 to be exact. Of those with the help of our reviewers, we selected 31. Our goal was to provide an AERA forum for as many excellent proposals falling under the umbrella of the SIG mission statement as possible. We were especially pleased the 5 of the 6 “sessions” were selected as those provide opportunities for even more participants as well as the possibilities of more interactive and varied presentations. In all the SIG will sponsor 5 interactive sessions, 2 paper sessions with 3 papers in each, and 3 themed sessions which include 6-7 round tables facilitated by a chair.

As some of you may know, the proposals are selected under a highly structured system set up by AERA under which the program chairs match proposals with at least two reviewers. In our case we were able to provide three reviewers except in one or two cases. In those cases, which came down to the last minute, the two reviews were in agreement so the outcome would not have been changed. As program chairs we then used the system number crunching to provide a prioritized list. As stated previously, we made a decision to group proposals (using the numerical ordering provided by AERA) to ensure the maximum number of acceptances.

The proposals accepted were of the highest quality. And we regretted that we could not include even more which were also of high quality. Due to our high membership numbers (third highest of all SIGS), in fact we were allotted a high number of slots. Let's keep the membership up this year so that we can continue providing these needed spaces for our voices.

This year we made a decision, already being practiced in some other SIGS. We would appoint one appointed semi-permanent program chair to run the logistics of the AERA system smoothly from year to year. The elected program chair will then confer with the appointed chair with regard to problems and issues that come up, with regard to decisions

about cut off scores, and with regard to the shape of the final program. This year Sally Thomas served as the appointed chair, Nola Byrrd as the elected chair.

We will need to work on two issues this year with the help of the SIG membership. One there was some confusion with regard to the criteria. We had not seen ahead of time that the criteria needed to be adjusted to account for the difference between sessions and individual proposals. That should be fairly easy to solve this year.

The other will take more input. We had at least one concern expressed about the quality of reviews received. We believe it is especially important, given the values of our SIG, that reviews be done thoughtfully and thoroughly, that proposals receive feedback on strengths as well as weaknesses regardless of final acceptance decisions, and if possible receive suggestions about ways to improve the proposal. We have no way of knowing if this was a wide spread problem or not. Keep in mind that there is no feasible way for program chairs to read every proposal in its entirety to evaluate the reviewers' feedback. We are wondering if reviewers new to that process would benefit from some reviewers' guidelines developed by the SIG. Please send suggestions to Sally Thomas at sally.thomas4@verizon.net about this issue. We will develop some general guidelines for SIG review at AERA.

CESJ's New Fiscal Representative

Patricia H. Hinchey, Ed. D.

CESJ Representatives are pleased to announce that Patricia H. Hinchey, associate professor of education at Penn State will assume the duties as CESJ's Fiscal Representative. Pat has a career-long commitment to equity. She has taught a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate courses from a critical perspective, including language and literacy, media literacy and philosophy of education. Her most recent scholarship highlights and expose government efforts to privatize education. She has also authored two books in critical teacher education including one that details students' constitutional rights and one arguing for more ethical treatment of graduate students. Pat will begin duties of Treasurer in April, 2005.

AERA 2005

Social Justice: Teacher Education and Development

Paper Discussion (formerly known as Roundtables)

Time: Mon, Apr 11 - 12:00pm - 12:40pm Building/Room: Marriott Montreal
Chateau Champlain / Salle de Bal Ballroom & Foyer view

Moving for Social Justice: Embodied Pedagogy as Critical Theory

Interactive Symposium

Time: Tue, Apr 12 - 12:25pm - 1:55pm

Building/Room: Hilton Montreal
Bonaventure / Montreal Ballroom, Section Lachine view

Social Justice Reform Analysis

Paper Discussion (formerly known as Roundtables)

Time: Tue, Apr 12 - 12:25pm - 1:05pm Building/Room: Marriott Montreal
Chateau Champlain / Salle de Bal Ballroom & Foyer view

Ripples of Change: Exploring Issues of Youth Engagement in Social Justice

Interactive Symposium

Time: Tue, Apr 12 - 4:05pm - 5:35pm

Building/Room: Hilton Montreal
Bonaventure / Le Salon Verriere view

CESJ Annual Business Meeting

Tue, Apr 12 - 6:15pm - 7:45pm

Building/Room: Le Centre Sheraton
Speaker: Mara Sapon-Shevin

Participatory Research as Praxis for Transformation

Interactive Symposium

Time: Wed, Apr 13 - 8:15am - 9:45am

Building/Room: Marriott Montreal
Chateau Champlain / Maisonneuve, Section C view

Teachers' Transformation as Social Justice Educators

Paper Session

Time: Wed, Apr 13 - 10:35am - 12:05pm

Building/Room: Marriott Montreal
Chateau Champlain / Salon Terrasse View

Ubiquitous Assessment: Melding Assessment and Instruction

Interactive Symposium

Time: Wed, Apr 13 - 10:35am - 12:05pm

Building/Room: Hilton Montreal
Bonaventure / Montreal Ballroom, Section Westmount view

Black Canaries in Traditionally White Mines: Interrogating Systemic Failure and Institutional Innovations in the Academy

Symposium

Fri, Apr 15 - 10:35am - 12:05pm
Building/Room: Sofitel Montreal
Montreal / Salon 1 view
Bonaventure / Montreal Ballroom, Section La Salle view

Social Justice in the Classroom

Paper Discussion (formerly known as Roundtables)
Time: Fri, Apr 15 - 10:35am - 11:15am Building/Room: Marriott Montreal
Chateau Champlain / Salle de Bal Ballroom & Foyer view