2008

Mini-Kingdoms and Ivory Towers: A Critical Analysis of Higher Education in Modern Civil Society

David Martin
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mcnair

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mcnair/vol12/iss1/5
Mini-Kingdoms and Ivory Towers: A Critical Analysis of Higher Education in Modern Civil Society

Introduction

What is education? What is education in our society and culture—in other words, modern civil society—and how does it function within the constraints of a capitalist economy? What is its ultimate purpose? In terms of the etymological semantic potential of the word education, which gives expression to “leading people out,” to grow, become, or develop one’s human potential, is education meant to be a dynamic means of being led out of unreason, superstition, fear, ignorance, and anti-intellectualism? Does our educational system move us toward wisdom, rationality, understanding, justice, and freedom? Or, is the purpose of education simply a means of commandeering greater wealth? Is education an avenue through which individuals create character that potential employers will find attractive?

The purpose of this paper is to call attention to the state of our educational institutions and to examine their potential for moving us toward a more reconciled future that is free from political, economic, and intellectual oppression. Throughout this paper I will expose how that potential has been reified in favor of the capitalist mania for ever-increasing profits. Also, I specify that conditions of higher education in modern civil society, explicitly calling attention to the relationship between student and professor and how it is affected by the overarching economic and political systems. I address the cultural and structural hegemonic forces working to perpetuate those effects and why they do so. I accomplish this through the study of the pertinent historical and contemporary materials that reference and critically analyze the relationship between economics, politics, and higher education in modern civil society. I conclude with a means of combating the antagonisms found within the classroom and present an alternate method of educating more in line with what Paulo Freire termed “problem posing” education.

From my research I have concluded that many professors instill within their students a sense of dependence and an anti-intellectual mindset of uncritical thinking. This can be attributed to the colonization of our educational institutions by class antagonisms, proliferated by the capitalist class means of production that values profit over humanity. Education has been transformed from its intended purpose, defined by its etymological origins, into a means of streamlining the transition from the student-professor to the worker-owner relationship in modern civil society.

Although in this paper I focus intentionally on the educational process in colleges and universities, I take the position that in order to induce critical pedagogical reform, critical thinking must be reasserted as a primary function in the theory and praxis of all educational institutions. Critical thinking is, according to Paulo Freire (1970):

Thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. (P. 73)

For Freire, critical thought in theory and praxis is fundamentally grounded in and expressive of the sociohistorical struggle for more reconciled, rational, and humane future societies. Critical theory and praxis are crucial to the elemental substance and purpose of education. They allow one to be free of the societal pressures to conform and they negate the suppression of that which is wholly “other,” which in turn facilitates the creation of a better future society. However, in modern civil society, the theoretical attraction and attainment of higher levels of education is systematically made directly proportional to the economic...
possibility of employment. The attraction of this employment comes in the form of a more lucrative remuneration and benefit packages, which then brings the potential of increased social capital and prestige. Education has thereby been reduced into a means of socioeconomic production and reproduction of commodities as well as of the social class antagonistic status quo. Students are to learn, and the better ones become masters of, the technical and political rules by which the social system operates. In theory, people are rewarded based on their knowledge and ability to contribute to the maintenance if not progress of the status quo. In such a totally administered and class-driven system, which depends on either the assimilation or the removal of all things different or wholly other, it becomes apparent why the critical component of education is systematically limited to a few courses or professors. That is to say, the atmosphere of intellectual oppression prohibits the student and the professor from engaging in discourse from which the active development of a critical perspective can flourish. This in turn minimizes the potential maturation of theories and actions that are critical of the current state of our political and economic institutions and policies.

In the scope of this paper, what constitutes oppression can be conceptualized in reference to human need. Herbert Marcuse (1964) made a distinction between true and false human need:

False needs are those superimposed upon the individual by particular societal interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease. The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false need. (P. 5)

The key element in the implementation of false need is that it is conceptualized and put forth by external powers over which the individual has no manifest or latent control. Such external power in the advanced Western world is wielded by the capitalist class, the top 5 percent of the world population, who hold dominance over the media and political arena, as well as the production of consumer goods, including those that contribute to basic subsistence. This class of people function within what William G. Domhoff (2002) termed “interlocking directorates.” Members of this segment of the population attend the same boarding schools, universities, country clubs, and belong to other socially recognized “blue books” and registers. They operate under the concept of shared interest and collectively put forth policy by way of significant political influence, which is directly intended to further their cultural and economic dominance. These individuals manage virtually every aspect of civil society through corporate control and cultural hegemony. Furthermore, they determine the precise arrangement of those false needs that are reinforced predominantly in the classroom and other social institutions such as the family and religion. More often than not, these arrangements function to maximize profit for the capitalist and ruling classes regardless of the detrimental effects on the working individual’s mental health and physical well-being.

Herbert Marcuse (1964), who was a founding member of the critical theory of the Frankfurt school, which was established in Frankfurt, Germany, after World War I, referenced this domination while working as a member of the Institute for Social Research. Marcuse believed that American capitalism, which has given rise to mass consumerism and corporate control, has created a dichotomy between what people truly need in the quest to achieve their humanity and what has been socially labeled as denoting success by dominant corporate ideology.

He states:

No matter how much such needs have become the individual’s own, reproduced and fortified by the conditions of his existence; no matter how much he identifies himself with them and finds himself in their satisfaction, they continue to be what they were from the beginning—products of a society whose dominant interests demand repression. (P. 5)

Functioning under the umbrella of dominant elite interest is the university, which serves to indoctrinate and solidify the false needs that are required for the perpetuation of the political and economic systems. This false need is filtered into the ideologies of students through their interaction with the professor in the classrooms, hallways, offices, and other locations where the two interact. As stated earlier, the student-professor relationship takes on the characteristics of the worker-owner paradigm in modern civil society. Thus, all of the internalization of false need (oppression) is reinforced in those who have already adopted it in earlier stages of education and forced upon those who have not fully accepted it as one progresses through academia. This manipulation is done through the bureaucratic power structures and unspoken hierarchies that permeate college and university campuses. These social networks are built upon ideologies, values, and norms that mirror those found in the corporate world.

The university primarily serves to train and prepare future generations of workers, in an advancing technological society, to take up the positions held by previous generations. This shift toward training becomes functional for corporations in that it intensifies competition among prospective employees as current workers reach retirement or become obsolete under the strain of technological advancement and globalization. Due to this, the prevalence of critical thought and praxis has drastically lessened since the 1960s, a time when widespread political and cultural movements created an environment conducive to critical discourse. Presently, such critical social
thought is not even a periphery function or requirement for success in our educational institutions.

However, there are those professors who have themselves been exposed to various forms of critical theory, and while being in the minority, they nevertheless attempt to provoke an intellectually inquisitive mentality within students. I was exposed to such people in my time in undergraduate education and chose to internalize a critical view of the world rather than adopt the dominant views present in most classrooms. Professors who choose to participate in Paulo Freire’s “problem posing” style of education, which will be further defined later, could be denied tenure, reprimanded, or passed over for positions altogether. This potential exclusion of critical educators would further illustrate how the needs of the economic system are placed above those of the student within the system.

Laying the groundwork for a truly critical pedagogy necessitates a break from the systemic standardized ideology that promotes an uncritical positivistic mentality. It requires the theorist to develop modes of thought and praxis outside of, but also include the transformation and use of, preexisting social mechanisms and institutions. The university, for example, is an institution that holds the potential for the nurturance and development of true critical thought and praxis. However, the outdated and authoritarian pedagogical methodology needs to be reconceptualized in order to promote emancipatory social change, thus reshaping society and ushering in a more progressive and reconciled future.

“Problem Posing” Education vs. “Banking” Education

Frequently in higher education, rote memorization is misunderstood to be true education. Accordingly, the teacher is rewarded for his or her ability to “fill” student’s heads with information without relaying the meaning and importance of the words themselves. Moreover, this method of disseminating knowledge, which Paulo Freire (1970:52) termed the “banking style of education,” hinders the development of critical thought by diminishing the need for the students to create and unfold their own concepts and ideas.

In higher education the skill least developed, and in some instances missing altogether, is the ability of students to think critically. Throughout my educational career, I have spoken to many professors and have been told repeatedly that the ability to logically analyze, critique, and synthesize complex material (i.e., critical thinking) is an undervalued skill absent from most of the student population. Rather than being taught how to become critical thinkers, students are frequently trained how to be good workers through the banking method of education. In this way students become objects rather than subjects, repositories to be filled rather than people to be educated.

True critical thought is not possible in the act of training. Training does not require the individual to question or analyze but to follow directions as closely as possible, thus repressing creative and progressive thought and action. True problem posing education is possible only through rational authority and the active intellectual engagement and critical discourse between all participants in the educational process. In her analysis of Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (1955), Antonia Darder takes note of the distinction made in reference to necessary and excessive repression and authority. She acknowledges that some structure is valid in the attempt to educate, but that it has become irrational in its application in modern civil society.

In speaking of domination as a psychological as well as a political phenomenon, Marcuse did not give a carte blanche response to wholesale gratification. On the contrary, he agreed with Freud that some forms of repression were necessary. What he objected to was the unnecessary repression that was embodied in the ethos and social practices that characterized social institutions like school, the workplace, and the family. (Darder, Torres, and Baltodano 2003:49)

Coinciding with the irrational and excessively repressive structure in our educational institutions is the cultural shift towards mass consumerism and commodity fetishism. Students are subjected to the bombardment of mass media advertising, even within schools, as name brands are venerated and posited throughout educational buildings. As this trend begins to take hold, even knowledge is subjected to this commodification. Students then become further segregated by socioeconomic status (SES), athletic ability, intellectual prowess, and in many instances, by race or ethnicity. This separation reinforces the in- and out-group relations present in modern civil society, which serves to perpetuate the toiling of the oppressed by the owners of the means of production. Lower-class groups functioning within the confines of an increasingly administered society are pitted against one another, coaxed into viewing anything that is “the other” as a threat to their ambition of attaining increased financial and social capital. While seeking to emulate the capitalist class, average people are forced to step on and over one another in order to climb into the upper social and financial echelons of society. This constant struggle to fight off perceived threats occupies the attention and energy of those participating in the conflict, which in turn narrows one’s views to only the most immediate concerns. Due to this, the instigation of intergroup antagonism is a highly effective tool used by upper-class agents in order to direct attention away from societal injustices and inhumanity. All the while average Americans continually elect individuals who work to preserve those injustices, as they are functional for the wealthiest members of our society. Gore Vidal stated, “The genius of our system is that ordinary people go out and vote against their interests. The way our ruling class keeps out of sight is one of the greatest stunts in the political history of our country” (Darder et al. 2003:79).

During their time in educational institutions, students are taught the ins and outs of living a working-class life. They begin taking responsibility over their performance and internalizing the oppressive mentality placed on them by individualistic capitalist ideals of success and failure. Life becomes about whom one knows and what one has, rather than the content of one’s character. Social
divisions are reinforced in the form of cliques and in-groups while those who have retained the seeds of critical thinking are marginalized and labeled as troublemakers and unpatriotic. As a result, the nonconformist character of those individuals is seen as unteachable, or in capitalist terms, unemployable.

Erich Fromm believed that the dominant social institutions shape the character of the individuals within them. The economic system has such a significant impact on the means by which social institutions work, we may stipulate that education in a capitalist economy shapes the social character of individuals into forms that are beneficial for the perpetuation of the economic system. This character development is also correlated to the means by which we educate our population and to what end. Due to the capitalist system imperative for the ever-increasing production of profit, the educational system begins morphing into an institution that is more a business than a so-called Ivory Tower. Students are seen as sources of tuition and other forms of revenue and thus are treated like customers rather than people seeking knowledge. The banking mode of education is chosen because it emphasizes rote memorization, respect for authority, and the continuation of static tradition rather than quality, newness, and originality of thought. D. Stanley Eitzen, Maxine Baca Zinn, and Kelly Eitzen Smith (2009) also speak to the structure and nature of education in modern civil society by stating:

The avowed function of the schools is to teach newcomers the attitudes, values, roles, specializations, information, and training necessary for the maintenance of society. In other words, the special task of the school is to preserve culture, not transform it. Thus, the schools indoctrinate their pupils in the culturally prescribed ways. (P. 467)

To assume that instructors in an institution of higher education are consciously aware of this banking style of education would be incorrect. Many professors have also internalized the socially acceptable means of attaining wealth, prestige, and cultural capital. Subsequently, in many instances professors unconsciously instill a sense of dependence in their students. Educators too experienced the very same repressive pedagogy and as a result the banking method has seeped into their teaching style. However, some students and teachers begin to see the contradictions, by way of their existential experiences, in the dominant theory and praxis of our educational institutions. It is at this point that Freire (1970) states:

Sooner or later these contradictions may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality. They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. (P. 56)

Accordingly, from day one, the teacher must seek to transition the student-teacher relationship away from a dependent-paternalistic paradigm toward a type of discursive partnership. The student must no longer be viewed as a lifeless object to be filled with information, but rather a person from whom even the professor can learn and grow.

This transition is dependent on the removal of irrational authority from the educational process. Needless to say, an educational environment cannot function without an appropriate authority structure. The professor must have some control over the pedagogical processes taking place within the classroom. However, this control is often perverted into a means of furthering the student’s dependence on the professor and the subsequent employer upon entrance into the labor market. The difference between what constitutes a healthy and fundamentally necessary authority lays in the nature of the relationship between both parties in the educational setting. Fromm (1976:31) distinguished between positive authority and destructive authority, labeling the former “rational” and the latter “irrational.” He conceptualizes authority by classifying it into his two categories: (1) rational authority, which is derived from competence and helps the individual to grow when that persons leans on it; and (2) irrational authority, which is based on power and serves to exploit the person subjected to it.

Fromm elaborated further by introducing his belief that human beings have a specific structure and freedom to grow within the boundaries of that structure. This argument, however, may seem like a contradiction. What is this structure and how can one be free to grow while being limited to a predetermined set of parameters? Fromm (1976) qualified this seemingly dichotomous situation by alluding to the guidelines for said structure:

Freedom does not mean freedom from all guiding principles. It means the freedom to grow according to the laws of the structure of human existence (autonomous restrictions). It means obedience to the laws that govern optimal human development. Any authority that furthers this goal is “rational authority” when this furtherance is achieved by way of helping to mobilize the child’s activity, critical thinking, and faith in life. (P. 66)

When a professor practicing rational authority within the classroom does so not only with the intention of helping students progress toward higher levels of critical thinking and “optimal human development” but also in order guide the dialogue, he or she is able to inject critical discourse into the educational process. To further elaborate, “optimal human development” consists of any socially constructed environment in which an individual has free reign to question, reflect, offer opinion, and have that opinion taken seriously. Furthermore, it is an environment that allows individuals to work together synergistically in the pursuit of a more reconciled society in which people are free from the detriments of preventable social problems.

Fromm (1976) discusses how social structure effects social character and how social character has been transformed from its original mode in early sixteenth-century capitalism to today’s authoritarian-obsessive-hording form. This gave way to his notion of the “marketing character,” which is a person who places value on his self based on “exchange
value” and to a lesser degree on his “use value.” Created from this transition is the concept that men and women see themselves as commodities to be placed on the “free” market.

The aim of the marketing character is complete adaptation, so as to be desirable under all conditions of the personality market. The marketing character personalities do not even have ego (as people in the 19th century did) to hold onto, that belong to them that do not change. For they constantly change their egos, according to the principle: “I am as you desire me.” (P. 121)

This concept relates to the nature of the banking style in higher education in which the student picks and chooses from a wide array of subjects, never obtaining any depth of knowledge in any field. For the marketing character personality, to have a wide base of knowledge without depth of understanding allows for individuals to enter the job market with a perceived higher exchange value. This higher value then allows for a greater chance one may be able to appease the various consumers of these marketing characters, the potential employers.

As a result, people within our economic system shift from being cold and lifeless automatons into a sort of reprogrammable robot, one that must constantly adapt to the shifting desires of corporate America. As we move from the old to the new economy, we see how modern institutions of higher education contribute to the shaping of this personality; students are encouraged to sample various subject material but are not expected to demonstrate deep proficiency in any of them. Students are given what Fromm (1976:34) calls “Luxury-Knowledge packages,” which are clusters of information and cultural capital that is commensurate with the expected social prestige and wealth-earning potential that the student exhibits. Therefore, people are trained to know more rather than being taught to know more deeply, which enhances the characteristics and subsequent success of the marketing character in capitalist labor markets.

If the student’s economic success is dependent on the ability to memorize random information and the professor’s economic success is dependent on his or her ability to deposit what is to be memorized into the student, then it is no wonder why the banking style of education takes precedence in modern civil society. The Marxian notion of estranged labor provides a lens through which we can place our current state of education in a relevant context. Once a person’s labor is no longer part of his or her life activity but merely a means for fulfilling immediate physical need, the individual negates his or her own species-being (humanity) in the process of seeking education. The liberational and life-dynamic transcendence that comes from true education is abandoned as one’s survival becomes contingent upon the ability to adapt to the banking style of education. As stated earlier, the professor works for wages which are contingent upon his or her ability to make said deposits. Concurrently, the students’ survival, albeit delayed gratification, is contingent upon their ability to take on that market personality. In both instances the pursuit lies not in education, but merely in the acquisition of wealth in order to protect one’s physical existence.

In Marcuse’s (1964:7) words, the predominant feature in modern civil society is the “suffocation” of need that demands freedom and liberation. He believed that true liberation must also free humanity from that which is “… tolerable, and rewarding and comfortable…. “ Marcuse made this fascinating statement in reference to those who do not view themselves as oppressed because they enjoy certain luxuries and the illusion of free choice. However, there is no liberation in free choice when the choices are given without one’s input and in contrast to one’s personal interests. There is no democracy in a system with only two viable political parties with little significant difference between them. As Marcuse (1964:7) stated in One-Dimensional Man, “free elections of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves.” There is no liberation or free choice on the open market when a handful of conglomerates, whose actions are not transparent, control price, advertisement, and have significant influence over the political arena. Furthermore, there is no freedom of choice when the goods and services available serve only to perpetuate the cycle of domination and oppression inherent in and necessary for modern capitalist economies to function. Marcuse (1964:7) sums up this idea by saying, “Under the rule of a repressive whole, liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination.”

The relationship between student and professor has increasingly taken on the undertones of the relationship between worker and owner, paralleling the subordination of student to teacher as the dominant paradigm in modern educational institutions. As Karl Marx (1988:25) states, “Landowner and capitalist are merely privileged and idle gods, are everywhere superior to the worker and lay down the law to him.” By analyzing this observation of the capitalist worker-owner dynamic in reference to the modern classroom, we begin to see the parallels that take place between it and the student-professor relationship. The professor acts as a quasi-capitalist, laying down the law to the student, whose place is that of the inferior worker. Professors within the classroom are given a type of authority over the educational process that is only superseded by those ranking higher in the bureaucratic structure of the university. Thus, what should be a rational authority is changed into irrational authority as the professor reacts to the will of the university bureaucracy, which in turn acts in accordance with its own interest rather than that of the student. Even those professors who are aware of this structural deficiency in educational institutions who wish to implement a more comprehensive and in-depth curriculum must work under the confines of the bureaucratic structure and policy put by the administration.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are many professors who coddle their students, adopting a paternalistic approach; the standards of excellence are set so low that students are never challenged to become high-level scholars. Both methods treat the student as an inferior party, which creates a dichotomy that further adopts the paradigm of the worker-owner relationship in our capitalist economy. In support of this point I refer
to Marx (1988:31) who stated, “In order to live, then, the non-owners are obliged to place themselves, directly, or indirectly, at the service of the owners—to put themselves, that is to say, into a position of dependence upon them.” Therefore, inasmuch as the workers in modern capitalist culture subordinate themselves to the power elite, the students subordinate themselves to their professors. To qualify this further, bell hooks (1994:17) states in reference to professors in institutions of higher education, “More than anything they seemed enthralled by the exercise of power within their mini-kingdoms, the classroom.”

Within the banking method of education students translate their habits as mass consumers into the classroom. Student will listen and take notes to memorize later what they have heard in order to earn a good grade. This perverts knowledge into a logical sequence of words that is not internalized but simply memorized to a degree that allows for regurgitation on an exam or evaluation. Knowledge becomes a thing to be had and to control rather than a process of understanding and becoming. Ideas of equality and justice are prostituted on the broken streets of capitalist ambition while dehumanization and the cybernetic automation of working-class people inhibits the pursuit of a more just and reconciled future. Because higher education is intended to be the pinnacle of intellectual inquiry before young men and women take up their positions in the labor market, the colonization of that institution by class antagonisms must be reversed if any hope of reconciliation is to be possible.

Erich Fromm (1976) explains this shift toward automation and commodification by analyzing how the forms of property attachment found in civil society has reversed course from the early nineteenth-century capitalist form to the current manifestation. Fromm states, “In the older period, everything one owned was cherished, taken care of, and used to the very limits of its utility” (1976:58-59). Fromm calls this type of property attachment “keep it” buying. In contrast, what Fromm calls “throw away” buying has come to dominate consumer culture. In this mode the consumer makes a purchase, soon tires of it, and then beings looking for the latest update or model to take its place. The old version is thrown away in favor of the new. The same type of property attachment seen in the consumer market can be found within the classroom. Students as well as professors are infatuated with the accumulation of knowledge but lack the patience to gain depth into the subject, constantly moving from one idea or subject area to another. Students are rarely even asked to finish reading an entire book. Instead, they are fed a chapter from this book and that book and given just a glimpse into the content of the author’s theory.

Even problem posing teachers participate in this mode of educating because of the simple lack of time in a given semester to truly delve into the material. This speaks to the structural inadequacies of higher education. Many, if not all, undergraduate courses take place in the same window of time, a 16-week semester being typical, regardless of the ease or difficulty of the material. As D. Stanley Eitzen and Maxine Baca Zinn (2002) state:

> U.S. schools are characterized, then, by constraints on individual freedom. The school day is regimented by dictates of the clock. Activities begin and cease on a timetable, not in accordance with the degree of interest shown or whether students have mastered the subject. (P. 472)

This traditional authoritarian teaching style is coupled with the new type of property attachment found in modern civil society. This combination, which is diametrically opposed to a true critical pedagogy and praxis, simply reinforces status hierarchies, in- and out-group antagonisms, and propagates an uncritical mind that is more easily manipulated by social and political elites. Fromm (1976) sums up his explanation by simply stating that the type of property attachment that flourished in the nineteenth century could be viewed as “old is beautiful,” as opposed to the decades since the end of WWII, during which one could say “new is beautiful.”

Commodity fetishism has permeated our society, as evidenced by the growing mass-consumer culture we now function within, and is in full effect within the classroom as well. These commodity fetishes are internalized and solidified by way of the modern capitalist notion that one’s value is determined by the degree to which that individual can accumulate wealth. In turn, that wealth is acquired for the sole purpose of obtaining goods and services. In that acquisition of goods and services people then find their self-value, which is reinforced by the bombardment of television commercials, product placement, Internet advertisement, and the marketing found in print media. At all times the message is hammered into people that having more possessions equates to greater self-value. As a result education becomes simply another thing to obtain; notions of transcendent and critical thought are cast aside in favor of rote memorization that only serves to make people into objects capable of following orders in an increasingly more efficient manner.

Rather than learning to create their own ideas, students relegate themselves to the acquisition of thoughts or ideologies relayed by someone else, typically the professor and other authority figures such as parents and religious leaders. Erich Fromm (1976) believed that students are, in many instances, dismayed by the concept of active engagement in learning. This is due to the internalization of the class-antagonistic nature of the worker-owner relationship. The worker, having internalized his socially labeled inferiority to the owner, often feels that he or she has no place to speak up and suggest ideas that may contradict that of the owner, or to take a step further, put forth a system critique by way of critical investigation. Paulo Freire (1970) also makes reference to this phenomenon in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Subsequently, as referenced in both the contemporary and historical literature, this illusion of mental deficiency that spans the lower classes in modern civil society has seeped into the classroom and into the behaviors, thought processes, and habits of both students and professors. Ensuing from this paradigm is the perception that for a student to question the professor is seen as disrespectful and
that professors conduct their classroom like mini-kingdoms functioning within the Ivory Towers of academia. Erich Fromm (1976) states:

Students in the having mode have but one aim, to hold onto what they have “learned” either by entrusting it firmly to their memories or by carefully guarding their notes. In fact, the having-type of individuals feel rather disturbed by new thoughts or ideas about a subject, because the new put into question the fixed sum of information they have. Indeed, to one for whom having is the main form of relatedness to the world, ideas that cannot easily be pinned down (or penned down) are frightening—like everything else that grows and changes, and thus is not controllable. (P. 25)

To take a dialectical approach to the above-mentioned issue present within higher education, we must look toward its opposite. Student and professors alike must adopt what Paulo Freire termed the “problem posing” style of education, coupled with Erich Fromm’s “to be” mode of existence. Together these philosophies combine to create an environment conducive to the increased potential for critical thought and awareness. Students engaged in this type of education ponder, even before the course begins, what they will take away from it, how it will affect their disposition, and what they will contribute to the overall learning experience. After all, a student has as much to offer to the intellectual exchange that takes place in the classroom as the professor. The student accomplishes this by adding his or her own unique perspective to the active discourse between professor and student, as well as between students and their peers.

Crucial to the development of critical pedagogical theory and praxis is understanding of the true nature of words. Words serve two functions that allow for the identification and ultimately the negation of social injustice. First, words function to reflect. This is accomplished by giving the individual a means of articulating feelings, intuitions, observations in such a way that allows for a deeper understanding of social issues and one’s relation to them. This is more commonly referred to as speaking truth to power. It is in reflection that one may come to find the dehumanizing traits in a given institution, ideology, societal norm, as well as within oneself. Second, words function to act upon those injustices. Freire (1970:68) stated, “There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis.”

Within words lies this synergistic relationship between reflection and action. The absence of either demeans the potency of its partner. Subsequently a word without action compromises its reflective potential. This dichotomy brings to the fore what Freire (1970:68) called “unauthentic words.” An unauthentic word is “an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.”

In this method of education the student and the professor actively engage one another in an attempt to form what I call bridges of awareness, which function to close the gap formed by alternate life experience. These bridges allow for the creation of progressively shared and symbiotically created social meaning. This in turn enables individuals to more fully understand the sociohistorical and economic spheres of influence they share with people of similar backgrounds, as well as the spheres occupied by others of dissimilar upbringings.

Because we are all unique individuals who learn and perceive everything in different ways, the only true means of educating is the sincere attempt not to only listen to or observe other perspectives, but to internalize the concept of the other. By this I mean that to learn means to grow; learning is not a static process, but one cannot learn by only studying that which is familiar. It is in the exposure to anything that is other that we step toward new modes of thinking, toward the achievement of our humanity, toward a more just society and reconciled system of higher education, and finally, hopefully, toward freedom from economic, political, and intellectual oppression.

However, a caveat must be stated. For this means of active engagement to take place, the classroom must offer material that is intellectually stimulating and challenging. Thus, it is a dialectical process in which the professor must engage students as equals in regards to the potential for uplifting the intellectual discourse. Furthermore, the student must engross themselves in the active pursuit and contribution to the process of gaining depth and understanding of knowledge, which then enhances the professor’s ability to engage with the student. As Fromm (1976) states in reference to the “to be” mode of educating: “Instead of being passive receptacles of words and ideas, they listen, they hear, and most important, they receive and they respond in an active, productive way” (p. 24). Fromm goes on to state, “Empty talk cannot be responded to in the being mode, and in such circumstances, students in the being mode find it best not to listen at all, but to concentrate on their own thought processes” (p. 30).

According to Fromm (1976):

The difference between the mode of having and the mode of being in the sphere of knowing is expressed in two formulations: “I have knowledge” and “I know.” Having knowledge is taking and keeping possession of knowledge (information); knowing is functional and serves only as a means in the processes of productive thought. (P. 33)

When we apply this to our current system of education we can see that often, but not always, the student and the professor are engaged in the hording and memorizations of information. Neither individual views the available knowledge as a means of negating systemic injustices and inequalities. Knowledge in the circumstance is not viewed a means of becoming more and establishing a new paradigm based on honest reflection, stimulated by new perspectives. This is due to several factors but primarily because our students and professors have been stripped of their humanity and autonomy in the banking system of education.

Fromm believed that the aim of knowledge differs between the two...
modes of existence in that the goal of the having mode is to obtain more knowledge, as opposed to the being mode, which is to know more deeply. In this respect we see how the “having mode” of existence is prevalent in the classroom and synergistically transmitted between professors and students. Fromm (1976:34) states in reference to this polarity, “… The aim of knowing is not the certainty of ‘absolute truth,’ something one can feel secure with, but the self-affirmations process of human reason.” Stated differently, this means that education, in which the university is the apogee of achievement, should be a pathway that serves to lead individuals to a level of enlightenment and understanding that allows for the reclamation of one’s humanity.

This method of educating is a practice of futility that ultimately leads those living a “to have” mode of existence to be insatiable in their consumption and unwavering in their belief in authoritarian banking education. The notion of unlimited consumption that dominates capitalistic culture seeps into our view of knowledge, which in turn trickles down into the teaching style of many professors. Universities then become a type of assembly line in which students pick and choose, as they would food from a buffet, the bits and pieces of knowledge that appear to be interesting, all the while never truly bothering to understand any of it. This in turn makes them unable to critically analyze anything because they have not been encouraged to develop a questioning mind, one in which the initial exposure to any given base of knowledge leads the student to deeper and more thoughtful questions. In a sense, what some would argue is the natural curiosity of humanity is transformed into a mass consumerism functioning within capitalistic markets, which are far from free and fair.

People then are molded into more efficient and less unpredictable cogs to be placed seamlessly into the machine of political economy. The rough edges we are born with that grab and snag upon the fabric of education and learning are sanded down, making individuals into automatons—cold, steel, and smooth, almost certainly to never have those rough edges of inquiry again. In contrast, those who wish to know more deeply do not concern themselves with the boxing-in of ideas, but rather understand that to have a deeper intellectual hold of any given object of knowledge means that one is able to further define his or her place in the world. The transcendent quality of the process of delving deeper into an idea, culture, or any area of inquiry creates deep, rough trenches in the mind of persons attempting to become more than what they are. This leads us to transcend the boundaries placed upon us by conventional thinking and old paradigms.

In essence, a person in the “to be” mode of existence who accepts the “problem posing” style of education is one who does not deal in absolutes. By this it is meant that it is not necessary for these people to own and thus control all that can be known. Indeed, ignorance is just as an important aspect of a critical mind as any other because ignorance is part of the process of knowing more deeply; it fuels that intense will to become knowledgeable. However, this should not be misunderstood to be the ignorance of the unthinking mind, as Fromm would argue.

The dichotomies of the two methods of education also encompass the difference between teaching and training. Training requires procedures and strict guidelines to ensure that each cog in the system is functioning predictably and efficiently. This allows for the owners of the means of production to eliminate almost all “radical” behavior by the people working within the system whose task it is to conduct daily operations. Teaching, in contrast, in its true sense has an iconoclastic quality: It serves to break down conventional thought and seek new ways of solving problems and engaging in dialogue. This activity requires that the people involved are able to critically analyze their circumstances and break down the causes, as well as identify possible solutions. The ability to think critically makes individuals far more unpredictable and “radical” in their action and thought processes. This is due to the nature of critical awareness. What is inherent in this mode of thinking is the constant questioning of reality. The critical thinker, nurtured by a true problem posing education and “to be” mode of existence, struggles to weed out all potential causes of and reactions to any given issue.

The many inherent contradictions in our capitalist society create irreconcilable situations for the critical thinker. For example, principles such as free market competition, the notion that hard work is always rewarded, and that if one tries one can accomplish any of one’s goals starkly differs from reality. In our society markets are far from free and fair, we reward class and privilege over hard work in many instances, and most people are blocked from attaining their goals by structurally embedded forces working to perpetuate the caste-like stratification system we function within. Higher education has been instrumentalized into a factory for producing uncritical thinkers who internalize instruction well and conform to expectations. To simplify the contrast between the styles of educating—banking as opposed to problem posing—one need only look to Paulo Freire. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1970:62) simply states, “Problem posing education is the constant unveiling of reality while the banking system of education inhibits creativity.” Thus, continuation and perpetuation of Joe Bageant’s “American Hologram” remains in full swing.

In his book Deer Hunting with Jesus: Dispatches from America’s Class War, Bageant (2007) further sheds light upon this common American misconception that he terms the “American Hologram” by providing an in-depth look into these self-destructive fallacies and bringing them back to reality. This in turn allows for broader analysis of how this consumer culture has changed the landscape of our institutions of higher education. The construction of this illusion is directly related to the inability of recent generations to forge a unique identity that is then compensated for by the development of Fromm’s market personality. Now more than ever, one’s identity is nothing more that a patchwork of fads and styles knitted together, creating a Frankenstein of capitalist consumerism. According to Bageant (2007):

The Hologram generates tens of thousand of such social identity
A key barrier to the attainment of humanity and the negation of oppression is the phenomena of the oppressed erecting mechanisms to defend the status quo. Freire (1970:85) termed these barriers “limit-situations.” This concept serves to explain the reasoning that individuals cling to when presented with factual information that contradicts their support of the “system.” People entrenched within a limit-situation often become agitated, fearful, uncommunicative, and even aggressive when arguments are put forth that challenge the beliefs and ideologies presented during the interaction between student and teacher as well as in society at large. When an individual is locked within a limit-situation that is a part of the overarching theme of domination, they are unable to perceive the true nature of their existence as a commodity being used by the dominant corporate culture. The argument degenerates into what they perceive to be a threat to their commonly held ideas and the notion of the “American dream.” It is in the misunderstanding and the inability to perceive what is truly taking place in the greater historical context of higher education that the attempt to build limit-situations for the maintenance of “banking” education flourishes.

It is in this dual role that professionals take up the positions of dominator and dominated, the latter being students and the former being the overarching economic system. The individual typically acquiesces to the repressive state, and in the increasingly rare occasion when one does reject an oppressive role, he or she is subjected to harsh backlash. Not only are there internal conflicts but also a conflict among the oppressed and his or her peers, family, and friends whom have not rejected the dominant elite ideals. This is due to what Freire (1970) calls the “housed or dual beings.” Down trodden people take on the dominant values that are prioritized by the economic and cultural elites. This internalization strengthens the fatalistic and often self-loathing feelings found within the oppressed. Moreover, the oppressed view the status of the elites as the ideal representation of success and take in the sloganized myths they are bombarded with through mass media, authoritarian households, and the educational system. It is in this instance where education is perverted and turned into a means of obtaining a position which may garner a greater level of profit, rather than an institution which promotes an environment where the oppressed join together in the pursuit of reconciliation. People are increasingly creating their own reality despite the constant revealing of social contradictions. People begin seeing the inequality but continually construct limit-situations in order to justify it, thus displacing any feelings of injustice for those on the bottom and feelings of guilt for those on top. These people surround themselves with like-minded individuals who buy into their fabricated reality, which eliminates any outside reason from penetrating the simulacra.

This falsification of truth is buttressed by the fatalistic mentality of the people struggling at the lowest end of the socioeconomic spectrum who believe that failure in school or any social institution can be attributed to faults of their own. The elevation of anomic individuality is becoming exceedingly prominent in the middle and lower classes. People are discouraged from developing so-called radical views in order to transform them from free-thinking, unique individuals into puppets, objects to be bought, sold, used, and discarded at the whim of corporate America. This in turn makes the creation of manufactured identities even that much more desirable to corporate elites because it allows people to be molded into mindless model consumers. Joe Bageant (2007) sums it up best by stating:

The corporate simulacrum of life has penetrated us so deeply it has become internalized and now dominates our interior landscape. Just as light pollution washes out the nighttime sky, so much of our day-to-day existence has lost its depth and majesty, having been replaced by constellations of commercial images. (P. 261)

A fog of unreality has settled upon American culture, clouding our perception of the injustice found in the neoliberal form of capitalism. This simulacrum has penetrated our perceptions and thrown off our frame of reference, thus incapacitating our ability to construct an environment conducive to critical thought. We have descended into the cloud of illusion to such an extent that we are no longer able to perceive our true place in the American stratification system.

The Hologram mystifies our class culture, which in turn inhibits the ability of the people to affect any type of change in society. This mystification affects political and religious beliefs, as well as the diets, styles of dress, child-raising methods, and most importantly, the means by which we educate. Therefore, as a result individuals shun critical thought in favor of consumer ideology. As Fromm (1976:23) states, “The attitude inherent in consumerism is that of swallowing the whole world.”

Education in modern civil society has taken on the role present in many institutions found in advanced capitalist economy. This role diminishes the human spirit (humanity) by the commodification of nearly every aspect of life. The ease of production, the increased consumption to the point of waste, and the dispersion and increase in comfort all contribute to what Marcuse, when referring to our increasingly technized culture, (1964:9) called the “rational character of its irrationality.” All of these modalities function to solidify the objectification of the natural world, including humanity, into commodities, pawns on a chessboard to be moved, sacrificed, and discarded by those who control the means of production. Humanity has begun to determine its self-value based on the extent to which it has horded the various objects deemed indispensable by societal standards, which, as I have previously shown, are constructed in reference to the well-being of the capitalist substructure of our society. In this instance, education has become no different than any.
other object to be owned and manipulated: the participant in higher education seeks to “have” more education in order to play the chess game more effectively. Notions of enlightenment, humanity, and critical thought (especially pertaining to our economic system) are disposed of, seen as irrelevant in an increasingly technologized world that places emphasis solely on so-called hard science and empirically provable facts.

The university functions under this umbrella of dominant elite interest and serves to indoctrinate and solidify the false needs required to continue the reign of oppression imposed by the power elite. This false need, in turn, is filtered into the ideologies of students through their interaction with the professor within the classroom setting. As stated earlier, the student-professor relationship takes on the undertones of the worker-owner relationship in modern civil society. Thus, all of the internalization of false need is reinforced in the act of banking education. The university’s primary purpose now is to prepare future generations of workers, in an increasingly technological society, to take up the positions once held by previous generations. All the while critical thought is not even a periphery function of higher education in terms of questioning value systems, economic policy, or political agendas. This further illustrates how the needs of the economic system, to replenish the industrial reserve army, are placed above those of the student and modern-day workers. Due to this, many professors conduct their classrooms as a type of mini-kingdom, functioning within the so-called Ivory Towers of academia.

The Elite Response to Education

Education has taken this turn toward an increasingly positivistic form of learning because it is necessary for the proliferations of the machines that have come to dominate production. Math and science are emphasized, as opposed to the arts and humanities, because of the ability of those disciplines to produce ever-more efficient means of production. These reasons are coupled with the promotion of upper-class values which place emphasis on consumerism, prompting participants in educational institutions, specifically higher education, to adopt the cultural capital favored by the dominant group in any given society.

Higher education is especially important to the capitalist classes above all other levels of education because college further stratifies the lower classes. This stratification creates a middle class that acts as a buffer between the poorest of the poor and the very wealthy. The graduates of higher education, being far more likely to earn greater wages and benefits, are pacified by a relatively comfortable lifestyle that makes them far less likely to view themselves as oppressed. This, along with the solidification of the dominant cultural values and norms, creates tension between the so-called middle class and lower classes, taking away attention from the numerical minority who enjoy a level of wealth that is several hundred times that of the average worker.

This dehumanization is systematically implemented for specific reason, although, despite upper-class manipulation, education still holds the potential for justice and the negation of the intellectual repression. The corporate elite class, being well aware of this, takes action accordingly. To further qualify this statement we can simply look at the severe budget cuts to our nation’s educational system while our military budget has skyrocketed. To elaborate on this and address why education is seen as such a great threat to capitalist economy we can examine attacks on higher education by taking note of certain historical facts.

For example, Noam Chomsky (1999), in Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order, brings attention to the expanded engagement in higher education during the sixties and seventies and the subsequent capitalist move to reverse the trend. Chomsky (1999:60) states, “The Trilateral Commission, founded by David Rockefeller in 1973, devoted its first major study to the ‘crisis of democracy’ throughout the industrial world as large sectors of the population sought to enter the public arena.” Chomsky went on to say, “Of particular concern to the Commission were the failures of what it called the institutions responsible ‘for the indoctrination of the young’: the schools, universities, and churches.” This Commission, comprised of capitalist elites, pushed forth policy in order to blunt participation in education and also to help shift the purpose of education to its new role as a capitalist tool in an advanced industrial society. Furthermore, Herbert Marcuse (1964:21) states, in reference to capitalist ability to mobilize against the communist threat in the sixties, “Mobilized against this threat, capitalist society shows an internal union and cohesion unknown at previous stages of industrial civilization.”

The ability of the capitalist class to mobilize with the unity and cohesion in opposition to any perceived threat also includes the threat found within higher education. High-powered lobbies and political action committees (PACs) are put into action in order to push and promote policy that strips funding away from educational institutions. This causes a ripple effect that has many severe consequences in regards to the ability of people to attain higher education, let alone an education with a critical perspective. Due to increases in tuition that result, in part, from lower government support and lack of available funds, fewer people will be able to afford a college education. Also, professors will typically be paid less or far more adjunct faculty will be hired, which could have a twofold effect: (1) Adjunct faculty are less likely to teach in a way that criticizes the bureaucratic structure of the university for fear of losing their positions. This can be done easily to nontenured employees as opposed to tenured faculty. (2) The remaining tenured faculty are further inundated with work because of a decrease in full-time professors to share in the administrative functions of the department. This increased workload could have several outcomes. The professor could potentially be overwhelmed with extra work that he or she is unable to develop adequate lesson plans that are suited to problem posing education. Another possible outcome could be a build-up of frustration due to feelings of insignificance stemming from higher work volumes without increases in remuneration, as well as the cynicism that develops from what appears to be a losing effort on the part of the problem posing educators. All of these potential
issues, along with many others that arise from the assault on education, are done purposefully and strategically.

To clarify why this is done one must address why education is seen as such a great threat. While education has been increasingly used as a means of streamlining the transition from student to worker, viewed from a dialectical standpoint, education also has the power to reverse this process and negate the perpetuation of that antagonism.

Dialectics is a method of viewing and analyzing the interplay of various, and in many instances, opposing aspects of a given situation in terms of the negative. Negative dialectics allows a critical thinker to create a means of solving social issues by identifying the characteristics in any given situations that are detrimental to both structure and agency. By identifying these negatives, one is able to work toward the elimination of those aspects of any given object of knowledge. Thus, one can move society that much closer to the negative of oppression, which is freedom. For example, one may not be able to articulate what a utopian society will be like because such a notion is complex and does not account for the individuality of people’s notions of such a society. However, one is able to determine more easily the inhumane and unjust aspects of a given society for the purpose of eliminating them. Things such as poverty and violent crime are societal aspects that, if negated, would by definition bring society closer to an ideal form. Also, for this to be done one must also work to reshape the societal apparatuses and institutions that are already in place in order to affect any significant type of change. As Herbert Marcuse (1964:23) states, “Thus, the negations exists priori to the change itself, the notion that the liberating historical forces develop within the established society is a cornerstone of Marxian theory.”

In modern civil society the more efficient the means of production become, the less humanely people are treated. For example, one would not be hard pressed to assume that as efficacy of production rises so does an increase in free time as well as a decreased in physical strain and mental exhaustion. However, what has actually taken place is in direct contrast to such an assumption. This is due to the capitalist mania for ever-increasing profit margins, which has led to a culture founded on the basis of unlimited consumption. Regardless of the ease and expanded capabilities of the production process, people who control those means remain unsatisfied even though the acceptable level of productivity is increased. The increase in production takes up any slack afforded by more efficient means of production. For example, if one man could once produce 1000.00 of wealth per hour and can now produce twice that, rather than accepting the 1000.00 per hour and giving the worker more free time or higher wages, they simply increase the quota to match the increased ability to produce. The result is the worker works the same amount of time, or longer, and the owners simply reap the benefits of increased productive capability. Accordingly, higher education has become a means by which people can learn the techniques and cultural behaviors that (1) allow for them to be able to operate and maintain the technology necessary for the expanded production, and (2) preserve and strengthen dominant values that serve to keep the workers docile and stagnant critical thought. Herbert Marcuse (1964:1) takes note of this trend by stating, “To the degree to which freedom from want, the concrete substance of all freedom, is becoming a real possibility, the liberties which pertain to a state of lower productivity are losing their former content.”

As mentioned earlier, Erich Fromm’s marketing character plays a vital role in the conceptualization of what education is in modern civil society. Fromm (1976) elaborates on this notion by stating:

The marketing characters’ lack of attachment also makes them indifferent to things. What matters is perhaps the prestige or the comfort that things give, but things per se have no substance. They are utterly expendable, along with friend or lovers, who are expendable, too, since no deep tie exists to any of them. (P. 122)

Capitalistic hegemony has devoured our capacity to see beyond the power, prestige, and control that accumulating things has as its main motivating factors. There is no internalization of education as a means of leading out of obsolete traditions and conventional thinking and toward revolutionary ideas and concepts. Education then becomes a tool in which the degree becomes nothing but another status symbol. It is a symbol used to acquire wealth by painting one as more productive; a symbol used to stratify people so that those with a degree can look down upon those without (another form of control and dominance); a symbol that justifies, for those with degrees, why they are better and should be given more rewards. All of these symbols that a degree has come to represent are a far cry from what achievement in higher education should symbolize.

Upon earning a degree, graduates should be more understanding of the plight laid upon their fellow human beings in the form of social injustice. One should be more proficient at the art of critical thinking, which at its core is an activity that promotes positive change. One should be, as Marx would say, more expressive of life and thus less alienated from the world and others. Our task then, as critical thinkers who have become more in touch with our humanity, is to speak truth concerning the state of education and the possible outcomes if no true praxis is put forth.

Education, Capital, and Humanity

All animals live but only humans exist. We strive for transcendence from our animal instincts, however blunted and tucked into our subconscious they may be. We are able, unlike other animals, to separate our life’s work from our ourselves, thus allowing for true reflection of our inner-self as objects of inquiry. No other animal has the capacity to reflect upon itself and the object of its pursuit of knowledge. This fundamental observation encompasses the spirit of humanity. We are historical beings who actively contemplate the actions we take as well as the consequences of those actions. This is opposed to the remainder of the natural world, which is comprised of ahistorical animals whose life activity is merely a means of survival. This di-
The nature of work in a capitalist economy removes people’s life activity and contorts it into a means of survival rather than a means of reflective growth and transcendence. Thus, by way of the antagonism between worker and owner, formed by the relationship each has to the means of production, working class people experience the dehumanization characteristic of any economic model in which unlimited consumption is the ultimate goal.

Karl Marx in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts 1844* (1988) elucidates on the betrayal of critical thought by class antagonistic materialism that is indicative of higher education in modern civil society. He states, “The raising of wages excites in the worker the capitalist’s mania to get rich, which he, however, can only satisfy by the sacrifice of his mind and body” (1988:23). When using Marx’s analysis in reference to the university we see how students in particular, having spent their entire lives subject to intellectual repression and in deference to the dominant cultural ideals, find themselves fettered with the burden of suppressing their own curious nature and true interests in favor of those careers that will potentially garner the most stable financial future. Often students chose their majors because it is a “good” profession that they will be financially successful pursuing, as opposed to individuals who take up the arts, humanities, and social sciences. In this case “good” means what is accepted by a predominantly capitalist value system. People are then funneled into careers that are more beneficial to the economic substructure of our society than to their own personal happiness. The arts and humanities hold the seeds of passion and curiosity; the creative, transcendent, and dynamic mode of being that inspires critical thought, as opposed to the cold, cybernetic, and overtly positivistic pedagogical curriculum which is presently favored and implemented by capitalist elites.

People in this system do not own their work, they do not control it, and it does not belong to them but to others. They produce out of necessity, not out of freedom, which then becomes self-estrangement. Marx believed that once people’s work is taken out of their control and what they produce no longer belongs to them that their humanity is lost. In modern civil society people’s work is no longer done in freedom; it no longer has the aesthetic, warm quality found when one owns and gains dignity and purpose from one’s work. It is cold and lifeless work commissioned at the whim of others under pain of degradation, subordination, and disrespect. In order for people to achieve their humanity, their work must once again become their own. Higher education has been so tightly linked to employment and financial success that it must be in that institution where these notions are reinstated. Karl Marx (1988:77), in support of true production in freedom, stated, “Man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefore.”

To coincide with the increasing technological capabilities of our society, we must begin to create new modes of social action and praxis. Marcuse (1964) believed that due to the expansion of technology, economic, political, and intellectual freedoms have become so much more complex than traditional definitions that we must create new ways of conceptualizing what they mean. Marcuse argued that as societies advance, old paradigms that housed the concepts of economic, political, and intellectual liberties must be reanalyzed because of their inherent importance to humanity’s well-being, purpose, and freedom. Marcuse further argued that the only means of reconceptualizing what these liberties mean in modern civil society was through negative thinking, because any new ideas corresponding to these notions would negate the existing models of thought. To support this mode of dialectical negation Marcuse (1964) stated:

Economic freedom would mean freedom from the economy—from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggles for existence, from earning a living. Political freedom would mean liberation from politics over which they have no effective control. Similarly, intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, abolition of “public opinion” together with its makers. (P. 4)

By this he meant that a certain amount of labor was once necessary in order to produce enough for all of society to function in a civil manner. However, now that technology has allowed the ability to produce to skyrocket, rather than allowing the expansion of personal freedom to coincide with it, the capitalist classes have placed ever-increasing profit margins above the rights of the working people. It is because people no longer need to spend the majority of their
time working to produce necessities that we must reconceptualize what it means to be free. Unless this is done, man will constantly be working rather than having his labor allied in favor of freedom.

It is from this view that Marcuse (1964) invokes the mode of thinking known as the “negation of the negative.” Specifically, Marcuse believed we must “restore individual thought” by negating the culture of mass communication and social indoctrinations that has run rampant in our society. In the process of analyzing our educational institutions, the positive is found in the negative. Simply stated, while higher education has been increasingly used as a means of streamlining the transition from student-professor to worker-owner, viewed from a dialectical standpoint, education also has the power to reverse this process and negate the perpetuation of that antagonism.

Dialectical negation is a method of viewing objects of knowledge in terms of the negative. Negative thinking allows an individual to establish a means of solving social issues by identifying the characteristics in any given institution that are detrimental to critical thought and the attainment of one’s humanity. By identifying the negative aspects of any social institution, one is able to work toward the elimination of those characteristics, thus moving society that much closer to the negative of oppression, which is freedom.

Marcuse, in One-Dimensional Man (1964), further suggests that the reason these statements sound like utopian dreams is precisely because of the strength of the forces working to hold them in the light of pure left-wing rhetorical fantasy. It is specifically due to this that educational institutions must be reformed immediately. Second to the family, education is the social institution that holds the most sway over the mode of thinking an individual adopts as he or she grows into adulthood. If in that institution people are told that such an existence is unrealistic, then what measure could anyone truly be expected to take in order to reach such a level of enlightenment?

One’s desire to attain something is positively correlated to his or her ability to imagine it as a real possibility. For example, one would not have a realistic goal to be able to run 100 miles per hour. Similarly, if one believed that these seemingly unfeasible goals of freedom from economic politics and intellectual oppression were unattainable, he or she would not be able to truly commit to any praxis in which that goal would be the ultimate end. In support of this argument, Marcuse (1964:4) stated, “The most effective and enduring form of warfare against liberation is the implementing of material and intellectual needs that perpetuate obsolete forms of the struggle for existence.” By this Marcuse means that what we are taught is realistic and inevitable will ultimately be the end that we work toward. If we were taught that equality and freedom, in all its forms, are realistic and good, then we would work and strive toward that mode of being. Conversely, as people are taught to accept what they are given, work without question, and agree with the dominant societal views that are strategically implemented by the capitalist elite, then that is what they will aspire to do.

The act of transforming a classroom must take place before the professor even steps foot into the situation. The foremost and seemingly most difficult challenge is to view each participant in the classroom as an active, valuable member. Each individual classroom then becomes a sort of micro learning community (MLC) within the university. Each MLC then functions with the professor’s realization that each student, by actively engaging in the discourse and having his or her opinions valued, will contribute to the overall level of critical thinking and learning potential. Even though the professor must take responsibility for the environment because of the rational authority possessed from his or her advanced knowledge of the given discipline, he or she is still able to engage students rather than depositing information in them. This engagement negates the preexisting simulacrum that views the educational process as a static and unchanging thing. Just as people are not static beings, neither can the means by which we educate remain inert. Viewing education as an unchanging thing, stuck in the past tradition and old methodology, is transforming the living and transcendent quality of true education into a dead, insensitive, and dehumanizing process.

Reconciliation of Educational Systems

It is in the exposure to critical theory and praxis that students can begin to reclaim their status as people to be educated and cease the cycle of objectification that is prevalent in modern educational institutions. Also, by reclaiming the right to true problem posing education and humanity, students assist in the emancipation of their professors. Freire (1970:38) qualifies this by stating, “As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors’ power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they lost in the exercise of oppression.” Just as the process of oppression, the suppression of critical thought and true words, and the proliferation of Fromm’s “to have” mode of existence were cyclical, reinforced with each generation, so too is the act of redemption.

The reclamation of one’s humanity begins after the gears of critical thought and praxis are set in motion. The students work to reclaim their humanity, thus assisting in the professors’ reconciliation. The professors then teach, by means of problem posing pedagogy, a questioning and engaging mentality to their student. This newly developed critical lens is comprised of true words, active dialogue, and a critical perspective of societal issues. This allows for greater progress toward a truly reconciled system of higher education.

The defeat of oppression must be preceded by the naming, with the use of “true words,” of that injustice. Words then become a dialogue through which men and woman actively engage in reclaiming their rights as human beings. The reclamation of language that allows for our dreams to become concrete is the avenue by which people break the silence that has been forced upon them through a terribly dehumanizing system of banking education. To name the injustice, to break the silence, to expand one’s vocabulary with the understanding of the words, complete with knowledge of the reflective and active potential they
embody, is to regain one’s significance as a human being.

Humanity is built upon dialogue, the willful communication of human experience. Thus, true dialogue cannot exist unless all parties wish to actively participate. Dialogue cannot take place between those who wish to be educated in a manner that allows for critical thought and those who wish to proliferate a method of education that impoverishes one’s ability to think, to create, and to imagine a more reconciled society and system of higher education. It is in communicative action and power that the oppressed break the shackles holding them in their prisons of capitalist consumerism and anti-intellectualist culture. As Freire (1970:69) states, “If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity.”

The liberation of the oppressed through education cannot be done for the oppressed; it must be a cooperative initiative which values the humanity, creativity, and critical thought of each person involved. As Freire (1970:60) states, “Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.” Freire goes on to state that we must develop our consciousness: “consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world.” We must begin to view our lives, ambitions, problems, values, and traditions in the broader sociohistorical context. If that is to be achieved we must evoke our sociological imagination to practice a type of reflexive inquiry into how we have come to be the way we are.

A shortcoming of the pursuit of critical thought is often the misconception that our topic of study is impacted by all these social forces, but somehow we (the knowers) are unaffected by the various forces which we are attempting to explain. Therefore an introduction to problem posing education must be preceded by the negation of this student-professor dichotomy that is present in modern civil society. An iconoclastic approach to this relationship is necessary; the negation of traditional roles of students and professors is essential. Once this outdated style of education is resolved, the relationship can take on new forms and become one in which both the student and the professor learn from each other. A type of mutual ownership over the process of education then becomes the norm, and the transformation of students into objects, containers to be filled rather than people to be educated, is negated in favor of a more reconciled humanistic approach. Moreover, this approach enriches the student-professor relationship by creating an environment in which each participant adapts to the other, thus finding new and inventive ways of communicating, solving problems, and synthesizing and analyzing information.

Conclusion

The original questions that sparked the inquiry into the contents of this analysis centered on the nature and purpose of education. More specifically, is education meant to be a liberational life dynamic means of being led out of anti-intellectualism, unreason, superstition, ignorance, and fear toward wisdom, rationality, understanding, justice, and freedom? Is it this purpose which is in line with the etymological genesis of the word “educate” that means “to lead or draw out,” “to grow or become,” “to develop potential”? Conversely, is the purpose of education simply a means of commandeering greater wealth?

The authors have shown that education is indeed a means of leading out of conventional thought, a transcendent dynamic process of achieving one’s humanity. However, the authors have also shown that education in modern civil society does not fit into that definition. Indeed higher education has been transformed into a means of streamlining the transition from the student-professor relationship to the worker-owner relationship in modern civil society. This transition has its nexus within the classroom, hallways, and offices of the university and in the relationship between the professor and student. This antagonistic relationship does take on the mantle of the worker-owner relationship that promotes oppression and dependency as staples of the modern “banking” style of educating.

Higher education and the student-professor relationship, while stagnated by our repressive economics, politics, and materialistic culture, remains our greatest hope for reconciliation. Rather than being led toward an increasing state of total administration we must work to promote knowledge. Knowledge is not forged within Ivory Towers and on the intellectual battlefields of academia; it is formed in the spaces between people and their drive to become more than what they are. We must pursue and create knowledge despite the seemingly insurmountable odds standing against us. We must pursue it tirelessly, and as Paulo Freire (1970:53) states in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuous, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”
References


Chomsky, Noam. 1999. *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*. Ontario, Canada: Turnaround Publisher Services Ltd.


