

Pedagogy in Common: Democratic education in the global era

NOAH DE LISSOVOY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

In the context of the increasingly transnational organization of society, culture, and communication, this article develops a conceptualization of the global common as a basic condition of interrelation and shared experience, and describes contemporary political efforts to fully democratize this condition. The article demonstrates the implications for curriculum and teaching of this project, describing in particular the importance of fundamentally challenging the interpellation of students as subjects of the nation, and the necessity for new and radically collaborative forms of political and pedagogical authority that can more powerfully realize the imaginative potential of educators and students alike as global democratic actors. In this effort, familiar progressive educational ideas (e.g. the importance of the continuity of the curriculum, and the meaning and purpose of experimentalism) are interrogated and rearticulated. The article concludes with a discussion of the unique ways in which education can contribute to constructing a democratic society in the global era, and how the central aspects of such a pedagogy in common can also suggest essential principles for the organization of social movements in this context.

Keywords: critical theory, globalization, curriculum theory

Introduction

As a set of global crises widen and deepen, demands for authentic democracy and community are transformed from merely utopian expressions into the minimal demands for the survival of society. Unprecedented economic desperation, ecological devastation, and political chaos all require an urgent, intelligent, and original response. While no one can yet specify exactly what it will take to overcome these challenges, any adequate effort will eventually have to start from the premise of our belongingness, globally, to each other—the myriad and unrecognized ways we are in relation, and are produced out of these relations, and the myriad ways in which, in the context of continuing globalization, we will come to be even more so. It is this fundamental social condition of interrelation, collaboration, and entanglement, which sets the parameters for any meaningful global community, that I call here the *common*, and it is the form of education which sets its sights on the development and democratization of this condition, that I call *pedagogy in common*.

Education is a unique social sphere and practice, since it is at once real, and a laboratory for the real. In the present, education arranges the possibilities of what the global will come to mean, whether it does so explicitly and intentionally or not. Whenever education repeats the worn-out forms of the given, it proposes a bleak version of this future. But it is also possible for education, as the critical, processual, improvisational practice of pedagogy, to propose original and radical senses for global culture and society, as well as *to try them out* in the constellation of its own relationships, the relationships of teaching and learning. In this sense, democratic education in the global era not only has to approach questions of content and curriculum in a fundamentally creative way, but in constructing its own community also has to begin the very construction of global democracy within its own particular moment and locale. Pedagogy is the indispensable condition of democracy, no less so in the current historical moment. These stakes motivate my argument here, and inspire the proposals that emerge from it.

In the following conceptual intervention I develop the notion of the common, and the forms of education responsive to it, in several directions. Beginning from recent work in critical globalization studies, this article extrapolates from the powerful senses of globality as a distinctive political, social, and economic condition (and problem) that this scholarship suggests. Specifically, I argue that while the moment of globalization is characterized by an intensification of processes of domination, appropriation, and coloniality (Amin, 1997; Dussel, 2003; Harvey, 2003), at the same it makes possible powerfully original and emancipatory transnational analyses and movements (De Angelis, 2007; Hardt & Negri, 2004; Mohanty, 2003). I argue first that in a political sense, the common can be proposed as the foundation of a contemporary notion of global democracy. Second, I discuss the implications for curriculum and teaching of the conceptualization of the common that I propose, and what these suggest for familiar conceptions of progressive and democratic education. Finally, I take up the problem of the common from the standpoint of pedagogy itself, and argue that pedagogy not only follows as an implication of new notions of democracy and community but in fact also anticipates and contributes to the basic senses of these categories.

While I aim here to develop principles that can be applied to a variety of contexts and locations, it is important to point out that my approach to the problem of the global is situated in the context of the educational discourses and practices of the United States. Approaches to the global are always mediated by the local, and my location influences the ways in which the questions I consider show up here; however, if properly attended to, I believe this specificity of the analysis can be an asset rather than a drawback. In particular, one goal of my argument is to interrogate the ways that the US (including in education) disavows its actual articulation to and insertion in a globality which overdetermines it. In this regard, and in relation to this location, the kinds of global reconfiguration of democratic identifications that I envision here take on a special urgency.

From the Commons to the Common

The moment of globality, and the sense of the common in this context, have to be thought politically as well as ethically; we have to consider the meaning of global

democracy and its implications for education just as much as the new potentials for community. This historical moment is inspiring to the extent that it represents an exhilarating new horizon for experiments in democracy and human relationships; it is menacing to the extent that it represents a powerful extension of sovereignty. There is nothing inherently liberating about the globalization of the economy, culture, and politics, since new instruments of control are evolving to accommodate and exploit this underlying historical transformation through the formation of supranational groupings of political and economic elites (Sklair, 2002). On the other hand, if the democratic potential of this new horizon can be appropriated, its possibilities are equally unprecedented. We increasingly, if unevenly, inhabit a common globality. All depends on how, and to what end, that condition is inflected (Klein, 2004). A crucial starting point for an analysis of the challenges to education posed by globality, and for the proposal of a pedagogical project adequate to this moment, is the notion of *the common as collectively shared production, experience, and activity*. In order to grasp this sense of the common, the Marxian analytical tradition, and critical studies of globalization in particular, is especially helpful. Not only does this framework make it possible to understand the formation of the common in political and economic terms, but also, in its contemporary articulations, it allows us to imagine fundamentally new senses of what the common might come to mean in the global era.

An initial point of reference for the common is in fact the *commons* itself, which is the name for the collective property that is appropriated in the course of the development of capitalism. As Marx (1867/1976) describes it, capitalism was established through the enclosure of communally held village land at the end of the feudal period. This appropriation of the commons created the original fund of wealth that allowed for the development of capitalism on a wide scale, as manufactures were established, and as peasants were driven from the land and into the ranks of the wage-laborers. It is in this original moment that the contemporary *common* (as shared social condition) emerges from the loss of the original commons: what determines the meaning of the collective is no longer the shared space of life and work but rather the shared experience of loss and alienation. What is collectively held is no longer the positive substance of a form of life, but rather the negative condition of a new historical epoch—what Marx (1867/1976) described as the process of ‘divorcing the producer from the means of production’ (p. 875). This virtuality of the common, and the condition of alienation that conditions it, remain essential to it up to the present.

Nevertheless, the fact of sociality as dependent on the creativity of the collective is proven to us by the intricate cultural, technological, and economic webs of relationships that have become the landscapes within which the meaning of our lives is constructed (Castells, 1996). Furthermore, in the context of struggles against the principle of domination that defines much of collective experience in the present, these relationships begin to be reappropriated and the common becomes rearticulated as a liberatory sign and utopian project. This liberatory construction of the common posits a new shared space: the complex and multidimensional condition of twenty-first century sociality, and the absolute territory of the global (Hardt & Negri, 2004). There are several important senses in which familiar boundaries are traversed and undone by globalization, and therefore in which the possibilities for the common, as a democratic

and liberatory project, are at the same time multiplied; I discuss each of these in turn below.

The Transnational Common

In the first place, globalization means the weakening of the boundaries between, and reconfiguration of the *geography* of, groupings of people in political, cultural, and economic terms. Politically, the locus of power begins to migrate from national states to supranational and transnational frameworks. At the same time, as capital broadens its reach to absorb new regions and modes of life, the logics of reification, consumerism, and cultural commodification unite diverse populations globally (Amin, 1997; Robinson, 1996). This is also, however, potentially the occasion for a creative kind of appropriation, as these global cultural and economic logics are differentially negotiated by populations from their own standpoint and for their own purposes, in the context of a dramatically more complex cultural infrastructure of technology and media (Appiah, 2006). At the same time, these transformations influence the possibilities for emancipatory movements. The political economy of globalization transnationalizes oppositional identifications, linking ‘global cities’ as privileged terrain for struggle within and against global finance capital (Sassen, 1998). On this terrain, the construction of the common as democratic horizon means creating alliances of workers, oppressed groups, and concerned citizens that do not depend for their coherence on national allegiance, and which can develop analyses of exploitation, racism, and patriarchy as transnational processes. A global movement of the common organizes the energy of the multitude in singular moments of global expression, as in the spectacular transnational protests against the meetings of the World Trade Organization; such expressions exceed the logic of the international, and potentially suggest a new global subject of opposition.

The Communicative Common

It can be argued that the most significant development of the global era is the tremendous contemporary ramification of networks of communication and information (Castells, 1996). These transform global politics, capital flows, and the textures of everyday life. This promiscuous web-building binds together the nodes of the collective more powerfully and variously. Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) have argued that the inherent creativity of humanity, which Marx identified with the ability to produce value in the labor process, is evident most clearly in this domain of communication and information exchange. They argue that this virtual collaboration and inventiveness represents an ‘immaterial labor’ which capital increasingly attempts to capture and exploit (e.g. in the information technology, advertising, and service industries). A central political task is then to organize the new potentials of global communicative networks for democracy-building movements. In the process, the identity of such movements is transformed, as they are joined within a transnational horizon and contemplate their obstacles at this scale. The horizon of the global, as it becomes accessible for progressive theory and practice, opens up unprecedented possibilities for radical articulations between sites, and thus for new oppositional identifications. In this context, a discursive ‘equivalential

chain' (Laclau, 2005, p. 74) sutures diverse moments of protest into new popular demands at the transnational scale; these new formations can be seen, for example, in global women's movements, and in international alliances between peasants, indigenous communities, and environmentalists.

The Postcolonial Common

One important implication of these processes is that global left politics is complexified and decentered; in particular, the Eurocentric determination of critical traditions in theory and practice is challenged in favor of a liberatory understanding based on the profound imbrication of global territories, and on the agency and priority of the global South within this context (Dussel, 2003; Mignolo, 2005). The complex recombinations and reterritorializations produced by globalization as political economy create new possibilities for oppositional identifications and complex alliances at the same that new populations are subject to exploitation (or subject to new exploitations). For example, the increasing importance of service work within the urban spaces of the global economy, the transnational migrations produced by the demand for cheap labor in this sector, and the recruitment of women in this context, create the possibility for a new compound social movement oriented at once to gendered and classed identities (Mohanty, 2003; Sassen, 1998). These complexities in the cultural dimensions of work and resistance in the context of globalization point to the complexity of the common itself as a space of combination, intersection, and hybridity. This is perhaps not quite the hybridity of a genteel cosmopolitanism, which surveys the panorama of the global from a point above the ordeal of its concrete production, but rather an on-the-ground clash and combination of languages, histories, and struggles—as for instance in the powerful remaking of both the US labor movement and working-class culture by immigrants from Mexico and Central America. In this sense, the common is not the grey space of a bland universalism, but is rather *full of its differences*—it is the material and concrete space of the collective making of history.

The Ecological Common

Finally, the proliferation of natural disasters in the context of global climate change, the disappearance of biodiversity in the context of habitat destruction and agricultural monoculture, and the rising challenges of water and food scarcity all point to the historicity of nature itself, as well to the impossibility of reserving historical and ontological priority for human beings. In the context of this sense of shared time and space, the earth itself can be seen to participate in the kind of subjecthood that has been reserved up to now for human beings (Shiva, 2005). At the same time, the ecological is essentially linked to the economic, both because processes of production and consumption are the material foundation of ecological destruction, and because ecology names an analysis of *the dynamics of the whole*, not just of nature by itself (Kovel, 2002). A global-ecological perspective reveals the common *par excellence*: the material body of the totality—the earth itself. This means that a project for a democratic globality has to challenge more than the abstract irrationality of the relations of economic production; it

also has to confront the social and environmental violence and domination of globalization (Mies, 1998). In the moment of ecological crisis, we can begin to see past the veil of reification that captures relations between humans and their surroundings. A deeper conception of the democratic common becomes possible, one that unites efforts to defend the environment with efforts against economic exploitation and political marginalization (Stedile, 2004).

Of course, at the same time that globalization more powerfully creates the conditions for the realization of the common, it also results in (and proceeds through) new and more dramatic enclosures and expropriations. David Harvey (2003) shows that in response to a persistent crisis of overproduction, contemporary efforts to privatize basic social services, as well as imperialistic efforts to control critical geopolitical resources and territories, represent a process of 'accumulation by dispossession' which recalls the original moment of plunder of the commons described by Marx as setting the stage for the development of capitalism (as I have described above). Massimo De Angelis (2007) argues that these instances show in fact that the process of enclosure is continuous within capitalism, and continually necessary in the context of a struggle against collective resistance to its colonizations. For De Angelis, enclosure should not be thought of as a (pre-)historical stage within the development of capitalism (which occasionally atavistically reappears) but rather as the consistent and continuous aspiration of capital, as it seeks to reproduce the social relations that define it against lifeworlds that have so far escaped it or that struggle to resist it. In this context, it is important to understand the global common as a political project, provisional and in process, rather than the mere result of an objective dialectic. The new possibilities for democracy that are proposed in the social and political reconfigurations of the global era emerge as such *against* the ongoing efforts of power to construct the coherence of global sociality in its own image; these possibilities constitute an *outside* to the grammar defined by capital's fundamental binding of processes of life, creativity, and construction to the modes of the private and the proprietary.

Importantly, *democracy* itself is an ambiguous sign. It has been often equated, hege- monically, with capitalism; in the present, the boosters of market-driven globalization consider it to be a natural corollary of economic expansion in the new 'flat world' (Friedman, 2005). But this kind of democracy, measured by levels of profit-oriented entrepreneurialism and commodity consumption, and by a narrow electoral politics, and exported to the world under the flag of imperialism, is exactly what the emerging common I have described above begins to contest. At the same time, then, that we envision an alternative globality directed against the top-down globalization organized by elites, we need to imagine an alternative democracy which refuses the constraints imposed by official discourse and practice. This alternative imagination, in challenging directly the processes of appropriation and enclosure associated with neo-liberalism and technocracy, ties democracy to a radically emancipatory widening of the possibilities of the lifeworld itself, rather than limiting it to a modification of the institutions of parliamentary politics.

The basic ontological condition that grounds solidarity in education and elsewhere is the fact of our constitutive involvement or entanglement in each other. That is to say, human selves are always already constitutively *traded* at the level of being, essentially

made out of each other, from the common material of life and sociality. Marxist theory has emphasized this process in its explication of the always-collective nature of social production, which sets the terrain of selves. But globalization reveals this condition in new ways: through the new kinds of communication between disparatenesses that it produces, the new mobility and hybridity of populations that it occasions, and the new forms of cultural interpenetration that grow out of it. The coming to consciousness of this entanglement means a determination against those social structures and processes that deny it; democratic education finds its meaning and purpose in this context.

Globalization, the Common, and Curriculum

In each of the aspects described above, the common is a name both for an actually emergent experience of interconnectedness and for a utopian political project. We are reconstructed by globality at the same time as we participate in inventing it. Whether these processes are truly simultaneous depends upon the degree to which globalization is available to democratic interventions. If we are committed to the realization of a democratic global common, then the process and mode of our engagement are crucial problems. In order to consider these problems, we have to consider them *educationally*, not only because they have important implications for education policy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2000), but also because the production of an unprecedented condition is essentially a process of learning and teaching. In the field of education, which is one of the crucial global fronts of the neoliberal project and its ‘managerialist’ orientation to public life (Peters, Marshall, & Fitzsimons, 2000), this rethinking of the pedagogy of democracy is especially urgent.

Understanding the itinerary of the common described above—from the historical moment of enclosure to the utopian horizon of the global—has important implications for the curriculum in particular, especially where this means not simply the manifest content of education, but also the ideological foundations of this content (Apple, 2004). In the first place, a sensitivity to the emergence of the condition of transnationalism, and of a ‘transnational imaginary’ in curriculum (Gough, 2000, p. 334), implies an unraveling of the national identifications that anchor student and teacher subjectivities, and which are painstakingly constructed through the experience of schooling itself—in the US case, in the rituals of the pledge of allegiance, the celebrations of the ‘founding fathers’, and in the often perfunctory gestures of multicultural inclusion. This involves the ideological work of challenging our basic interpellation as national subjects. This is a traumatic process, to the extent that the very ‘matrix of intelligibility’ (Butler, 2006, p. 24) that founds our own coherence to ourselves begins to fray. In this context, teachers and learners in a democratic pedagogy in the global context—or pedagogy in common—are called upon to join in the production of an unprecedented global citizenship, in which their own subjectivities can begin to participate (Gaudelli & Heilman, 2009; Nussbaum, 1996). Rather than a simple concern for the fates of others, elsewhere, this means a political project of alliance, and an intellectual project of discovering the purposes that determine our shared, and different, situations (Mohanty, 2003).

Even progressive approaches that seek to build more genuine ethical spaces are often captured by a provincialism that does not recognize that the privileges of the pluralism

of the global North depend on the refusal of a responsibility to the ‘periphery’. Valuing diverse experiences and challenging processes of social exclusion have not usually been thought of as projects to be undertaken collectively at the global level; multicultural education, for instance, has only recently begun to consider this context (Banks, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2004). However, attending carefully to globalization, and to the historical passages of colonialism and imperialism that have contributed to constructing it, necessarily transforms our understanding of racism and marginalization. Progressive efforts to include minority populations often ignore the inscription of majority-minority relations in histories of conquest as well as in contemporary neocolonial economic and political projects globally. Additionally, these approaches often neglect the conceptual and political unraveling of the authority and autonomy of the ‘center’ that is implied by a global perspective (McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). In the US, it is often overlooked that the reproduction of life and culture in the North is absolutely dependent, on the ground floor, on global flows of cheap labor from the South, and at the heights, on global flows of finance capital from the East. The allegiance to US exceptionalism that is mandatory in public discourse in this country, and in education as well, is an expression of the defensiveness that characterizes the attitude of a declining global hegemon. However, within a pedagogy in common, it is a discourse we should crucially contest.

Authentic solidarity with others elsewhere also means an understanding of the logic of capitalist accumulation, especially in its neoliberal manifestation (McLaren, 2005; Torres, 2002). There are important implications here for the selection of explicit content. The history of the ‘market’, so touted in the popular media, can be retold from the standpoint of the victims of enclosure (from the feudal period in Europe to the contemporary dispossessions wrought by neoliberalism), and with attention to the new global society that is produced by the flows of capital, information, and people—and to its fantastic economic, technological, and communicative potential. A pedagogy in common calls for a curriculum of trade and economics that would consider not only conventional accounts of development, but also critical analyses of the social and environmental ravages caused by the ubiquitous processes of marginalization and privatization (Grue-newald, 2003; Kahn, 2009), as well as discussion of the spaces created by movements of popular protest and alternative practices. For instance, experiments against ‘intellectual property’ (i.e. alternative forms of copyright, legal challenges to patents by transnational corporations of indigenous knowledge, open-source programming, etc.) ought to be made available to young people as alternative visions of production and ownership anchored in and dependent upon the collective, increasingly on a transnational scale.

However, the most powerful implications for critical education of emerging senses of global democracy are the potential transformations in pedagogical relationships that they suggest. In moments of transition, education becomes a staging ground, or experimental space, for larger democratic projects. Contemporary antisystemic movements are characterized by a collaborative, networked, and flexible form of organization (Graeber, 2004) that does not depend to the same degree on the personalities of ‘leaders’ as have earlier movements. Curriculum and instruction need to undertake a similar unraveling of the authoritative figure of the teacher, and a similar discovery of the power and intelligence of the group, which is at the same time a recognition of the agency and autonomy of students themselves (De Lissovoy, 2008). We can see this independent agency in the

many contemporary student-led walkouts, protests, and activist organizations that link school reform to issues of immigration, militarization, and economic opportunity. Only such a loosening of the epistemological and political limits of pedagogy can liberate the degree of collaborative imagination that will be necessary to confront a rapidly changing global society and to participate in building its future. Beyond familiar efforts to build on prior knowledge, this principle suggests a basic reevaluation in which the minds of students are no longer expected to be folded into the superior intelligence of the teacher and the curriculum (however critical). Instead, student and teacher thinking each become independent and indispensable starting points for intellectual and practical interventions in common.

Just as it means a shift in the organization of educational authority, the urgency of building a form of democracy adequate to the global moment also corresponds to a shift in the purposes of education. In contrast to the retrospective orientation of Dewey's (1944/1997) *reconstructionism*, which sought to reorder and improve existing knowledge and social relationships, the curricular approach I describe here could be understood as a radical departure from the given—a forward-looking and audacious *constructionism* that is motivated by the emergency of responding to the crises of globalization. The focus of curriculum within such a philosophy is less to initiate students into the wisdom and practices of the culture, and more to provoke them to the discovery of the knowledge and society of the (global) future. The justification for this break with familiar and progressive senses of educational purpose is the special character of the crises that confront us in the present. The new forms of anomie that emerge with the destruction of national identifications (Appadurai, 2006), and the desperation of populations abandoned to their fates by the global market and by the breakdown of the communicative rationality of politics (Bauman, 2000), cannot be parsed by the social science that is currently available to students. (Consider, for example, the failure of the leading democratic societies to respond creatively to the challenges of genocide, climate change, or economic collapse; the discourses that produce these failures are codified in the curricula of social studies and citizenship classrooms.) In methodological terms, this means challenging Dewey's (1938/1997) basic principle of the *continuity* of the curriculum (its progressive building on and rearticulation of accomplished understandings). In the present, we require a radically *discontinuous* and flexible learning, one that can propose unprecedented modes of thought and practice. This form of education does not just respect but essentially depends upon the intelligence of students, and generates a form of knowledge that refuses the familiar determinations.

The proposals described above will of course have to confront the current articulation of the basic meanings of education within the hegemonic logic of neoliberalism, and the dramatic attenuation of the space for critical teaching through the imposition of positivistic benchmarking of achievement, scripted and corporate-sponsored curricula, and narrow and instrumentalist senses of literacy. However, the point is not to envision a top-down reorganization of curriculum and instruction, but rather to urge teachers in their own contexts to a greater sensitivity to social and political shifts already taking place on the ground and among students, and to an awareness of the possibilities of a pedagogy built on the basis of these organic processes. In this regard, there are several important practical implications of the approach outlined in this article. First, teachers can create

space in their classrooms for the investigation of emerging forms of alternative and youth cultures and movements, as they are lived in and out of school, and in particular as they knit together disparate and transnational contexts. Scholars have described the emancipatory potential of hip-hop (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002), which is already a thoroughly global idiom, often signifying and allied with forms of political resistance internationally (Mitchell, 2001). Less reported on are the emerging diasporas of *roc en español*, *norteña*, and other Latin American popular musical genres which contribute to a radically transnational identification for youth from immigrant families. These popular cultural forms are linked complexly to concrete struggles by young people against the creeping criminalization of youth by law enforcement and anti-immigrant initiatives, while at the same revealing the ongoing recoding and transnationalization of working class culture. Likewise, as youth in the US begin to participate in efforts to reclaim public space for a new urban cultural and ecological commons, as for example in the inner city community gardens of the Detroit Agricultural Network (Boggs, 2009), they can be helped to investigate the connections between these efforts and international ones—such as worker occupations of shuttered factories in Argentina, and peasant movements against corporate ‘development’ projects in India—to defend collective space and resources from appropriation and privatization. In making the classroom hospitable to discussion of these movements, and supporting students’ own initiatives as activists and cultural workers engaged in ‘critical civic praxis’ (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007), teachers can expand the terrain for radical democratic work *without appropriating the authority to direct it*.

In addition, in response to the official and reductionistic forms of teaching and learning noted above, the senses of the global common that I have described above suggest site-specific investigations of local *educational* terrains in relationship to global contexts. For instance, a sensitivity to the symbiosis between administrative rationality and privatization efforts that defines neoliberal social policy globally can foreground (as crucial examples of this policy) the pervasive testing and accountability regimes that classroom teachers confront. Rather than simply trying to elude these constraints, teachers and students might systematically investigate their global origins, meanings, and effects. In fact, while there is a long history of critical accounts of standardized assessments, we have seen the emergence more recently of teacher-student coalitions specifically organized against them. These organizations have begun to draw connections between the racial and class inequalities that accountability instruments reinforce and the global strategies of capital (Lipman, 2004). Not only do such efforts make crucial analytic links; they also experiment with new forms of authority and solidarity that decenter the traditional teacher-leader, as I have described above. For example, the Brazilian Citizen School reported on by Gandin and Apple (2004), has initiated a collective process of decision-making (extending even to curricula and budgets) explicitly oriented against the managerialism of capital’s social and educational ‘best practices’. Finally, in support of all of these efforts, critically-oriented teacher preparation programs should dramatically expand opportunities for future educators to consider the underlying issues at stake—the sense and direction of globalization, the articulation between education and social movements, and the meaning of democracy itself. This would mean a rigorous exposure to contemporary social and political theory, including globalization

studies. While these recommendations will not defeat by themselves the overwhelming force of technicist and anti-democratic discourses and practices in schools, together they can help to facilitate the entry into education of broader movements for a democratic globality.

The Pedagogical Common: Education and Social Production

My discussions of the meanings of the democratic common above are premised on the idea that the production of this condition involves a basic challenge to the order and organization of actually existing globalization. While I have already discussed some of the most important implications of an understanding of the common for the practices of educators, it is crucial to see that education is not merely a dependent variable in this relation; in fact, education as much determines the sense and form of the common as it is a simple field of practical application of the common as philosophical concept. There are three ways in which pedagogy is itself partly *constitutive* of the shared social condition and experience that is the common: 1) pedagogy is one of the most essential moments of collectivity or being together, in any society, and therefore one of the most crucial terrains for ongoing experimentation with the meanings of social relationships and collaboration; 2) in its extension across society and its engagement with young people, pedagogy is perhaps the most important tool for reorganizing social and cultural life, and for consolidating new and more democratic processes; 3) the specific kind of encounter and communication between subjects that takes place in pedagogy—in which basic meanings and identifications are offered, taken up, and renegotiated—imprints itself on the emerging common as part of its essence. Politics is always essentially a teaching and a learning, rather than a static and objective system of ideas. In other words, if we want to build a new and more democratic and just global society, the point is not to produce a blueprint of that society which we then execute or implement, but rather to begin a collective and organic process of *education*—a process in which the social body slowly teaches itself a new way of being.

In describing how a new society emerges from within the interstices of contemporary capitalism, De Angelis (2007) describes a provisional shift in ‘value practices’ that is felt in the fleeting moments of struggle and social movement: ‘Experiencing commons in which we have to take responsibility for our daily actions and reproduction, safety, goals and aspirations ... means articulating social co-production according to different values, it means experimenting and trying out different value practices, it means making an *outside* dimension to the value practices of capital *visible*’ (pp. 23–24). In other words, struggles against privatization, war, and marginalization are not simply negative moments of protest, but also positive moments in which new temporalities, values, and practices tentatively begin to suggest a different social world. These are inherently pedagogical projects, since what has not been permitted before we must collectively teach ourselves—which is no doubt why education is such a priority in the Zapatista indigenous autonomous zones of Mexico, for example, and in general why the alternative globalization movements emphasize so strongly training for participants in new forms of decision making and collective action. But beyond these disparate moments, it is important to see that education will be crucial in organizing and consolidating any new global

democratic sociality. Not because education should enforce its order on all, after the manner of the schooling we are familiar with, but rather because education can provide the space for teachers and students to experiment with and refine the original and unanticipated forms of a democratic community that is already inherently an invention.

To this end, it is important to radicalize two central principles in the progressive understanding of the relation between democracy and education. First, in this tradition there is a fundamental relationship between education and society not just to the extent that democratic education teaches *about* democracy, but also insofar as this education begins to inculcate the rich and complex relationships, and ‘conjoint communicated experience’ (Dewey, 1944/1997, p. 87), that characterize democratic societies. Democracy is not simply a form of government, but a form of life, and to the extent that its possibilities are enlarged both by the horizon of globality itself and by movements of opposition to the violence of actually existing globalization, then democratic education, to be authentic, must be responsive to these developments. That is, education should begin to explore the new networks of relationships, horizontal forms of association, and bottom-up forms of decision-making that are respectively proposed by the internet, transnational progressive alliances, and indigenous movements. Second, progressivism emphasizes the *experimental* character of education, on the basis of which the teacher is responsible for creating the coherent parameters within which the intelligence of students can freely investigate the world. But our sense of experimentation should be broader, extending to the collective investigation and practice, by teachers and students together, of *new* democratic values, norms, and practices—ones which do not reside at the core of existing society as its ideal, but rather press against it from the outside, as premonitions of a different order of collective life. Here too it is important to emphasize the indeterminate field of signification of ‘democracy,’ an idea which has been enrolled into oppressive as well as liberatory systems and movements. Identifying this term with a fundamentally imaginative social project, as I do here, means constructing at the same time a new discursive field for ‘democracy’ itself, as a practice of emancipation, whose limits cannot be set ahead of time by any instrumentalism.

In this experimentation, pedagogy works on the sense and organization of its own relationships, and at the same time presages and precipitates the basic meanings of a new democratic society. What I have called here *pedagogy in common* experiments with the basic kind of offering that education is, reframing this offering not as the transmission of a reified knowledge, nor simply as the invitation to a critical habit of mind, but rather as the proposal of a moment of collective invention. In this process, the teacher’s job is not to ensure the ultimate coherence of a controlled experiment, but rather to provoke an investigation whose outcome cannot be anticipated. Just as the context of the global undoes the boundaries of our senses of community and culture, in the same way pedagogy in common undoes the boundaries of our senses of teaching and learning. The teaching situation, in this context, is more than a laboratory for the construction of new (or reconstructed) knowledge; it becomes a laboratory for the construction of new modes of relationship and collective activity, and thus of social life itself. An important starting point for this radical democratization of pedagogy is Rancière’s (1991) assumption of absolute *equality of intelligence*. This principle implies a generosity that recognizes that the possibilities that the teacher makes available to students must be fundamentally reorga-

nized by them. This is a kind of teaching that not only recognizes the validity of students' agency and knowledge, but also absolutely depends upon them, not as settled powers but rather as open-ended processes and potentialities. The significance of this educational conception is not just methodological, but also political. Education brings together the moment of meaning-making *and* the moment of articulation of authority, in a way that no other situation does; how it chooses to construct this combination sets the limits for democracy and community more broadly.

In addition, the pedagogical relationship can serve as an exemplar for transformational social relationships more generally. Beginning from pedagogy, we can begin to see global sociality and social change as inherently a matter of *relationships*, as always involving an *offering* (of knowledge, possibility, being) from one part of a social body to others, and as essentially *dynamic* or developmental. The kind of dialogue that takes place between teacher and students, within a pedagogy in common, can serve as the model for the articulation between social groups that must take place in an authentic global democratic movement. In this sense, an authentic movement is never the mere consolidation of a mass, but rather always the construction of a fragile and flexible tissue of connections. The scheme and extent of this tissue change constantly as its nodes communicate with and construct each other. In practical terms, actual movements will have to find a form of relationship between their constituent communities and organizations that is deeper than mere coalition, yet which also refuses the authoritarianism of familiar political structures; the dimensions of the pedagogy I have described here can serve as a model for this.

Conclusion

The construction of a democratic common, in the global era, means undertaking a fundamental project of social change, in which basic relationships and structures are reinvented, against their current determination by the logics of enclosure, accumulation, nationalism, Eurocentrism, and liberal formalism that I have described. This means a collective project of imagination and action, in which other kinds of political and communal being together are explored. The material risks and limits of globalization and globality make this an increasingly urgent imperative. In developing my senses of the common as shared process of social production, and as authentic condition for being together in the world, I have tried to illuminate the most critical lines of flight from the dominative imaginaries and economies that currently capture and oppress the vast majority (though in different ways). In order for education to be meaningful at this moment in history, it will have to be articulated to this broader project. This means not only that it will have to rethink its purposes and politics, but that it will also have to rethink the fundamental meanings and possibilities of curriculum and instruction, as well as the identifications available to teachers and students. In this process, articulations of authority and agency, epistemological limits, textures of teaching relationships, and definitions of content and canon, must all be reconsidered and reinvented. The same radical imaginativeness, or *constructionism*, that should characterize social movements generally, must also characterize education.

In addition, my discussion here suggests that we should recognize the centrality of education to larger projects of democracy and community building. A movement that

seeks to realize the senses of the common that I have described will have to recognize the importance of a pedagogical engagement. This is necessary first of all because education is perhaps the most important space for experimentation with, as well as construction and consolidation of, new forms of society. But beyond this, the nature of the pedagogical process illuminates the relational, dialogical, and dynamic dimensions of the project of social transformation, aspects that must be foregrounded in any authentic democratic movement. In this regard, the collaborativeness and generosity that should inform an emancipatory pedagogy implicitly suggest a framework for social movement generally. In enacting this framework, educators and others will need to be faithful to the radical possibilities that the global moment proposes, and to the radical imagination and commitment that can see them through to reality. The pedagogy in common that I have described in this context is the name both for the explicit principles of teaching that can help to build this new world, and for the emergent and unsettling experience of learning that must remake all of us in the process.

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