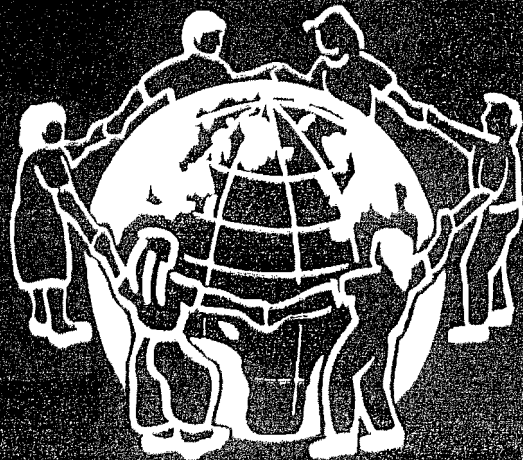


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Ethical Responsibility as Educators to Not Pretend to be 'Objective and Value Free'

— Inculcating a Critical Political Consciousness —

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It is too often the case that we are isolated and compartmentalized, and feeling disconnected from or even antagonistic toward others who really should be our allies in the struggle to overcome the constraints imposed upon us by the dominant culture and their continued reliance on the strategy of divide and rule. As the American Black feminist bell hooks notes, writing in 1994 in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*:

“It is fashionable these days, when ‘difference’ is a hot topic in progressive circles, to talk about ‘hybridity’ and ‘border crossing,’ but we often have no concrete examples of individuals who actually occupy different locations within structures, sharing ideas with one another, mapping out terrains of commonality, connection, and shared concern with teaching practices. To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences.”

The EPA Conference provides the opportunity for boundaries to be crossed, differences confronted, discussion to take place, contacts established, and solidarity to emerge. It is important for us to recognize our commonalities and appreciate our combined strengths—whether we are male or female, part-time or full-time teachers, teaching language-based or content-based courses, teaching in language schools or in primary, secondary, or post-secondary schools, or active in one social movement or another. I am convinced that this type of public dialogue serves as a useful intervention and a welcome learning experience for all of us.

I realize that many of the readers of this journal have advanced degrees in academic specializations related to teaching English as a foreign language so it may be pertinent to state at the outset that I have not received formal training as a language teacher. My Ph.D. is in cultural anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1995. My primary topical area of interest is new social movements, and how people united in grassroots-based organizations are working to effect the basic structural changes necessary to transform society to be more participatory and inclusive, democratic and equitable. I consider myself very fortunate to be in a position to introduce Japanese university students to topics that help them to start to question the accepted dogma and engage in critical analyses of pressing social issues. My primary aim is to give students an opportunity to be exposed to various perspectives and interpretations of social phenomena in order to discuss socially relevant issues by developing and utilizing their critical thinking skills.

I strongly feel that exposure to socially relevant, critical analyses of history, contemporary society, and international relations is an important component in quality university-level education, in language studies as well as in the social science disciplines. The academic boundaries in the social sciences and humanities are no longer clearly defined, and the increasing recognition of the overly fragmented state of academic disciplines offers a much needed counter balance to a previous preference for narrowly defined specializations. The “content-based approach” to English language instruction at many universities in Japan offers an excellent example of how previously closed academic boundaries are now being innovatively crossed, so that social scientists can utilize their expertise in the humanities as well as in other social science disciplines. This is an exciting development for me, as a cultural anthropologist living and working in Japan, as I am provided the opportunity to teach a broad range of interdisciplinary courses in English that not only helps to improve students’ English language skills, but challenges them to search for new horizons.

During my twelve years of teaching at universities in Japan, I have found that Japanese students are eager to be exposed to interpretations of social reality that offer perspectives that differ from the accepted mainstream analyses. Their enthusiastic response to critical yet constructive analyses of social issues that con-

cern them directly has clearly indicated a felt need on their parts to exercise their critical thinking skills. I believe that my classes have been popular precisely because I have given students the opportunity to broaden their perspectives and bring in examples from their everyday lives to relate to the issue under discussion. It is this hunger on the part of the students to learn about other cultures and other ways of organizing and experiencing life, and apply those lessons learned to their own social existence that stimulates me as a teacher. I have found Japanese students to be bright and inquisitive, and have found myself truly enjoying being a part of their learning experience. Being in a position to offer critical and dissident analyses to provoke students in order to awaken their political consciousness is not only intellectually stimulating but also personally fulfilling. My international experience beyond the U.S. and Japan includes more than two years in western European countries and North Africa, and more than one year in Southeast Asian countries. Thus, I am able to bring in personal anecdotes from my own experiences in other cultures to bring those cultures to life and generate genuine interest on the part of the students to learn about other cultures, overcoming ethnocentric biases.

We are all shaped by our own personal experiences and by sharing personal anecdotes with my students, I try to help them understand how, for example, my working class background, my exposure to racism in the United States when I first moved there from Japan, my experiences in the US military, my backpacking year-long adventures in Europe and Morocco, my involvement in various social movements and introduction to radical politics, and my eventual entry into academia all enter into the composite picture of who I am today. All of my classes are discussion-based, with students in random groups of three or four, so students have the opportunity to share their opinions with each other. I tell my students on the first day of class that I would be very surprised to find anyone who would agree with my perspective on the issues we will discuss, and I tell them that I expect them to disagree with me and to challenge me whenever I make a provocative statement. I let them know that we will make use of the time together to learn from each others’ experiences and recognize how those experiences play a part in shaping the way we interpret the issues we will be discussing.

So, before turning to the focus of this essay on the need to inculcate a critical

political consciousness among our students through the use of a critical/engaged pedagogy, I'd like to share with you some personal experiences that helped me to overcome the barriers to a critical understanding of the world that had been erected during the process of socialization in the United States from my early childhood and that opened my eyes to the extent to which I had been deceived by my government.

I recall reading a letter of support written in 1992 by a Japanese man in his 60s to then Nagasaki mayor Motoshima Hitoshi after he had been shot and hospitalized for talking in public about the emperor's war responsibility, in which he stated:

"I grew up in a society colored entirely by militarism, where a boy was educated to believe that to sacrifice himself for his country and his emperor was to walk the noblest path of all. When I finished middle school, I volunteered for the Navy."

Although I was born in Japan to a Japanese mother and a Norwegian/American father and lived here until I was seven years old, I spent my formative years in the United States and was thus inculcated with American cultural values and social assumptions. What struck me about the passage I just quoted was the similarity to the feeling I experienced growing up in the United States. I also grew up in a society colored by militarism where a boy was educated to believe that to sacrifice himself for his country was to walk the noblest path of all. I volunteered for the U.S. Air Force when I finished high school after listening to the military recruiters who came to our school talking about romance, adventure, and educational opportunities. In the case of the United States, the symbol of the emperor was replaced by the symbol of the American flag.

Our teachers taught us in school that the United States represented freedom and democracy, and fought for liberty and justice for freedom-loving people throughout the world. We were told that U.S. benevolence was appreciated worldwide, and that the United States of America was the envy of the world; everyone wanted to be like us. We were taught to be proud to be American! This ideology permeated all media from comic books, cartoons, and children's books to television and movies as well as junior high school and high school textbooks. The deluge of war and spy movies, for example, depicting American heroism and

patriotic sacrifice prepared the younger generations to anticipate participating in future conflicts, and dream of becoming national heroes.

The dominant culture's interpretation of history and social phenomena is accepted as unquestioned truth by the overwhelming majority of Americans, and any critical voices questioning this interpretation are effectively muted if not stifled altogether. This dominant ideology penetrates all aspects of American culture, including churches, clubs and sodalities, labor organizations, children's organizations such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, as well as holiday celebrations. It is indeed very difficult to discern let alone resist against this cultural hegemony that saturates the society. Cultural hegemony is the concept formulated by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s that allows us to understand the sophisticated manner in which ruling class ideas and interpretations of history and social phenomena are internalized and accepted as common sense by the majority of people.

I had no interest in politics or current affairs when I was in high school, and kept myself busy working part-time, playing in a jazz band, and going out with my girlfriend in my car on weekends. So it wasn't until I was in Air Force basic training that I first heard of a country called Vietnam and learned that the U.S. was involved in a war there. From the first day of basic training, the drill sergeants had us marching in formation singing a cadence that went like this:

Rainbow, Rainbow, have you heard?

LBJ has spread the word.

We're all goin' to Vietnam.

Kill ourselves some Viet Cong!

Kill! Kill! Slaughter! Slaughter!

Maim! Maim! Kill! Kill!

Say what? We're going to some country I never heard of to kill, slaughter, and maim? That certainly wasn't the romantic adventure I had in mind when I joined up!

As it turned out, my year in Vietnam (February 1969 to February 1970) became for me an experience of political awakening. I came to a quick realization of the racist nature of the war during my first week in Vietnam when we were told by a sergeant in an orientation lecture, "The only good 'gook' is a dead

'gook' and you can't trust a 'slant-eyed fish head' no matter how cute or how young they are, and this holds true for all the 'gooks' who work on base." Being half-Japanese by descent, I took offence to the use of the racist term "gook" and naively asked, "Aren't we here to protect the South Vietnamese?" The sergeant, disgusted by my naivety, retorted, "You're here to protect American soldiers, and don't you forget it!" It was this racist ideology that encouraged many American soldiers to treat the Vietnamese as sub-humans.

Although I continued to believe that we should fight to prevent communists from gaining power, during my last few months in Vietnam I began to feel that we should not continue to support the South Vietnamese government which was seen as a brutal military dictatorship, at least in the eyes of some of my Vietnamese friends. I began to wonder why the United States, in the name of freedom and democracy, would ally itself with such a brutal military regime and would itself be involved in terrorizing and killing innocent Vietnamese civilians, including women and children, the very people we were supposedly there to protect. My doubts and questions were not answered until after I got out of the military and became involved in the antiwar movement during my first year as a university student in 1974, five years after I had left Vietnam.

Although my eyes had been opened to the lies of the U.S. government leaders in telling us soldiers that we were going to Vietnam to fight for freedom and democracy, it was not until I became involved in student politics at university that I became painfully aware that I had been lied to and deceived by everyone who had been in positions of authority over me and influenced me from childhood. My parents, teachers, boy scout master, church pastors, football and baseball coaches, as well as numerous others brought me up to be a proud citizen and respect the flag and for which it stands—liberty and justice for all.

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which at the time had the reputation as a "hotbed of radicalism," I at first attended the antiwar rallies and teach-ins out of curiosity. However, as I read the literature handed out to participants at those rallies and listened to the various speakers, I slowly became aware of the hidden history of the Vietnam War and the outright lies that government leaders told the American people concerning the history of the war in Vietnam and the justification for military intervention there. The flyers I received at these events

often had recommended reading lists and I became motivated to read more about the history of U.S. military interventionism. The more I read, the more I became convinced that I needed to get involved. I joined an organization called Vietnam Veterans against the War and participated in rallies and protest demonstrations against the war, speaking about my own experiences in the Vietnam War.

During my years at university, I took part in a variety of student movements, including protesting against U.S. support for military dictatorships throughout the world and increasing U.S. arms exports; opposing CIA recruitment on campus and military research at the university; speaking out against the Strategic Defense Initiative and the militarization of space; and protesting against racism and sexism, nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, and apartheid in South Africa. This type of involvement was an educational experience unavailable in the classrooms, fostering a sense of solidarity with other participants of varied backgrounds and interests.

I recall one conversation I had with a woman from the Dominican Republic that profoundly affected my way of thinking about Third World poverty. We were at an organizing meeting on campus for an upcoming demonstration against U.S. arms exports to brutal military regimes in Central America and the Caribbean, and during the break I asked her about life in the Dominican Republic. What shocked me was when she said, "You know, for my people in the Dominican Republic, life was better for us when we were slaves." I couldn't believe she had said that! Life was better under slavery? And she went on to explain (I'm paraphrasing here): "Well, when we were slaves, our masters kept us fed, clothed us, and provided us with a roof over our heads. If we became ill or injured, our masters would have our wounds tended to and would provide us with medicine. It was important for master to keep his slaves healthy so that they could work hard for him. Now that we are no longer slaves, there is no concern if we have no food or medicine. Many of us sleep under the stars. Our children die from hunger and illness. If we can find work, we are lucky to get paid enough for one meal after working all day." It was that eye-opening conversation that motivated me to study more about the notion of "Third World development."

In my independent studies, I found that in the postwar period of Pax Americana, "Third World development" was the rhetorical term that displaced the overtly

racist and thus discredited concept of the “White Man’s Burden.” Although there has been a change in terminology, the justification remained the same: “We” must help “them” develop, become more like us. However, when we ask the question, “Development for whom,” the answer remains the same as in the height of colonialism: the major beneficiaries are the political, economic, and military elite in the imperial centers and the political, economic, and military elite in the periphery (i.e. the ex-colonies or so-called “Third World,” more recently referred to as the “South”). If we ask people living in the imperial nations, “Do you think ‘Third World development’ is a good thing?” the majority will answer, “Yes, we need to help those poor people in Africa, Asia, and the Americas to develop their standards of living, to become more like us.” If you go to a Third World country and ask, not the elites (whose views are often represented in the mainstream media), but the majority of the people who are poor, and whose voices are seldom heard, the same question, they will answer, “No, ‘Third World development’ is killing us. It is using up our land, taking away our natural resources, destroying our cultures, devastating our environment, forcing us to live in shanty towns and scrounge for food in the garbage dumps, and increasing the numbers of child prostitutes and people living in misery with little hope for the future.” The more I gained access to critiques of the so-called “Third World development” paradigm, I more I became aware of the extent to which most people in the advanced capitalist countries such as the United States and Japan are misinformed by an over-reliance on mainstream media and mainstream education as sources of information about government domestic and foreign policy issues.

The entire global regime today is the result of neo-liberal political policies, urged on by the U.S. government and echoed by the other imperial states that make up the Group of Seven. Most important, not far below the surface is the role of the U.S. military as the global enforcer of neo-liberalism (i.e. global monopoly capitalism), with U.S. corporations and investors in the driver’s seat. Keep in mind that globalization is a euphemism for imperialism. In the words of well-known neo-liberal economist Thomas Friedman, in a rare moment of candor: “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies is called

the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps.”

We need to develop an understanding of the process of neo-liberal globalization that is joined at the hip to U.S. militarism—and all the dreadful implications that suggests. If we can see how the imperial nations are engaged in “armed theft” on a global scale to benefit the rich and powerful at the expense of the 95% of humanity who are not rich and powerful, then we might understand why, for example, the United States needs to provide counter-insurgency warfare training at 150 military schools to military officers from 124 countries throughout the world. These U.S.-trained military elites go on to kill and imprison labor union leaders, human rights activists, farmers calling for land reform, parents demanding basic necessities for their children such as medicine, food, clothes, shelter, and students and workers involved in pro-democracy movements. This, of course, helps make it possible to continue to plunder the wealth of world. If we become aware of the fact that the governments of the imperial nations, representing the interests of transnational corporations, are brutally opposed to democracy in the ex-colonies, then we might understand why the United States sells military weapons to more than 150 countries around the world, many of which have unelected governments. And we would also understand why every Japanese government in power since Yoshida Shigeru has supported every US military intervention during the postwar years, has cheered on the creation and support of military and authoritarian regimes by the United States worldwide, and continues to allow the presence of more than 100 US military bases and facilities on its soil.

This core relationship between the U.S. military, global militarization, and the global neo-liberal project, one of the central political issues of our times, is virtually unreported by the corporate media giants and is rarely discussed in university classrooms. The very notion of neo-colonialism or imperialism has been dismissed as a historical artifact or a rhetorical ploy of the feeble-minded. In view of the corporate media’s interdependence with the global neo-liberal regime, any other outcome would be remarkable.

Meaningful democracy must be based on an organizational structure that permits isolated individuals to enter the domain of decision-making by pooling their limited resources, educating themselves and others, and formulating alternative ideas and programs that they can place on the political agenda, and work to real-

ize. However, to what extent are ordinary people able to become informed, a prerequisite to democratic participation, considering the ideological constraints imposed by a very sophisticated cultural hegemony? In order to create a counter hegemony, Gramsci emphasized the importance of the struggle for ideological hegemony at the grassroots level as the precondition for a truly democratically-inspired socialist transformation.

With the phenomenal growth of alternative media and grassroots-based social movements throughout the world in recent years, aided by the relative ease of access to critical and dissident analyses of social phenomena via the Internet, the awakening of political consciousness of an increasing number of people has put to rest the worn out adages “Ignorance is bliss” and “What you don’t know won’t hurt you.” With the interconnectedness of various movements on a global scale working for social justice, human rights, peace, and solidarity, more and more people are recognizing the fact that ignorance is NOT bliss and what you don’t know WILL hurt you. It was not cynicism but sheer arrogance that prompted former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Margaret Thatcher to defiantly declare to the world, “There is no alternative!” The belief within the corridors of power that the package of neoliberalism, free markets, free trade, and monopoly capitalist globalization was the only way in which modern societies could advance themselves became a mantra propagated by mainstream media worldwide. The mainstream media represent the same interests that control the state and private economy, and it is therefore not very surprising to discover that they generally act to confine public discussion and understanding of social issues to the needs of the powerful and privileged.

Meanwhile, the education of Americans does not enlighten them much about the sources of U.S. foreign policy. The same holds true in Japan. Most university courses on foreign policy are taught from the standpoint of government policy, looking at strategic problems and alternatives from a government point of view; there is little education on the strategies citizens might use to oppose official policy. Courses on foreign policy generally do not emphasize corporate economic interests. The most widely used textbooks ignore the fact that foreign policy decision-makers are heavily recruited from large corporations, investment houses, and law firms.

The overwhelming majority of courses offered in all academic disciplines in universities help to produce graduates who have learned that the fastest and surest road to “success” is to maintain the present structures of power and privilege intact, and not become involved in any attempt to question the legitimacy of that power or attempt to effect basic structural changes that may threaten the stability of the status quo. Politically sensitive topics can barely be discussed within the ideological institutions managed by the educated classes such as the media, schools, universities, or journals of opinion. Therefore, the commitment of the state to serving private power in the domestic and international arena, and the commitment of the ideological institutions to limiting popular understanding of social issues, are firmly rooted in the institutional structure of society and are highly resistant to change.

There are so many things that I learned in schools, growing up in America, that I had to unlearn after I finally managed to become skeptical and started asking questions. George Orwell, a well-known British playwright once wrote: “Who controls the past controls the future. And who controls the present controls the past.” In other words, those who are in positions of power and influence in our society are in a position to write our histories. And if they can do that, they can decide our futures.

In the late 1960s, a paradigmatic shift occurred in the social sciences in the United States. The previous paradigm asserted that social science research and writing was objective and value free. It claimed that the social scientist did not take sides, showed all sides of the argument, and gave a balanced, rational analysis of social phenomena. However, the new generation of university graduate students in the 1960s argued the opposite was true. They exposed all social science research and writing as being value laden and subjective, asserting that everyone interprets social phenomena differently. They pointed out that certain questions are asked while others are not; certain people are chosen as key informants while others are not; and that a person’s personal background and experience as well as that person’s sex, class, race, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and political biases are reflected in the work. Although a university education was only available to White males from privileged class backgrounds in the past in the United States, during the postwar economic boom,

students entering university included women, racial and ethnic minorities, foreign students and immigrants, and those with working class backgrounds. And they showed how their histories and their interpretations of social phenomena had been neatly excluded from the history texts and other social science literature that had been written for the most part by rich, White, homophobic, Protestant, males. Although there was much initial resistance to this insistence on the recognition of the political and ideological bias of social science research and writing, it was impossible to ignore and too difficult to refute. Today, most social scientists worldwide would agree: social science writing and research is subjective and value laden. It is now widely recognized that our personal biases and political beliefs as well as our theoretical orientations and methodological approaches influence our choices in what questions to ask or not ask in our writings and in what materials to use or not use in our classrooms.

However, those in positions of power today, who claim to believe in “free markets,” do not believe in a free marketplace of ideas any more than they believe in a free marketplace of goods and services. In both material goods and in ideas, they want the market dominated by those who have always held power and wealth. They worry that if new ideas enter the marketplace, people may begin to rethink the social arrangements that continue to enable the rich to become richer at the expense of the poor. Just as very few books that offer a radical and critical interpretation to and analysis of pressing social issues are published, very few teachers who have radical and critical ideas to share with students are hired, let alone given tenure. Universities, in order to maintain a semblance of freedom of inquiry and expression, will place a token Marxist professor in one department and a token feminist in another, but they will most likely be made to feel like unwanted visitors in hostile territory.

Let me now turn to the concluding part of this essay and offer some thoughts concerning the use of a critical/engaged pedagogy in the classroom. I’ll be using the term critical/engaged pedagogy not as some prescriptive set of practices, but rather as a heuristic around which those of us who share certain pedagogical and political visions can group.

As a broad and loosely linked area of educational theory and practice, critical/engaged pedagogy can be described as education grounded in a desire for a

recognition of the status quo and how maintenance of the status quo primarily benefits those in positions of power in society, as well as an engagement with alternative visions of what society can be. Viewing schools not as sites where a neutral body of curricular knowledge is passed on to students with various levels of success, critical/engaged pedagogy takes schools as cultural and political arenas where different cultural, ideological, and social constructs are constantly in struggle, and where definitions of success, both within schools and beyond, can be questioned and changed. Broadly speaking, then, critical/engaged pedagogy aims to change both schooling and society, to the mutual benefit of both.

Whatever visions of democracy we may hold, most critical educators would probably agree that education plays an important role in the construction of student subjectivities and that in order to change society, we need a vision of how students, as future (or present) adult citizens, might act in different (and well informed) social, cultural, and political ways. Ethics needs to be understood as central to education since the issues we face as teachers and students are not just questions of knowledge and truth but also of right and wrong, of the need to struggle against inequality and injustice as well as the need to identify perspective and interpretation associated with social phenomena, both historical and contemporary.

As critical educators we need to recognize the importance of opposing the notion of curriculum knowledge as a sacred text in favor of an understanding of how different types of culture and knowledge are given precedence in schools to produce individuals who will not question the status quo, and accept their place within it as a given. As I touched upon earlier, the status quo within elite dominated societies is maintained, with slight modifications, through the media system and the school system that are geared to hinder the development and utilization of critical thinking skills in the public at large. Children as students become adults as workers who have been socialized, through the saturation into every area of daily life of the dominant culture’s values, social assumptions, definition of self in relation to others, and interpretations of history and contemporary social phenomena, to internalize those cultural values and social assumptions, and accept them as common sense. They are thus, for the most part, unable or unwilling to ask critical questions regarding their assigned role in the workplace, home,

and society.

A critical/engaged pedagogy must include not only a language of critique but also a vision of a better world for which it is worth struggling. Such a vision involves a certain degree of optimism, a belief in alternative possibilities, and a way of moving beyond the despair into which a critical and ethical view of the world can often lead us. Teachers need to see themselves as, in Gramsci's phrase, "organic intellectuals" working with others for social justice. Teachers, as organic intellectuals, can exercise forms of intellectual and pedagogical practice that attempt to insert teaching and learning directly into the political sphere by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. This view of teaching aims to oppose the way teachers are today often positioned as classroom technicians employed to pass on a body of knowledge, and in its place offers a version of teaching that removes the theory-practice divide and stresses the significance of working towards social transformation that benefits the majority and not just the privileged few.

Such an approach to education raises many issues for those of us engaged in teaching English (or in my case, in English) to speakers of other languages. First, and most generally, it brings to the fore basic questions about education, social inequality, and progressive social change. It is essential that as teachers teaching in a foreign language, we have not only ways of thinking about language and language learning but also ways of thinking about education and inequality. As teachers, we need to ask ourselves what sort of vision of society we are teaching towards. Are we merely attempting to fulfill predefined curricular goals or do we have an ethical understanding of how education is related to broader social and cultural relations and that therefore there is a need to teach towards a different version of the curriculum and a different vision of society? Do we understand the syllabus of English as a canonical truth to be handed on to our students or is it something to be negotiated, challenged, and appropriated by both teachers and students?

One difficulty in discussing critical/engaged pedagogy emerges from challenges to one's right to engage in pedagogies that appear disruptive to the status quo: "Just who do you think you are, pushing your political views down your students' throats?" is a criticism that is often expressed. Although it may be a

criticism worth listening to if it forces you to reflect on your teaching style, it is important to appreciate some of the misconceptions about a critical/engaged pedagogy embodied in such a challenge. First, since I would argue that all education is political, that all schools are sites of cultural politics, then it cannot be claimed that more traditional or standard forms of education are neutral while the critical approach is "political." No knowledge, no language, and no pedagogy are ever neutral, objective, or apolitical. To teach critically, therefore, is to acknowledge the political nature of all education; it is not to take up some "political" stance that stands in contradistinction to a "neutral" position.

Also, to assume that a critical approach necessarily implies a dogmatic preaching of a political standpoint is not only to fail to appreciate the political nature of all education, but is also to make unwarranted assumptions about both the political and the pedagogical in critical/engaged pedagogy. By asserting that all education, culture, and knowledge is political, I am arguing for an understanding of politics as infused into everyday life as we struggle to make meanings for ourselves and about others: reformulating self-identities, creating new cultural values, establishing redefined social relationships, effecting basic structural changes. Thus, a critical/engaged pedagogy does not advocate the teaching of a fixed body of political thought but aims to help students to deal with their struggles to make sense of their lives, to find ways of changing how lives are lived within inequitable social structures, to transform the possibilities of our lives and the ways we understand those possibilities.

Finally, as critical educators, we need to see ourselves not as isolated individuals but as people engaged with a community of other cultural and political workers involved in similarly critical and socially relevant projects. Thus, we can see ourselves engaged on the one hand with local specificities around the impact of the accelerated pace of capital accumulation associated with corporate globalization, and, on the other hand, with struggles around culture, language, and knowledge that are being confronted by other people in different domains. Connections can be made between, for example, educators and writers, artists, environmental activists, people involved in alternative development projects, human rights activists, grassroots-based movements opposing the type of corporate globalization pushed by the G7, WTO, IMF and World Bank, or members of

different groups engaged in struggles over gender, class, or race exploitation. This is where the critical educator as organic intellectual needs to understand the cultural politics of her or his educational context, trying to understand, for example, the significance of discussing issues of race, class, and gender, war and peace, environment, human rights, social justice, and economic and political power, and the need to give students the opportunity to be introduced to differing perspectives and alternative interpretations of complex and multi-faceted social phenomena.

As educators, particularly in the social sciences but in the humanities as well, I believe that we must be ethically responsible by not pretending to be “objective and value free.” We must clearly state our own theoretical orientation and ideological biases, and explain that the readings we choose to expose the students to reflect our own personal and professional interests and concerns.

In the very first class of the courses that I teach, I inform the students that I will be introducing them (and that they themselves will introduce their classmates and me) to the perspectives, not of the government or corporate elite whose voices are repeatedly heard, but of people whose voices are seldom heard in the mainstream media or mainstream education system—e.g. the voices of family farmers struggling to survive as farmers, of workers fighting for a living wage, of women and children demanding basic human rights, or of participants in a variety of grassroots-based groups and social movements working on a wide range of issues. I tell my students that I support, for example, activists working for gay rights, children’s rights, worker’s rights, peace, environmental sustainability, Third World solidarity, and social, economic, and political justice. I let the students know that I support the feminist movement, as defined by the feminist writer bell hooks, as a movement to end sexism, sexist oppression, and sexist exploitation. My students are fully aware that I strongly oppose the so-called Third World development strategies pushed by the World Bank and IMF that have led to an extraordinary increase in poverty and misery throughout the world. They also know that I strongly oppose U.S. military interventionism and the U.S. creation of and support for military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes throughout the world. And, I point out to the students how Japan plays an integral role in the maintenance of the postwar US-led imperial alliance system

that has led to more wars and increased poverty and misery throughout the world. Just as we want to instill in our students a belief in the freedom of inquiry in university and help them to build the confidence needed to express critical and dissident opinions, I believe we must be bold enough to set the example ourselves.

By the end of the courses that I teach, students are in position to question the validity of the dominant culture’s truth claims. They start to question the ways in which we are conditioned and socialized to accept as “objective truth” what we’re taught in school and what we’re told is “objective analysis” in mainstream media. And, hopefully, they come to realize that they can become involved with others in helping to establish a new world order based on such universal principles as peace, human rights, and social justice.

It is my contention that we cannot allow the ruling elites, corrupted by greed and power, to continue to make the inhumane and irrational decisions that are increasing human misery and environmental devastation on a global scale. We must all take the steps necessary to gain further access to alternative and critical analyses, and share that information with others in the effort to motivate not only ourselves but others to take action and become involved in movements working to create a sustainable and equitable future for all. Let us all work together, in our own ways, to realize this potential.

Note

¹ This is an essay version of the keynote address that I gave at the Engaged Pedagogy Association Conference held at the Daito Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo on July 12, 2009.