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CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

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Introduction

Paulo Freire's pedagogical approach was intimately related to critical approaches to knowing and learning. While Freirean scholars have most often focused on elaborating the importance of critical pedagogies, the unmistakable object of these pedagogies is robust, equitable, and transformational learning capable of reshaping lived social realities. Yet, less attention has been paid to the implications of Freire's work for understanding consequential forms of learning. In this chapter, we argue that Vygotsky's theories of learning are aligned in important ways with Freire's persistent focus on pedagogies of hope and possibility.

It is the emphasis on prolepsis, that is, "the cultural mechanism that brings the end into the beginning" (Cole, 1998, p. 183), within learning arrangements that we seek to highlight in both critical pedagogical and sociocultural traditions. Prolepsis is best understood as a nascent experience of the future in the present (Cole, 1998, p. 184). In both traditions, prolepsis is not simply a theoretical term but a consequential everyday practice of learning and sociopolitical activity. Consider the role of prolepsis in the ways families across the globe draw on their pasts to negotiate present activity and socialize their children through the practices and family routines they arrange (Gutiérrez, Izquierdo, & Kremer-Sadlik, 2010; Weisner, 1998). This everyday example of arranging for sustained well-being in the present "for the future" is consistent with Freirean and Vygotskian perspectives; however, for Freire it was expressed both as a sociopolitical and humanizing aim. Prolepsis is central to contemporary work that draws on these traditions, insofar as learning is organized around imagining what is "not yet" (Gutiérrez, 2016). Hope and possibility are materialized when learning is organized as a formative anticipation of a possible future (Vossoughi, 2011). To this end, we note Freire's own interest in elaborating learning dimensions in his work.

One of us (Gutiérrez) had the opportunity to engage in a discussion of Vygotskian theory on one of Freire's last trips to UCLA.[2] Professor Carlos Torres, a close colleague and a longtime collaborator of Freire's,[3] invited me to join him for a day of conversation with Paulo before his public lecture that evening. We listened and learned and engaged in collective discussion about his work and its specific implications for Latinx youth in Los Angeles and the U.S. It was during this particular visit that I mustered the courage to ask Paulo about my study of Vygotsky and its potential for elaborating discussions of learning in critical pedagogy. Before I could even finish my sentence on Vygotsky, Paulo eagerly overlapped, "Yes, Vygotsky! He is the missing link. I have been reading Vygotsky." That evening Paulo mentioned Vygotsky's work in his talk.

This vignette illustrates two issues with which we continue to grapple: how to make issues of learning more salient in the theory and practice of critical pedagogy, and how to contribute to a more critical sociocultural theory of learning and development. Our goal is to bring these two bodies of work into conversation, and to highlight their shared focus on the role of historicity and futurity in pedagogies of possibility. Our own collective work views learning as the organization of possible futures and has focused on how attention to history in the present can open up proleptic visions. We have drawn both from cultural historical approaches to learning and critical pedagogies to design and study newly imagined futures for youth from nondominant communities.

Before illustrating the ways critical pedagogy and sociocultural theory can be brought together to create a more expansive set of tools for analysis and design, we present our understanding of critical pedagogy. We then locate areas of potential alignment with Vygotskian perspectives, while identifying the points of tension and potential growth across the two traditions. We view the insights gained from bringing these traditions into greater dialogue as essential to the design and study of intellectually generative and politically grounded learning environments. Our discussion therefore offers conceptual and methodological resources for educators and researchers grappling with what sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy mean in practice, particularly for nondominant youth. Ultimately, we aim to contribute to public debates about the place of education in a democratic society, and the creative practice of pedagogy towards liberatory ends.

Critical Pedagogy and the Freirean Tradition

Critical pedagogy is a multi-voiced field and movement that analyzes the relationship between education and oppression in order to help bring about social transformation. The theoretical, pedagogical, and political tradition galvanized by the work of Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire represents one genealogy of critical pedagogy (alongside the foundational contributions of W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Gloria Anzaldúa, Antonio Gramsci, Augusto Boal, and others) that has shaped our own research on learning and equity.

Paulo Freire's (1970/2002) analysis of the relationship between "banking education" and oppression sheds light on the role schools play in social reproduction, particularly the ways dominant ideas and practices become a part of who we are (Mendoza, 2014). Banking education refers specifically to the narrative process through which teachers (the primary *subjects* of the pedagogical process) deposit knowledge in the heads of students (passive *objects* of educational activity). In this model, students play their role most successfully by memorizing facts that are often disconnected from their lived experiences. Interweaving pedagogical and political critique, Freire drew a direct connection between banking education and authoritarian political systems:

> It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men [sic] as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.
>
> *(2002, p. 73)*

Banking education offers a window into the role teaching and learning practices play in socializing students to accept the "world as it is," rather than to imagine and enact the world as it could be (Boal, 1995/2015). Freire's response to banking education was "problem posing education," a humanizing pedagogical approach that engages social reality as transformable and treats students as *historical actors*, subjects rather than objects of pedagogy and history (Freire, 1970/2002).

Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, also appeared as a warning: educators and activists invested in the creation of a more just world must be careful not to replicate the pedagogical forms of the present social order—such as banking, sloganism, and authoritarianism. In other words, simply replacing the *content* of teaching (from hegemonic to counter-hegemonic ideas) does not unsettle the social and intellectual relations that sustain an unequal society. Instead, Freire insisted on the need to transform both the means and ends of schooling, treating classrooms as arenas for the analysis of social life and the *practice* of more liberatory forms of thought and action. From this vantage point, Freire's work was geared towards multiple audiences: those who knowingly or unknowingly engaged in banking education on behalf of an oppressive system, and those who engaged in similar pedagogical methods (treating students as passive objects in need of the teacher's knowledge) *within* revolutionary projects. The treatment of students as passive is sometimes present in Freire's own writings as well, where descriptions of problem-posing education and a spirit of dialogue appear alongside seemingly linear marches towards "critical consciousness." This tension is reflected in some of Freire's diverse intellectual descendants and represents one of the core issues we take up in this chapter.

Emerging in the wake of Freire, Marx, and the Frankfurt School, critical pedagogy defined education as an inherently political practice that shapes how we think about and move within the social world. Critical pedagogues argue that the knowledge and cultural ways of being taught in school (through manifest and hidden curricula) often serve to reproduce unequal social conditions (Apple, 1990; Giroux, 1981). This tendency includes devaluing the cultural practices of historically marginalized groups, thereby predicating academic success on cultural assimilation. While offering powerful analyses of schooling and its relationship to social reproduction, critical pedagogy also articulates an alternative: schools can and should become transformative spaces where teachers and students work together to develop "a deepening awareness of the social relations that shape their lives and their own capacities to re-create them" (Darder, Baltondano, & Torres, 2003, p. 15). Becoming critically conscious involves developing tools to analyze and transform the world through social action. As McLaren writes, "Critical educators argue that any worthwhile theory of schooling *must be partisan*. That is, it must be fundamentally tied to a struggle for a qualitatively better life for all through the construction of a society based on non-exploitative relations and social justice" (1998, p. 172).

Critical pedagogy also elucidates the relationships between cultural and economic capital and questions what is treated as legitimate knowledge in schools (Apple, 1990). Rather than taking the value of school knowledge for granted, scholars within this tradition pose a different set of questions: what is the nature of school knowledge? Whose knowledge is it? Why is it being taught in the first place? (Apple, 1990; Giroux, 1988). For educators working to create an alternative, these questions push us to articulate the epistemological genealogies and values of our own curriculum, and to define intellectual activity as a collective practice aimed at producing emancipatory understandings: knowledge directed at eliminating pain, oppression, and inequality, and at promoting justice and freedom (hooks, 1994; McLaren, 1998). Echoing Freire (1970/2002), this approach is centrally concerned with *praxis*: the generative relationship between reflection and action.

Drawing from Hegelian–Marxist philosophy and the European tradition of Critical Theory, this continual movement between reflection and action is grounded in dialectical thinking. Recognizing the dangers of authoritarianism, positivism, and more orthodox forms of Marxism, the Frankfurt School sought to develop a form of self-conscious critique that averted the tendency to "cling dogmatically to our own doctrinal assumptions" (Giroux, 2003, p. 27). Borrowing from Held (1980), Giroux defines dialectics as revealing "the insufficiencies and imperfections of 'finished' systems of thought . . . it reveals incompleteness where completeness is claimed. It embraces that which is in terms of that which is not, and that which is real in terms of potentialities not yet realized" (2003, p. 36). This insistence on an epistemic mode that embraces contradictions, genetic analysis, and the processual development of thought suggests that no ideology,

theory, or politics is pristine. Rather, theory is and must be treated as an unfolding *moment* that aims to interpret a world itself always in movement. Rooted in this dialectical approach to knowledge, Darder et al. argue that critical pedagogy seeks to support "the dynamic interactive elements, rather than participate in the formation of dichotomies and polarizations in thought and practice . . . hence, all theorizing and truth claims are subject to critique" (2003, pp. 13–15).

Critical pedagogues have therefore developed powerful analyses of the relationship between schooling and the current social order, and proposed alternative conceptualizations of what teaching and learning ought to look like. Yet, when alternative pedagogical forms are researched, there is often a focus on *what* is to be taught (alternative curriculum, social theory, critical texts, and social consciousness) rather than the parallel question of *how* we teach—the organization of learning, social relations, and forms of mediation that constitute the means through which we engage students towards these objects. If we focus on the organization of learning, then we become attuned to more than one aspect of a robust humanizing pedagogy; instead the focus is necessarily on a constellation of influences on learning, such as social and spatial relationships, tools, processes, and aims. Thus, what is taught (e.g., the curriculum) can become a potentially powerful mediating tool, rather than the end point of critical pedagogy. In our view, a focus on the micro-processes of critical pedagogy involves documenting and analyzing 1) how social relations are constituted; 2) how power and ideologies are imbued in practices; 3) how tools expand or limit opportunities for the development of critical thought; and, 4) how students develop as thinkers and historical actors. These are some of the methodological lenses and units of analysis that emerge when sociocultural theory is leveraged to analyze the micro-genetic layers of critical pedagogical practice and how they are imbued with history.

In practice, analytic emphasis on alternative pedagogical ends (rather than means) opens critical pedagogy to teaching methods that may contradict its goals of humanization and social transformation. For example, narratives that emphasize students' *arrival* at critical understandings risk obscuring the pedagogical process and constraining the space for transparent discussions of the tensions that inevitably emerge in the moment-to-moment interactions that constitute critical educational practice. We believe that a more empirically detailed engagement with the practices of critical teaching and learning will therefore raise important new theoretical insights and questions. These questions can help us move beyond critique and toward the creative development, analysis, and amplification of efforts to engender "qualitatively different social relations" (Giroux, 2003, p. 24).

To further illustrate the pedagogical and political tensions that can emerge when micro-practices are not treated as explicit objects of analysis, consider the following passage from Peter McLaren's seminal *Life in Schools*:

Not all prevailing ideas are oppressive. Critical educators, too, would like to secure hegemony for their own ideas. The challenge for teachers is to

recognize and attempt to transform those undemocratic and oppressive features of hegemonic control that often structure everyday classroom existence in ways not readily apparent. These oppressive features are rarely challenged since the dominant ideology is so all inclusive that individuals are taught to view it as natural, commonsensical and inviolable.

(1998, pp. 179–180)

On the one hand, we may interpret the notion of "securing hegemony for our own ideas" as an attempt to engender a future where humanizing, non-exploitative values become normalized as common-sense. Indeed, one can imagine a teacher deliberately organizing a classroom environment where such values are treated as given. However, two aspects of this concept remain troubling. First, while the notion that "dominant ideology is so all inclusive that individuals are taught to view it as natural" speaks to the pervasiveness of hegemonic narratives, it also risks painting students (prior to their engagement with critical pedagogy) as void of "critical consciousness." Narratives of "false consciousness" gloss over the intellectual resources young people bring to the classroom based on their complex engagement with the social world, and the subtle ways these resources may be cultivated or stifled within classroom discourse. We prefer to interpret hegemony as perpetually open to contestation from below, rather than all encompassing or impenetrable (de Certeau, 1984; Erickson, 2004; Scott, 1990). Further, the concept of "securing hegemony for our own ideas" suggests that engaging in humanizing practices may not require conscious reflection. Drawing from critical pedagogy's own emphasis on dialectical thinking, we argue that conscious reflection recognizes the persistent tensions that can emerge between word and deed, and opens these practices to continual development.

This discussion bleeds into one of our central concerns about critical pedagogy: a tendency towards ideological heavy-handedness that may, at times, limit the development of thought and action. This heavy-handedness can ebb and flow within the micro-moments of classroom life—the kinds of assistance teachers offer, the ways they form objects of analysis, respond to student questions, and determine what counts as "critical." For example, we recall a classroom discussion where a teacher employed what we would characterize as overly simplified theories of race, conflating race and ethnicity with culture, and glossing over the heterogeneity within cultural communities. When one student raised a question about how people of colour have sometimes occupied exploitative roles within historical systems of oppression, the teacher sought to realign the student's comment with his own theory. Rather than treating her nuanced intervention as a productive tension and a potential resource for expansive learning (Engeström & Sannino, 2010), the teacher read her comment as hegemonic. Such oversimplified typologies can constrain the non-linear and often vulnerable movements of genuine sense making (Philip & Zavala, 2015). Indeed, the search for right answers, so common in banking

education, can easily replicate itself in critical pedagogical settings, where teachers may explicitly or implicitly communicate expectations for what is acceptably critical. Consider, for example, the difference between a teacher designating a student as "colonized" and a teacher working with students to analyze colonial *talk*—an approach that acknowledges the ways all participants (teachers and students) may step in and out of hegemonic forms of thinking (Espinoza, personal communication, May, 2009). This approach also avoids positioning the teacher as one who has "arrived" in critical consciousness, and resonates more closely with Freire's critique of the teacher–student binary (Freire, 1970/2002).

There are conceptual and political traps that can lead inadvertently to enacting critical consciousness as a "state of grace" in critical pedagogy, and in critical approaches more generally, if theory becomes rule instead of tool. As discussed above, some of these traps exist within the text itself, and some emerge when critical frameworks are implemented with a kind of orthodoxy, thereby constraining agency, imagination, and sociopolitical action. Further, when the development of new understandings is understood outside of practice, then the theory loses its transformative potential. Finally, if the locus of change is in the individual, rather than viewing change as implicating the individual and the practices of which she is a part, a new kind of individualism can ensue, one that is antithetical to Freire's intention and to notions of mediation and learning in cultural historical activity theory.

Critical Pedagogy and Sociocultural Theory: Points of Resonance

During their respective historical moments, Paulo Freire, Lev Vygotsky, and their collaborators offered a critique of reigning psychological and sociological approaches to education, and developed their own conceptualizations of what teaching and learning could be. In bringing these traditions into dialogue, we started by pursuing a comparison of key similarities and differences. However, our reengagement with primary sources led us to shift our analysis; instead, we seek to identify points of tension and potential for mutual growth *within* points of resonance. This view avoids oversimplifying differences across the two or erasing productive areas of resonance.

We highlight three central points of resonance that are consequential to the development of a critical cultural historical approach to learning, development, and pedagogy: 1) Marxist definitions of the human as a sociohistorical being; 2) the centrality of cultural and pedagogical mediation; and 3) the relationship between the scientific and the everyday. We also highlight distinctions *within* these points—particularly with regards to the ways Freire's overt political analyses might extend core conceptions of learning within sociocultural theory.

The Human as Social and Historical Being

In tandem with the strong humanist currents running under each of these traditions, both theories attend to the relationship between sociohistorical contexts and individual thought and action. In their own ways, Freire and Vygotsky drew from Marx's historical materialism to distinguish human cognition from that of animals,[4] thereby challenging behaviourist conceptions of learning as the accumulation of predetermined reflexes. They also defined human activity in terms of praxis: humans change the environment through tools; in turn, the use of tools and the new environments they engender *change us back*, influencing the forms of activity made possible over time. In *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Freire (1973) writes:

> Human relationships with the world are plural in nature. Whether facing widely different challenges of the environment or the same challenge, men are not limited to a single reaction pattern. They organize themselves, choose the best response, test themselves, act, and change in the very act of responding. They do all this consciously, as one uses a tool to deal with a problem. Men [sic] relate to their world in a critical way . . . through reflection—not by reflex, as do animals. And in the act of critical perception, men discover their own temporality. Transcending a single dimension, they reach back to yesterday, recognize today, and come upon tomorrow.
>
> (p. 3)

Similarly, in *Cultural Psychology*, Cole draws from anthropologist Leslie White's work to describe how cultural mediation influences temporality: the world is "not made up of the present only but of a past and a future as well" (1998, p. 120). Cole then presents Alexander Luria's description of this 'double world':

> The enormous advantage is that their world doubles. In the absence of words, human beings would have to deal only with those things which they could perceive and manipulate directly. With the help of language, they can deal with things that they have not perceived even indirectly and with things which were part of the experience of earlier generations. Thus, the word adds another dimension to the world of humans. . . . Humans have a double world.
>
> (Luria, 1981, p. 35 as cited in Cole, 1998, p. 120)

One[6] can sense the ways these thinkers were traveling similar conceptual paths, in search of theoretical resources to elucidate the distinct, historical qualities of human cognition and development. In both bodies of work, the potential for human thought and action is *expanded* through tools, which provide access to the history of ideas developed by prior generations. One also senses a shared

concern with the forms of agency that emerge through the human ability to draw from this historical inheritance, and to do so *consciously*. As Freire writes, "*Integration* with one's context, as distinguished from *adaptation*, is a distinctively human activity. Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality *plus* the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality" (1973, p. 4). Another point of resonance can be seen between Luria's discussion of the "word adding another dimension to the world of humans" and Freire and Macedo's (1987) articulation of the dialectical relationship between "reading the word" and "reading the world." In both cases, language is not merely descriptive or referential; it fundamentally mediates and transforms human activity.

Finally, Freire and Vygotsky both drew from Marxist theory while defying some of its more orthodox strands. In Vygotsky's case, the highly politicized context within which he was working[5] may have limited him to drawing from the psychological and cultural dimensions of Marxist theory, as opposed to its more overtly political stances. In contrast, the aforementioned passages from Freire's work convey a greater emphasis on "critical perceptions of reality," or the "critical capacity to make choices and transform that reality." This language of critique points to Freire's greater willingness to connect historical materialist conceptions of human development with the more politicized Marxist notion of revolutionary praxis. For Freire, sociohistorical definitions of the human were coupled with overtly political analyses of oppression. Put differently, the human capacity for changing the environment through tools (including language) was not, for Freire, a politically neutral or benign process. His notion of praxis invoked a continuous movement towards more just and humanizing social relations. We believe this distinction can help grow sociocultural theories of learning and development, which have brought much needed analytic attention to the process of learning but could benefit from a more critical engagement with the ends of learning.

The Centrality of Cultural and Pedagogical Mediation

Both Freire and Vygotksy challenged behaviourist and individualist conceptions of human learning and the didactic forms of pedagogy they engender. However, unlike some of their European contemporaries (e.g., Piaget, Montessori) they did not swing to the other extreme of child-centred approaches, which tend to minimize the role of the teacher in favour of "self-directed learning," or conflate all forms of direct assistance with the stifling of student autonomy. Instead, both theorists took a more *dialectical* approach and saw pedagogical and cultural mediation as a generative conduit between historical tools and student creativity.[6]

For Vygotsky (1978), optimal contexts for learning are created when students, with the assistance of more experienced others, engage in practices they are not yet ready to do alone. But rather than limiting learning to the shift from assisted to independent performance, Vygotsky privileged joint activity; "good" learning

is aimed not at what is already known, but at what participants (students and teachers) are in process of knowing. The assistance of more expert others creates a context for students to "act a head taller than themselves" (1978, p. 102) and for teachers to see and support developmental changes. Vygotsky referred to these changes as the "buds of development" (1978, p. 86): emergent practices that signal the dawning of a future self. Importantly, Griffin and Cole (1984) argue that this future self is not simply a reflection of the teacher's past. Rather, the guidance of an expert provides a structure within which a novice may gain mastery and make a given practice her own: "Adult wisdom does not provide a teleology for child development, social organization and leading activities provide a gap within which the child can develop novel creative analysis" (1984, p. 62). Similarly, John-Steiner and Meehan define learning as the transformation (rather than transmission) of knowledge, and suggest that "a sufficiently deep familiarity with what is known is a constituent part of the dynamics of transformation" (2000, p. 35). The teacher's role is to organize the learning environment and to develop a skilled sensitivity to moments when novices are ready to take on more responsibility (Rogoff, 2003), or when students' forms of dissent might open up novel solutions (Engeström, 2007).

While Freire's critiques of banking education are sometimes interpreted as akin to student-centred models, key passages within early texts belie this interpretation and mirror core constructs within sociocultural theory: mediation, object-oriented activity, intersubjectivity, and cognition as a joint or shared accomplishment. For example, Freire (1970/2002) writes:

> Liberatory education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors. . . . Dialogical relations—indispensable to the capacity of cognitive actors to cooperate in conceiving the same cognizable object—are otherwise impossible. . . . The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow.
>
> *(pp. 79–80)*

The interpretation of Freire as a constructivist is not unfounded, particularly in the ways he centres the active construction of knowledge as counterpoint to the passive reception of information characteristic of banking education. However, the subject of knowledge construction, for Freire, is not the individual learner, but the teacher and students working in dialogical relations. Perhaps even more so than sociocultural theorists, Freire seeks to foreground moments when teachers are learning and students are teaching, and highlight the ways liberatory teaching always simultaneously involves learning. Some of the more nuanced

interpretations of the zone of proximal development within sociocultural theory also privilege the bi-directional learning that can emerge within joint, mediated activity (Chaiklin, 2003; Griffin & Cole, 1984; Gutiérrez, 2008).

Freire was aware that some scholars interpreted his words as a call to minimize the role of the teacher. In a conversation with Donaldo Macedo in the *Harvard Educational Review* (1995), he sought to clarify his position: "What one cannot do in trying to divest of authoritarianism is relinquish one's authority as teacher. In fact, this does not really happen. Teachers maintain a certain level of authority through the depth and breadth of knowledge of the subject matter that they teach" (p. 378). Here, Freire makes an important distinction between acting as an authority (i.e., having the responsibility to leverage expertise in equitable and respectful ways) and engaging in pedagogical authoritarianism. This was a distinction Gutiérrez heard him emphasize repeatedly in his lectures and discussions. Just as Vygotsky emphasized the importance of historical tools and forms of knowledge, Freire argued against denying the teacher's greater familiarity with the subject matter. In fact, he directly challenged the notion that teachers should be non-directive:

> To the extent that all educational practice brings with it its own transcendence, it presupposes an objective to be reached. Therefore, practice cannot be nondirective. . . . The facilitator who claims that "since I respect students I cannot be directive, and since they are individuals deserving respect, they should determine their own direction," does not deny the directive nature of education that is independent of his own subjectivity. Rather, this facilitator denies himself or herself the pedagogical, political, and epistemological task of assuming the role of a subject of that directive practice. . . . To avoid reproducing the values of the power structure, the educator must always combat a laissez-faire pedagogy, no matter how progressive it may appear to be.
>
> *(Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 378)*

The idea of educational practice bringing with it "its own transcendence" clearly resonates with the aforementioned interplay of structure and creativity within sociocultural theory. This sensibility frees teachers to guide students towards particular objectives, because the objectives themselves are always seen as horizons that are both intellectually generative and soon-to-be transcended through shared engagement with their contradictions (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). Indeed, Freire argues that a lack of direction is not a politically neutral or benign position, but one that likely allows for (or makes invisible) normative relations and ways of knowing. Thus, for Freire, the task of mediating educational practice is also the teacher's *political* responsibility; teachers must be vigilant to challenge the reproduction of social hierarchies, and to intentionally guide collective activity towards humanizing social and intellectual possibilities.

Freire contended "educators should never allow their active and curious presence to transform the learners' presence into a shadow of the educator's presence" (1995, p. 379), an argument reminiscent of Cole and Griffin's assertion that a student's future is not simply a reflection of the teacher's past. However, Freire added, "Nor can educators be a shadow of their learners. The educator who dares to teach has to stimulate learners to live a critically conscious presence in the pedagogical and historical process" (1995, p. 379). In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Freire (1998) connected this stance to the "unfinished" character of human beings: "both the authoritarian teacher who suffocates the natural curiosity and freedom of the student as well as the teacher who imposes no standards at all are equally disrespectful of an essential characteristic of our humanness, namely, our radical (and assumed) unfinishedness, out of which emerges the possibility of being ethical" (p. 59). Thus, similar to the ways Freire's attention to politics expanded his application of historical materialism in the educational realm, so too did his insistence on connecting pedagogical mediation to ethical practice.

The Scientific and the Everyday

A final point of resonance involves the dynamic relationship between everyday and scientific concepts or practices. Sociocultural theorists developed this set of ideas as a tool for design and research, while Freire defined everyday knowledge as a crucial resource for the development of critical social consciousness. In order to consider the implications of these ideas for the organization of disciplinary activity, we focus on the ways both traditions analyzed the scientific and everyday practices of literacy learning.

Grounded in the assumption that *mind* and *culture* are deeply interwoven, sociocultural theorists define literacy as a situated, social practice. For example, Scribner and Cole (1988) used a series of ecologically valid tasks to study the cognitive consequences of literacy aside from schooling, documenting the cognitive dimensions of everyday tasks to learn how people apply their knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use. Rejecting homogenous views of "non-literate" populations, they concluded that cognitive skills are intimately bound up with the practices that require them. This approach challenged monolithic views of reading and writing as discrete *skills* that can be understood outside their contexts of use, advancing a new definition of literacy as a set of socially organized practices.

According to Erickson (1984), Scribner and Cole's findings also challenged the "fallacy that school-like learning tasks require greater capacity for higher order thinking than do everyday tasks in home, community and work-like settings" (p. 531). By disentangling cognitive development from literacy and modern schooling, Scribner and Cole were able to critically reframe a central challenge in the teaching of literacy: "the kinds of literacy practices that go on in school

generate products that meet teacher demands and academic requirements but may not fulfill other instrumental ends" (1988, p. 69).

Cole and Griffin sought to address this problem through the establishment of the Fifth Dimension model in the late 1980s (described in Cole, 2006). The intention was to create a model learning environment that allowed for the systematic study of social and intellectual development. Explicit goals involved 1) using computer technologies in the learning environment "to invite the inclusion of girls and minorities into the program" (p. 5); 2) providing a rich educational setting for children during after-school hours that did not replicate school; 3) creating a structure for interactions that promoted cultural, economic, religious, and age diversity; 4) creating a program that was mutually beneficial to community and university; and 5) developing such partnerships to be sustained over time (Cole, 2006). In Gutiérrez' 5th Dimension Program, "*Las Redes*," elementary students worked with undergraduates to play computer and board games, and communicated through letter writing using hybrid language practices with a bilingual wizard named "*El Maga*" (Vasquez, 2009). Here, reading, writing, mathematical, and strategic thinking were developed within the context of play; skills were embedded in the meaningful practices that required them (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999).

In ways that resonate with a Freirean approach, Yrjö Engeström (1991) used the notion of encapsulation to analyze the ways schools separate learning from purposes that connect with students' everyday practices. Engeström also criticized learning environments that define texts as the *object* of activity rather than as a tool for engaging meaningfully in the world (Engeström, 1991; Smagorinsky, 2001). Engeström advanced a model of "expansive learning," which seeks to "expand the object of learning to include the relationships between traditional school texts, the context of discovery and the context of practical application, thus *transforming the activity of school learning itself from within*" (1991, p. 256). Bearing in mind criticisms of the sociocultural school for "tending to shy away from broader political and ideological questions" (Street, 2007, p. xii), it is important to note that expansive learning engages students in the analysis of contradictions within schooling in order to collectively "re-mediate" educational activity (Griffin & Cole, 1984; Gutiérrez, Hunter, & Arzubiaga, 2009).

Such collective re-mediation in service of expansive learning can be seen in scholarly-pedagogical projects that challenge the dichotomy between the academic and the everyday, including work on funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006), hybridity (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999), cultural modelling (Lee, 2001), and sociocritical literacy (Gutiérrez, 2008). By reframing students' language, literacy, and cultural practices as powerful *resources* for learning, these scholars have challenged deficit views of nondominant students, as well as the inequitable schooling systems that are often offered as their contexts for learning.

This work does not merely valorize local literacies (Gutiérrez, 2008), nor does it simply draw on the everyday as a scaffold for normative forms of academic achievement. Rather, these scholars treat school as a space for developing a conscious, expanded awareness of everyday practices, including language and literacy itself. As Vygotsky wrote, "scientific concepts may therefore *grow down into* the everyday" (1986, p. 219). In Lee's cultural modelling work, African American students work with their teacher to examine the cognitive resources embedded within African American English Vernacular, including historically developed practices such as signifying. Students uncover and name everyday linguistic tools (such as symbolism or metaphor), and then use these everyday tools to analyze canonical texts. As Moll argued, "schooled discourses represent a qualitatively different form in that the means of communication become an object of study . . . through formal instruction, children develop the capacity to consciously manipulate the symbolic system" (1990, p. 10).

In contrast to approaches that dichotomize home and school (or youth culture and school), syncretic approaches to literacy acknowledge the importance of bringing together and reorganizing vertical and horizontal forms of expertise towards consequential forms of learning (Gutiérrez, 2014). Vertical expertise, particularly in school contexts, involves building increasing amounts of disciplinary knowledge. Horizontal expertise develops as people move across everyday contexts, and is rarely factored into school-based concepts of learning. As Engeström (1996) has theorized, "instead of just vertical movement across levels, development should be viewed as horizontal movement across borders" (p. 4). Syncretic learning reorganizes everyday and school-based literacy practices to support the development of powerful literacies that challenge traditional models of academic literacy and, in doing so, develop horizontal forms of expertise within and across an individual's practices. In this way, syncretic approaches not only seek to expand learning; they seek to rupture the in-school and out-of-school learning dichotomy (Gutiérrez, 2014).

Turning now to Freire's work on the scientific and the everyday, scholars working in the tradition of *critical literacy* view educational settings as both socially reproductive and potentially emancipatory spaces. Freire and Macedo (1987) were particularly concerned with the political dimensions of the relationship between reading the word and reading the world, and argued that reading and writing ought to be aimed at critically understanding and "re-writing" the social world (p. 35). This approach supports students to perceive the social world as "something dynamic that we constitute through our encodings and decodings of everyday practice" (Peters, 1996, p. 53).

Offering an example of the relationship between reading the word and reading the world, Freire shared the reflections of a student in an adult literacy circle: "'I like talking about this,' a woman said, pointing to the codification of her own living situation, 'because that's the way I live. But while I am living this

way, I don't see it. Now, yes, I can see the way I am living'" (1985, p. 15). For Freire, the guided opportunity to reflect, codify, and examine one's life with new conceptual tools had the potential to reshape people's relationships with everyday experiences of oppression, which become increasingly perceived as open to resistance and change.

Critical pedagogy argues for teaching school-based reading and writing in ways that make substantive contact with students' everyday experiences. However, similar to the move beyond valorization in syncretic approaches to literacy learning, critical pedagogy understands itself as responsible for extending these practices, helping to develop students as intellectuals and social actors. In this vein, Freire argues that "the concept of voice should never be used to restrict students to their own vernacular. Rather, students should be empowered to interrogate and selectively appropriate aspects of the dominant culture that help to define and transform, rather than merely serve, the wider social order" (1985, p. 152). Developing a capacity to think critically *about* literacy practices (including dominant discourses) is fundamental to appropriating these practices in emancipatory ways, what Luke refers to as "critical vocabularies for talking about what reading and writing and texts and discourses can do in everyday life" (2000, p. 453). Critical pedagogy views the development of meta-languages for talking about literacy as an important pedagogical practice.

Thus, Freire would likely be skeptical of approaches that leverage the relationship between the everyday and the scientific without 1) turning a critical eye towards the disciplines themselves as historical artifacts, 2) guarding against erasure of the everyday by maintaining the tension that necessarily exists between the two, and 3) supporting young people to both enter into and transform disciplinary practices in order to help create a more just world (Medin & Bang, 2014; Nasir, Rosebery, Warren, & Lee, 2006). This understanding of power can help push the learning sciences to take a more critical stance towards expanding student achievement in conventional disciplinary domains.

Freire also proposed a distinction between "ingenious" and "epistemological" curiosity that resonates with the Vygotskian focus on the everyday and the scientific. As Freire (1998) wrote:

> The difference and the distance between ingenuity and critical thinking, between knowledge resulting from pure experience and that resulting from rigorous methodological procedure, do not constitute a rupture but a sort of further stage in the knowing process. This further stage, which is a continuity rather than a rupture, happens when ingenious curiosity, while remaining curious, becomes capable of self-criticism. In criticizing itself, ingenious curiosity becomes 'epistemological curiosity,' as through greater methodological exactitude it appropriates the object of its knowing.
>
> *(p. 37)*

For Freire, the distinction between everyday ingenuity and epistemological curiosity rested on the ability to approach one's own thinking as an object of analysis. Similar to the ideas presented by Engeström, Moll, and others, this practice opens up new possibilities for critically engaging with both school-based curriculum and everyday forms of knowing. Syncretic approaches make these moves explicit by "bringing together and reorganizing different, contradictory and discrete cultural practices that are generally incompatible or in tension with one another; preserving and foregrounding the tension between everyday and scientific practices; and seeking to maintain the value, history, and integrity of the everyday genre vis-à-vis the dominant form, especially in light of historical power relations" (Gutiérrez, 2014, p. 49). Similarly, Freire (1998) asked: "Why not establish an 'intimate' connection between knowledge considered basic to any school curriculum and knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experiences of these students as individuals? Why not discuss the implications, political and ideological, of the neglect of the poor areas of the city by the constituted authorities?" (p. 36). These questions align with sociocultural research on learning and equity, in that both are rooted in respect for what students know.

The continuity Freire describes between everyday ingenuity and more self-reflective forms of epistemology hinges on the practice of *curiosity*. As he stated, "Curiosity as restless questioning, as movement towards the revelation of something hidden, as a question verbalized or not, as search for clarity, as a moment of attention, suggestion, and vigilance, constitutes an integral part of the phenomenon of being alive" (Freire, 1998, pp. 37–38). This emphasis on curiosity may help address a persistent tension in the ways sociocultural work on everyday practices is sometimes taken up in educational settings. Too often, young people's everyday experiences become incorporated in tokenized ways, or are treated as "raw material" to be polished and made meaningful through their connection to normative disciplinary ideas. In *Unspeakable Things Unspoken* Toni Morrison (1988) wrote about a similar problem in the interpretation of African American art and literature. Writing against normative bestowals of artistic value in the context of white supremacy, she stated,

> When Afro-American art is worthy, it is because it is "raw" and "rich," like ore, and like ore needs refining by Western intelligences. Finding or imposing Western influences in or on Afro-American literature has value, but when the sole purpose is to *place* value only where that influence is located it is pernicious. My unease stems from the possible, probable, consequences these approaches may have upon the work itself. They can lead to an incipient orphanization of the work in order to issue its adoption papers.

> *(pp. 134–135)*

For Morrison, combatting such "orphanization" requires both historicized interpretations of African American artistic practice *on its own terms*, as well as the critical examination of the Western "canon" itself, including the ways it is always already shaped by racial hierarchies.

Here, Freire's decision to name everyday and scientific practices as *forms of curiosity* provides an additional resource for critical pedagogy and research. Rather than treating everyday knowledge as settled or static (which may lend itself to the "raw material" approach Morrison criticized), attending to everyday forms of curiosity considers young people's everyday *ways of knowing* and *asking* as substantive intellectual resources such that the questions students are already asking about their everyday lives can be fruitfully connected to systematic forms of social analysis. In this view, the scientific or academic concepts made available in critical pedagogical spaces may be reframed as tools for deepening students' curiosities. Thus, for Freire, a focus on curiosity moves beyond the "rupture" between the everyday and the scientific, towards a continuum defined by various forms of critical inquiry.

At the same time, Freire's distinction between "ingenious" and "epistemological" curiosity also suggests that everyday forms of knowing/asking are somehow less epistemological, a belief that may exclude forms of curiosity or dissent that productively complicate critical texts. Recall Erickson's (1984) discussion of the "fallacy that school-like learning tasks require greater capacity for higher order thinking than do everyday tasks in home, community and work-like settings" (p. 531). We are interested in the ways Freirean scholars might learn from this stance, and from the sociocultural emphasis on extensive ethnographic inquiry into community-based forms of intellectual activity. In the realm of political education, we wonder how further inquiry into the forms of critical social consciousness *already present in* communities might help to expand critical pedagogy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined three central points of resonance across Freirean and Vygotskian traditions: 1) Marxist definitions of the human as a sociohistorical being; 2) the centrality of cultural and pedagogical mediation; and 3) the relationship between the scientific and the everyday. We have also sought to highlight tensions *within* these points of resonance, with a particular emphasis on the ways critical pedagogy might push sociocultural theories—and more broadly the learning sciences—to critically examine the purposes of learning. While sociocultural approaches are already future-oriented, as reflected in concepts such as the zone of proximal development and prolepsis, Freirean ideas might sharpen our articulations of the sociopolitical relations embodied by particular visions for the future.

While this chapter has therefore largely considered the ways sociocultural theories might grow from deeper engagement with critical pedagogy, we conclude by elaborating how critical pedagogy might also grow from deeper engagement with sociocultural theories of learning. To this end, we describe a social design experiment (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010) that was in many ways a historical descendant of both Freirean and Vygotskian legacies.

The Migrant Student Leadership Institute

The Migrant Student Leadership Institute (MSLI) was a summer academic program for high school aged migrant students that worked to 1) apprentice participants into university level literacy, social scientific, and scientific practices, and 2) develop academic, artistic, and political tools to transform the university. Drawing from the Freirean tradition, students were introduced to complex social theoretical texts, such as Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Border-land/La Frontera* and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. As Vossoughi (2015) has written:

> These texts were framed as tools for collectively wrestling with the social problems that directly affected students' lives: migration, economic exploitation, racism, patriarchy. Yet the ways we engaged these texts mattered more than their mere presence in the curriculum. Teachers often read together, working to craft generative prompts, interpretive paths and metaphors. In moment-to-moment discussions of complex passages, students were treated as fellow thinkers, poised to contribute weighty questions and ideas. They were also encouraged to ask for help.
>
> *(n.p.)*

In other words, the social organization of reading drew heavily from Vygotskian understandings of re-mediation. While "remedial" models are organized around reductive conceptualizations of skills, narrow forms of assistance, and deficit ideologies, re-mediation involves a reorganization of the ecology: "a shift in the way that mediating devices regulate coordination with the environment" (Griffin & Cole, 1984, p. 70). Key here is the coupling of rich intellectual tasks with ample and strategic forms of support that allow students to experience the whole activity of reading. Thus, where critical pedagogy might emphasize texts and the critical consciousness such texts work to mediate, a sociocultural sensibility is also concerned with what reading means, looks, and feels like for participants, and how collective experiences of close textual analysis might re-mediate students' relationships with texts, and with the act of reading more broadly.

In our experiences, critical educational settings that do not explicitly attend to ideas about learning can sometimes reproduce remedial models. For example, instructors who make the guiding assumption that primary texts will be "too difficult" might introduce critical social theoretical concepts through more simplified, "accessible" versions or by drawing primarily on secondary readings. These teaching strategies highlight the political tensions that can emerge when texts are used as vehicles towards particular ideas, rather than as mediating tools to aid the joint development of new ideas, questions, and forms of acting in the world. To borrow from Cole (1995): in the latter approach, the process through which students and teachers grapple with complex texts *becomes the product.*

Similar possibilities for theoretical dialogue emerge when we consider research methodologies. In MSLI, our research was concerned in part with better understanding the specific qualities of political education that were developed in this setting, and the possibilities for learning that emerged therein. This focus led us to study the moment-to-moment affordances of pedagogical talk. Analyzing the "pedagogical grammar" of the Migrant Program, Gutiérrez (2008) argued that certain speech acts (giving advice, proffering suggestions, proposing possible solutions, using modal verbs [may, would, could] to engage in proleptic discourse) oriented students towards possibility, organizing a dialogue with future action. Similarly, Vossoughi (2014) found that teachers in MSLI consistently used phrases like "here is one suggestion," "tal vez" *(perhaps)*, "what if we think about it this way," or "that's one interpretation." The language of assistance was *subjunctive* in the sense that it tended towards opening up multiple conceptual paths, providing a range of possibilities for students to play with in crafting an essay, interpreting text, or designing a *Teatro* scene. To the extent that students began taking on some of these discourse forms within their own speaking and writing, studying the grammar of teacher talk provided new ways to recognize consequential shifts in participation and identity over time (Vossoughi, 2014). Thus, the phenomena commonly studied by sociocultural researchers (classroom discourse, gesture and multi-modal activity, shifts in participation over time, tensions and contradictions, etc.) might offer fruitful lenses for the study of critical pedagogical environments. In this way, the dialogic quality of teaching and learning so valued by the Freirean tradition becomes an object of analysis (to be studied as it emerges, is sustained or imperiled) rather than an assumed outcome of particular political principles or critical texts.

Sociocultural methodologies can also contribute to the study of schooling as a form of social reproduction and colonial domination. In *Toward a Decolonizing Pedagogy*, Tejeda, Espinoza, and Gutiérrez (2003) argue that

> Within a decolonizing perspective, cultural-historical activity theory can be used to examine and expose the ways the social constructs of race and ethnicity, and its proxies, language and ability, achievement and under-achievement, as well as the social practices of racism, discrimination, and privileging mediate the schooling outcomes of working class indigenous and non-white students.
>
> *(p. 36)*

Here theoretical constructs such as mediation, historicity, everyday activity, cultural artifacts, and practices are used to study the workings of hegemony with greater micro-analytic precision, thereby contributing to our understandings of learning as a political and potentially oppressive process, rather than as neutral or benign.

Others have drawn on these traditions to study quotidian forms of resistance in ways that echo the points of resonance we advance here. Pacheco (2012) explored "everyday resistance" to illustrate the value of both recognizing and leveraging the learning that students, families, and communities developed as they negotiated the demands of their "politically charged contexts" (p. 121). Pacheco found that youth and families develop a set of enacted political practices that constituted a form of everyday resistance. These repertoires were developed *in situ*, as the Latinx youth coordinated challenges to particular social and educational policies. Drawing on cultural historical activity theory and Engeström's (1986) use of the notion of "double bind," Pacheco analyzed the cultural resources that were generated in everyday resistance and argued that these cultural repertoires can and should be leveraged in learning and pedagogy.

These contributions serve as models for what becomes possible when we approach the design and study of learning in ways that bring together the political sensibilities advanced within the Freirean tradition with the sociocultural emphasis on cultural mediation and everyday activity. As we have argued throughout, we envision this conversation as a mutually generative endeavour. In the spirit of the syncretic, rather than simply bringing together the respective lenses afforded by Vygotskian and Freirean theories, we are interested in the ways newfound points of resonance might productively reframe each body of work. We are also interested in the ways points of tension might be intentionally held or preserved as a way to continuously surface how each might be pushed by the other, while maintaining the integrity of each as a constellation of ideas born out of its own cultural, historical, and political context.

Notes

1. Vossoughi was both first author and conceptual lead on this chapter.
2. Gutiérrez had the opportunity to interact with him in a variety of venues since the early 1980s.
3. Torres is Director of the UCLA Paulo Freire Institute.
4. This point also reflects the Western epistemological influences on both schools of thought, particularly with regards to human exceptionalism (Bang, this volume), and hierarchical views of human-nature relations (Medin & Bang, 2014).
5. Shortly after his death, Vygotsky's writings were banned for 20 years as part of Stalin's systematic persecution of Soviet intellectuals (Blanck, 1990, p. 43). See also Cole, M. and Levitin, K. (2000). *The autobiography of Alexander Luria: A dialogue with the making of mind*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
6. This stance resonates with John Dewey's critique of overly individualized approaches to education, particularly in later works such as *Experience and Education* (1938).

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