

The Challenge of Critical Education

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Introduction

One of the major theoretical currents sweeping across the educational world today is "critical education". Paul Hirst, best known for an educational philosophy located in the analytic tradition, has recently suggested that in the consideration of formal schooling, "Perhaps the most promising discussions... are to be found quite outside the particular context of educational theory, in the contemporary study of critical theory" (1983, pg. 27). This is an important and significant shift on the part of a highly influential thinker whose original position differed so fundamentally from the method and epistemology of critical theory and education, and in itself signals future directions for educational theory and practice.

There have been various attempts to define this multi-faceted movement which I am here bundling under the term "critical education". It is important to first of all locate it within a particular philosophical tradition which gave rise to it and to which critical educators constantly turn for theoretical sustenance. I am referring here to the Frankfurt School of thought, represented by a group of social philosophers such as Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1982), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), Eric Fromm (1900-1980), Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957), and more recently Jürgen Habermas (1929-). While there are important distinctions between these members and associates of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, and each one looked at different areas which included political economy, mass culture, music, literature, psychoanalysis, religion and sociology, these authors are all representative of the "Critical Theory" which became the hallmark of the School.

While holding that Marx was basically correct in his analysis of the roots of oppression and exploitation in capitalist societies, these thinkers drew on major philosophical traditions - Kantian, Hegelian, phenomenological, psychological, psychoanalytical - and generally argued that historical developments necessitated a revision of the orthodox Marxist programme away from its deterministic roots. Horkheimer thus outlined three agendas for "Critical Theory", and these were to include the economic analysis of contemporary developments in capitalism, the social psychological investigation of the societal integration of individuals, and the cultural-theoretical analysis of the mode of operation of mass culture (Honneth, 1987). Such agendas were to be pursued within a context which acknowledges that theories cannot be divorced from the social context in which they arose, and nor are they neutral with regards to

the practical context of their application. In other words, Critical Theory - in contrast to the positivism of "traditional theory" - set out to engage the "what is" of social life in order to promote the "what could" and "what should" be, an alternative social order which promoted dignity, freedom and self-argues, determination for one and all. This was the kind of reflexive thinking encouraged by Critical Theory, aimed at "improving the nature and conduct of social life", rather than "a 'value-free' science offering solutions to instrumental problems about how to achieve given practical ends" (Carr, 1987, p.290).

Critical education follows closely the agendas and concerns of its parent philosophy. The same key issues and concerns are there, including the strong belief that, as Roger Simon (1985) - a major exponent and exemplar of critical education - argues, knowledge is socially produced, distributed and legitimated within the school, and that it therefore is not value-free but represents specific interests and values. Because of this, critical educators purposefully work in schools for the realisation of "the essential, inevitable motion of all rational, self-conscious beings who are bound to strive (perhaps incoherently) for ever greater freedom, fulfilment, and self-critical awareness" (Inglis, 1985, p.16). Such an education necessarily involves the critical interrogation of what passes as everyday, common-sense activity in order that social forms and practices, including those that prevail in schools, become liberatory and empowering - and especially so for those who have traditionally been discriminated against, i.e. girls and students coming from working class and ethnic minorities.

This paper will tackle some of the issues and themes raised by critical education by exploring what such a perspective has to say about four specific aspects of schooling, namely its structures, its curricula, its cultural system and finally its pedagogic styles. The constraints and possibilities which currently prevail in the acceptance of critical education in Malta are considered in the concluding section of this article.

Critical Education and School Structures

Critical education first of all points out that schooling as an institution cannot be considered in a vacuum. The forms schooling takes, the structures, knowledge, ideologies, curricula, pedagogic relationships, assessment practices - one and all promote ways of thinking, feeling and valuing in

groups and individuals which either help these to fit into the wider social order (and hence reproduce it), or to critically engage with it in order to transform it into another version of life. In other words, schooling cannot be divorced from the wider social order, and schools and educators are not and cannot be "neutral" and "apolitical" channels for equally "neutral" and "apolitical" knowledge. Whatever we make happen in schools - constantly and inevitably - gives messages defining what it means to be "human", "good" and "normal" in particular social contexts.

Critical education is very much aware of the socio-historic context of the emergence of schooling as an institution. Williams (1961) has shown how in nineteenth century Britain, for instance, "industrial trainers" fought an ideological battle with "public educators" and "humanists" so that their interests prevailed in the formulation of the social sites to be known as schools. Bowles and Gintis (1976, p.190) point out that by 1916 in the U.S.A., though businessmen and professionals represented less than 11% of the non-agricultural labour force, they accounted for almost 80% of the school board members in a sample of 104 cities. Carnoy and Levin (1985, p.10) comment that under the guidance of this business and professional group, "the schools moved away from the concept of a uniform curriculum by initiating vocational curricula, particularly for children from working class and immigrant backgrounds".

We have our local version of ideological encroachment, where dominant classes, be they the colonial masters or members of the clerico-professional strata, struggled to promote versions of schooling (in many cases, hindered schooling from actually developing) which worked in their favour. Frendo (1979, p.32) reports a letter written by Lieutenant Governor Hely-Hutchinson in 1883, who advised his colonial service to ensure the propagation of English among the Maltese population as a counterfoil to Italian influences which might threaten the British hegemony. Schools were recognised as an important ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1971), and the Lt. Governor insisted "Look well after your primary schools, see that the boys and girls are taught Maltese and English. And in twenty years there won't be a chance for the propogation of Italianist ideas".

The local catholic church too was interested in the development of a particular version of schooling, one which strengthened its hold on the Maltese. It is highly significant that on taking the archbishopric of Malta in 1944, for instance, Michael Gonzi requested primary and secondary school teachers to meet him at St John's co-cathedral, and there he said: "The teaching of religion for half an hour a day is not sufficient to ensure the necessary Catholic atmosphere. Everything in the school must have a Catholic bearing - the whole system, the programme, the books and the teachers, without any exception. Moreover, the benign supervision of the Church is

as important in the school" (*The Teacher*, 1944, p.17).¹

The ultimate result of such ideological battles between interest groups are what we know today to be schools, and despite substantive differences between educational systems in a variety of countries, critical educators note a formal resemblance in their structures, be these schools in North America, Britain, Australia, or Malta for that matter. While schooling is generally thought to be a good thing, it is striking to read so much educational research which argues that in many ways these institutions fall far short from the way education should be in a good society. Bowles and Gintis (1988, pp235-236) clearly express three objectives for such an education. They argue that:

1. Education should foster the personal development of each member of society. This is not limited to the acquisition of knowledge and cognitive skills, but also those affective and interpersonal skills which allow individuals to control their lives, and foster the self-esteem and sense of personal dignity which lead them to demand the resources to exercise such control.
2. Education should act as an equalizing force, removing obstacles to substantive social equality and tempering the tendency for social privilege, and more importantly, social deprivation to be transmitted from generation to generation.
3. Education should be a stabilizing force in the good society, fostering what John Dewey called the social "continuity of life" by training youth to accept and affirm dominant culture and its institutional expression.

Bowles and Gintis however argue that such goals are only realisable in a democratic society, because it is only in such a context that "the personal development of individuals at the same time promotes social equality and affirms dominant social institutions and their cultural forms" (*ibid.*, p. 236). They recall the insights generated by their classic work on the American educational system (1976) and which have stood the test of time to be re-appropriated by critical educators, namely that schools are selecting and sorting mechanisms which treat students from different classes differentially, directing dominant class students to dominant jobs, and working class students to working class jobs. Moreover schools, like workplaces, tend to be motivated by the imperatives of profit and domination rather than by the consideration of human needs. In other words, there is a correspondence between schools and work, so that when young people live the social relationships developed at school, they are socialised into accepting - or recognising as legitimate and "natural" - similar relationships in industry.

One of the obvious similarities between schools and industry is that both organise relationships in an hierarchical fashion, with "vertical authority lines from administrators to teachers and students". Schools also generally tend to promote alienated

labour, where "student's lack of control over his or her education, the alienation of the student from the curriculum content, and the motivation of school work through a system of grades and other external rewards rather than the student's integration with either the process (learning) or the outcome (knowledge) of their educational 'production process'" (Bowles and Gintis 1976, p. 10). Finally, schools, like industry, encourage fragmentation "reflected in the institutionalized and often destructive competition among students through continual and ostensibly meritocratic ranking and evaluation" (*ibid.*, p. 10).²

The problem with such a correspondence is of course the fact that the economic systems in many countries are far from the democratic and humanising social constructions which persons yearn for. Schools should surely have better models to emulate and mirror! It is for this reason that John Dewey resisted attempts by Sneddon to make schools correspond closely to industrial workplaces, arguing that "the kind of... education in which I am interested is not one which will 'adapt' workers to the existing industrial regime: I am not sufficiently in love with the regime for that" (Dewey, 1915). His desire was that schooling would be organised in such a way as to produce "a projection in type of the society we would like to realize, and by forming minds in accord with it gradually modify the larger and more recalcitrant features of the adult society" (Dewey, 1966, p. 317). Schools were therefore to approximate as much as possible to participative democracies so that students, learning democracy by living in a democracy (Wain, 1987) would challenge the undemocratic structures they encountered at work and in other social sites.³

Dewey would therefore have affirmed Bowles and Gintis' preoccupation with the way school structures social relations in the same way that the economic system does. As the authors note, central problems for political democracy are inverted and reversed by the central concerns of the economic system, as follows:

Democratic Government sets out to:	The economic system sets out to:
* ensure the maximal participation of the majority in decision-making;	* ensure the minimal participation in decision-making by the majority, i.e. the workers;
* protect minorities against prejudices of the majority;	* protect a single minority (capitalists/managers) against the will of the majority;
* protect the majority from any undue influence on the part of an unrepresentative minority.	* subject the majority to the maximal influence of this single unrepresentative minority.

Critical educators are fully aware of the socio-political context of schooling, and would have schools differ from and transform the economic system

rather than emulate it and feed young people into it. Critical educators consider the criteria required by a political democracy, and reflect on the way schools promote or thwart full personal development, attenuate or legitimate social inequality. It is areas such as these that need to be researched and given priority in our deliberations on the Maltese educational system, rather than the increasingly sole human-capital approach that characterises present official educational discourse.⁴

Critical Education and Curricula

Education in Malta is often understood to be a transmission of information and skills. The curricula constitute an "inert" kind of knowledge (Whitehead, 1962) which neither educator nor student are involved in producing, but which must be transmitted and learned in order to be reproduced in examinations. Such an alienating process - an excellent example of what Freire (1972) calls "banking education" where bits of information are deposited in what are presumed to be empty receptacles - is rewarded by certificates. Roger Simon (1987) however argues that critical educators consider curricula not as a body of received and legitimate knowledge but rather "as a process of production and regulation of our social and physical world". Simon (1987) and Inglis (1985) for instance, consider curricula as a form of story-telling: teachers are involved in telling stories about how the world is and should be, and how we as human beings act or should act in that world. Simon thus proposes that "Every time we help organise narratives in our classroom we are implicated in the organisation of particular ways of understanding the world and the concomitant vision of one's place in that world and in the future" (Simon, 1987, p.377). As such, school subjects are "not objective bodies of knowledge but rather selective practices from particular ways of seeing, showing and saying" (Inglis, 1985, p.27).

This is a major point which critical educators owe to the development of the "new" sociology of education in the early 1970's - itself founded on a sociology of knowledge which was developed first by Karl Marx and Karl Mannheim (cf Peter Mayo's paper in this issue), and then by phenomenologists such as Schutz, and Berger and Luckmann. Such insights into the political roots of knowledge have still to reach our local educational shores. The "new" sociology switched from a technical focus on the extent of absorption of a specific curriculum by students to asking an even more fundamental question, i.e. why do we give legitimacy to this particular knowledge and not to other knowledge? What the "new" sociology argued and what critical education has taken up as well is that any selection of knowledge betrays specific interests and favours particular agendas. It is interesting, for instance, that in my Trade School Research Project I discovered that close to 80% of over 600 fifteen year-old Maltese respondents could not give a definition of

'trade unions' - such knowledge is not allocated a legitimate space in the curriculum, and such "selective traditions" (Williams, 1978) are vital in our understanding of the kinds of narratives we make available to our young. Another case in point is Baldacchino's account in this issue of the stories we tell student about economics - and the political implications of such narratives.

What we teach, and what we choose not to teach, is a political issue inasmuch as knowledge or ignorance forms our capacity to understand and act on structures which we find in the real world we inhabit. Critical education therefore asks some very cutting questions regarding the ensemble of knowledge we pass on to our students. Such questions as the following need to be addressed locally:

What counts as knowledge? How is such knowledge produced? Do different groups in the community value different forms of knowledge? If so, are these fairly represented in the school curriculum? How is knowledge transmitted in the classroom? What kinds of organisations and relationships are developed in the classroom? Are these designed to reproduce the values and norms embodied in the "accepted" social relationships of the work force? Who has access to knowledge, and who controls this access? Whose interests does this knowledge serve? How do prevailing methods of evaluation (tests, exams etc.) serve to legitimise existing forms of knowledge? What ideological appeals justify the system? (Adapted from Ramsey, 1984, pp. 9-10)

In the light of such questions, curricula in our Maltese schools can be subjected to a number of criticisms. These bodies of knowledge are often dictated by examination boards in foreign countries,⁵ and hence our students are twice alienated from themselves, from their communities and needs. They are twice removed from the real not only because they have little or no say in the production of knowledge, but because this production of knowledge is set in far-away England, another of the umbilical ties still to be cut from our past colonial masters. This double alienation means that students are twice as likely to fail to become empowered to understand and act on their immediate world.

Critical education therefore encourages a move from a "technocratic rationality" which is concerned with "what works" (i.e. the ways and means to get to curriculum), to an "emancipatory rationality". The latter involves a critical examination of those very same ends and goals, a practice which we are so unaccustomed to that Simon calls this - in a forthcoming book of his - "Teaching against the Grain". Such an education is concerned with the development of critical social intelligence, founded on a practice of reflective self-knowledge which will enable persons to improve the rationality of their own practical judgments and actions. Wilfred Carr locates such an approach within themes developed by that contemporary giant of social philosophy,

Jürgen Habermas. In the latter's view, knowledge and right action cannot and should not be divorced:

"Habermas has returned to the classical notion of 'practical philosophy' and, in particular, to the aristotelian notion of praxis. For Aristotle, ethics, politics and education were not theoretical sciences producing rigorous 'objective' knowledge. They were 'practical sciences' whose theory comprised the reflectively held ideas and beliefs which informed practice and were constantly being revised in the light of their practical consequences. 'Theory' and 'practice' were indivisible elements of the single process of praxis - a process whereby practitioners simultaneously reflected on their 'practice' and the 'theory' that informed it." (Carr, 1987, p.291).

This move from reproduction of accepted knowledge to creative production of knowledge that leads to praxis is in itself emancipatory because it invites individuals "to treat the subjective assumptions and common sense beliefs shaping their social reality as objects for rational re-appraisal, offers them the opportunity to re-construct their social reality for themselves" (Carr, 1987, p.293).⁶ It is a move from ignorance and habit to knowledge and reflection, from mere knowledge consumption and acquisition to the creating of meaning and culture. The set curriculum gives way to a dialogue in a community of learners, producing knowledge which challenges common-sense assumptions and leads directly to the "good life". Rob Young (1988), drawing on Habermas (1984) and Kleinig (1982), distinguishes between an education that teaches through coercion and one that teaches through reason. According to his criteria, our strict adherence to curricula in academic-oriented schools comes closer to indoctrination than education, for it involves students coming to hold a view in such a way that it is not open to rational assessment.

Such coercive processes can be observed in a recent educational initiative in Malta, the introduction in 1989 of the National Minimum Curriculum, legally binding for state and private schools alike. While there are a number of positive elements in this initiative, both process and form do not live up to the democratic ideals of critical theory. Not only was the "National" minimum curriculum not open to public fora for debate, but there is a clear implication of that familiar straightjacketing rather than the expansion "of the range of possible social identities people may become" (Corrigan, 1987). Thus, the primary school curriculum rejects the notion of forum and dialogue in favour of the inculcation of "a good behaviour and character formation in the moral and religious field, in order that children may learn to act according to what is right, to love their fellow man and to revere God" (Council of Europe, 1989, pp. 26-29). Simon (1987) points out that what is often meant by "character formation" is "a particular narrowing of human capacities to fit particular forms" (p.374), and then draws on Roland Barthes (1982) to argue that we often set out to

5

teach through ways that silence, which do not allow "multiple voices" to emerge in a dialogic encounter. Simon concludes: "An education that creates silence is not an education" (ibid., p.375).

Critical Education and Culture

This brings us nicely to the point that critical education questions not only the kind of knowledge that is given legitimacy in schools, but also the cultural systems that are allowed to develop in those sites. I am defining culture here in the manner that Jerome Bruner, in the tradition of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, does. Culture is therefore "a forum for negotiating and re-negotiating meaning and for explicating action" (Bruner, 1986 p. 65). It is an "ensemble of tools of discourse that a group employs towards exchanging information, expressing states of consciousness, forming bonds of solidarity, and forging common strategies of action" (Bowles and Gintis, 1988, p.22).

It is this idea of forum and dialogue which is once again missing in schools, and the overriding emphasis in local educational discourse is the idea of culture as a "set of rules and specifications for action" (Bruner, 1986, p.65). Pierre Bourdieu - a French sociologist whose research has had a tremendous impact on the way we think about education - argues that in the communicative site that is the school, information and knowledge are exchanged through the use of only one set of tools of discourse. It is the children of the dominant classes who have the "cultural capital" to converse with these tools (master-patterns, linguistic codes, relations to language and culture, familiarity with symbolic and iconic representation) - other groups, specifically those coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds, have their own discursive tools, but these are neither recognised nor given legitimacy. For some, schools represent a familiar continuation of the home culture, for others it is a sharp break creating dissonance. In assuming that this "cultural arbitrary" is universal, some groups are recognised as being "intelligent" and others less so. This leads to processes of "learned ignorance" and a "symbolic violence" whereby style matters more than content, and where, in Gramsci's words, the children of the working class have to pay with tears and blood to achieve that which comes "naturally" to the children of the privileged.

It is in recognition of such cultural violence that Simon (1984, p.382) proposes that "instead of talking about 'the culture', we must always consider the cultures that are produced in the crucible of dominant and subordinate lived relations. Furthermore, culture as a political phenomenon includes the power of a specific class or group to articulate, distribute, and legitimate specific meanings, message systems, and social practices in order to lay the ideational and material foundations for a specific way of life".

Locally it seems that there is an implicit recognition of such cultural factors at work in the link between schooling, justice, and educational achievement. This is evident in the current education Minister's decision to have kindergartens available free of charge for children from the age of three onwards. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds would thus theoretically have the same opportunity as their more well-off counterparts to get used to some aspects of school culture, such as learning in groups (cf. Ministry of Education, 1989, p.1) It is also true, however, that the same Ministry tends to show a predilection for "elite culture" (so called because of its association with an elite class) and very little appreciation of the legitimacy of popular culture. This silencing of the popular voice is also evident in other areas of contemporary Maltese cultural legitimating industries and celebrations. In this regard, it is highly significant that in a series of fourteen papers delivered at a national conference purporting to represent "Malta's Cultural Identity" (1989) only one - that of Dr Paul Sant Cassia - recognises the educational and political value of popular culture in any intelligent and non-condescending manner.

Critical Education and Pedagogy

What has preceded this section has already given a fair indication of what critical educators consider "good" pedagogy. The emphasis on dialogue, democratic participation, the notion of forum, a focus on process rather than pre-selected goals and ends, the awareness of "the complicity involved in teaching isolated skills and the cultural and socio-political formations it legitimates" (McLaren, 1988, p.3), one and all contribute guidelines towards the formulation of what has come to be termed "critical pedagogy".

It is clear that there is a choice in favour of that kind of pedagogy which Freire (1972) terms "problem-posing education" where in a dialogic relationship between teacher-student and student-teacher, persons are involved in a co-operative search for knowledge and the good life. The quest is for school and classroom practices which are "organized around forms of learning which serve to prepare students for responsible roles as transformative intellectuals, as community members, and as critically active citizens outside schools" (Giroux and McLaren, 1986, p. 237). Such a pedagogy encourages the asking of questions, the engagement with students' experiences which, although as Bates and Rowland (1988) have argued, is not in itself sufficient for the development of learning, yet is an essential component of critical education both on epistemological and pedagogical grounds. Young (1988) makes this point, showing that often teachers direct students' learning in such a way that teaching approximates more to indoctrination than to education because goals (which

in themselves might be unobjectionable regarding validity claims) are pursued "in a manner which tends to result in students' accepting these claims on grounds other than reasons which seem valid to them in their own frameworks of relevance" (p.57). Moreover, such a process is not only indoctrinating but also "results in a shallow kind of knowledge, unconnected with students' deepest beliefs, which is soon forgotten after leaving school" (*ibid.*, p.57) .

Critical pedagogy looks for ways to enhance reflexive learning, where students are actively encouraged to examine taken-for-granted knowledge claims and to accept or reject these after due discursive consideration is given. There is therefore a healthy scepticism of schooling systems like ours where the emphasis is on exams and pedagogies which insist on young minds to name the world in terms of other people's perceptions, not their own. Bruner (1986, p.123) considers this a pedagogy that "derives from another time, another interpretation of culture [i.e. other than a forum and negotiation and creation of meaning], another conception of authority - one that looked at the process of education as a transmission of knowledge and values by those who know more to those who know less and know it less expertly". The implications of such a pedagogy - and in this regard as in so many other regards, time seems to have come to a standstill in Malta - are that "there should be something rooted out, replaced or compensated. The pedagogy that resulted was some view of teaching as surgery, suppression, replacement, deficit filling, or some mix of them all" (*ibid.*, p.124) .

A new and critical pedagogy, according to Schneidewind (1987), involves a fivefold process goals approach, i.e. (a) the development of an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and community in the classroom; (b) shared leadership; (c) cooperative structures; (d) integration of cognitive and affective learning; (e) action. These are not, of course, new themes. Maxime Greene for instance notes Dewey's contribution to the theory and practice of critical education and promotes his attempts to re-create classrooms where "there would be continuing and open communication, the kind of learning that would feed into practice, and inquiries arising out of questioning in the midst of life. Critical thinking modelled on the scientific method, active and probing intelligence: these, for Dewey, were the stuff of a pedagogy that would equip the young to resist fixities and stock responses, repressive and deceiving authorities" (Greene, 1986, p.434).

Thus, critical pedagogy is about empowering young people to "recognise and name injustice...to act against their own and others' oppressions" (Ellsworth, 1989, p.300). While recognising the structural boundaries of these endeavours, aware that "people make history, but in circumstances not of their own making", it nevertheless believes that individuals are not structural dopes: people involved in education, including students, can react against structures which they find oppressive, undemocratic,

stifling, and such resistance can lead to the formulation of alternative structures and practices. Indeed, critical education is situated right in the nexus of the classic dialectic between agency and structure, freedom and determinism, insisting that "the more individuals understand about the social determinants of their actions, the more likely they are to escape from the constraints to which they were previously subject" (Carr, 1987, p.291). The political goals are clear: the critical appraisal of these conditions so that people are empowered to develop social structures which are more humanising in sites which include - but are not restricted to - the school. As Ellsworth (1989, p.300), reviewing over thirty major studies on the subject, puts it: "The goal of critical pedagogy [is] a critical democracy, individual freedom, social justice and social change - a revitalised public sphere characterised by citizens capable of confronting public issues critically through ongoing forms of public debate and social action. Students would be empowered by social identities that affirmed their race, class and gender positions, and provided the basics for moral deliberation and social action".

Conclusion: Towards A New Beginning?

The thrill of ending a study on critical education is that it often ushers in - or in any case, should usher in - a new beginning. This is no circular journey. Rather, we are here directly involved in the dangerous realm of dreaming for education that future it deserves, an idealism not unaware of the very real constraints in which that dream is being articulated.⁷ The Maltese educational system, like our local political system and general public sphere, desperately needs a sense of true dialogue, the working towards what Habermas calls an "ideal speech situation". With regards to the educational system, this requires the development of fora at policy-making as well as school and classroom levels. Imagine the contribution critical education and pedagogy can make to the dream of a democracy if students are constantly involved in the practice of a rational consensus reached purely by the force of the better argument, where, by means of systematic self-reflection, there is a diminishing of the existing obstructions to the realisation of genuine social relations, where action is taken after all pertinent evidence is brought into play and nothing apart from logical, reasoned argument is involved in an ensuing consensus!

True dialogue at the site of the school and in other social sites cannot, however, take place - in Malta as elsewhere - because, according to Habermas, the necessary *a priori* presuppositions of discourse - i.e. the procedural principles of truthfulness, meaningfulness, justifiability and sincerity - are missing. Habermas makes the point that we speak in ideologised speech, a speech deformed and laden with vested interests and hidden

world views related to domination and power. To "dialogue" on these terms is impossible because of the dishonesty of the context, and the only possibility of genuine language rests in a critique of ideology implicit in the context. Ellsworth (1989) in fact suggest that for dialogue to occur, there must exist:

- (a) a harmony of interests in the community;
- (b) a will by dominant people to work for equality;
- (c) a feeling of safeness for all members of the community to speak in the space provided (or, as Habermas puts it, a situation which permits the unimpeded flow of argument and equal opportunities for all participants to engage in dialogue and debate free from external pressure and controls).

Ellsworth (1989, p. 316) however rightly argues and concludes that "dialogue in its conventional sense is impossible in the culture at large because at this historical moment, power relations between raced, classed, and gendered subjects and teachers are unjust...Conventional notions of dialogue and democracy assume rationalized, individualized subjects capable of agreeing on universalizable 'fundamental moral principles' and 'quality of human life' that become self-evident when subjects cease to be self-interested and particularistic about group rights. Yet social agents are not capable of being fully rational and disinterested, and they are subjects split between the conscious and unconscious and among multiple social positionings".

It is these "horizons of prejudices", the overwhelming emphasis on competitive rather than co-operative social relations, the reproduction and re-inforcement of privilege based on social class and gender membership, the selective and streaming procedures which damage children's present and future - it is these educational practices which a home-grown critical education and pedagogy should address. Such an agenda for progressive action needs to become part of the process of dialogue within a context which approximates as far as possible to an "ideal speech situation". It is only then that our future can be emancipated from a colonial heritage where others think on our behalf, from an over-concern with politics tied to purely personal interest, and from a political illiteracy which leaves individuals and groups incapable of transcending the cognitive frameworks and normative world of their immediate milieu.

Notes

1. This information was kindly provided by my colleague, Mr Joseph Fenech.
2. There are, of course, many other similarities. Dreeben (1968) for instance notes a number of parallel structures and functions between modern industry and schools, many of which have now assumed a taken-for-granted quality about them. Such similarities include the separation from the household, the distinction between the worker as person and the position s/he occupies; activity in large-scale organisations with both bureaucratic and professional forms of authority; individual accountability for the performance of tasks judged according

to standards of competence.

3. While authors from the critical education perspective hold Dewey in high esteem, and as Morrison (1989) has argued, the two approaches are ultimately complementary, it is nevertheless important to point out that Dewey made a much less trenchant analysis of the way political powers outside of the school influence what actually takes place within educational systems. This point is well made by Spring (1985) in his review of one of Dewey's more well known contemporary followers, Arthur Wirth (1983).
4. Vella's analysis (1989) seems to suggest that attempts to link educational goals narrowly and exclusively to the needs and requirements of industry are largely unavoidable given Malta's economic dependence upon - and peripherality within - the international capitalist economic system.
5. Even when there are local innovations, such as the much discussed "systems of knowledge", the apparently progressive intentions of the course of studies are subverted by the students' - and teachers' - approach to studying and teaching in other areas of the curriculum, i.e. uncritical absorption and cramming on the one hand, and top-down "banking education" on the other. It is ironic - and extremely relevant in the construction of local curriculum histories - that "soft" subjects like religion and social studies which are even more apparently suited than say Mathematics or Physics for a dialogic, problem-posing pedagogy, attempt to emulate the higher status subjects by taking on some of the latter's characteristics. These include such uneducational features as fixed syllabi and assessment by means of formal and national exams.
6. One way of doing this is through a critical examination of the subjectivities produced by the very language we use. McLaren (1988), drawing on the work of Michel Foucault for instance, likens language to a semiotic text which introduces us to ways of socially constructing our knowledge of the real. Locally, Frendo (1989) makes a point which Gramsci had made earlier in a more explicitly political context, namely that the common-sense knowledge hidden in popular sayings and proverbs often produces frames of mind which are functional to dominant classes and groups in a particular society. Our past colonisers, as well as the present dominant classes in Malta would surely applaud proverbs such as the following: "Kull deni hudu b'gid" (i.e. Every cloud has its silver lining); "Jinghalaq bieb, jinfetah iehor" (i.e. when one door is closed, another is opened); "Mill-mitlul' tiehu li tista" (i.e. Make the best of a bad deal); and "thobb l-id li tixtieq maqtugha" (i.e. Love the hand you would see cut off). Zammit (1984) makes similar points in relation to that contemporary form of servilism, the transmutation of colonialism to clientalism.
7. Any theory of action needs to be aware of such limitations. In Malta I would consider these to be the excessive intolerance (religious, cultural, political); the relative success of industry in defining educational agendas within human-capital terms: the divide between educational system administrators (i.e. the Department of Education) and those who work on research and theorising (Faculty of Education); the proliferation of private schooling which is now catering for 30% of Maltese students; the violence on children caused by inter- and intra-school selection and streaming systems.

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