

Towards a critical teaching practice: Notes for the teacher educator

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Introduction

As a sociologist of education and teacher educator, I am often challenged by students following my courses to demonstrate the way that the insights provided by educational theory can be translated into practice in the 'real world of the classroom'. In responding to their very real needs, which become especially acute during their teaching practice phases, I developed a pedagogical tool with the intention of heightening students' perceptions of their work as critical educators. In this article I intend to first give an account of the theoretical context which informs my approach to teacher education and then present a series of questions which, when confronted by the student-teacher (or any practising educator), would raise issues central to the process of education.

PART ONE

From the language of pessimism . . .

Both my courses and this tool draw from a specific view of education and an inter-related set of concepts which build on the insights developed within the so-called 'new' sociology of education and 'critical education' especially so. This 'new' sociology of education differs from earlier models in a number of ways. As Shapiro (1988) points out, the 'old' sociology was mainly concerned with the problem of educational access. The 'new' sociology — which found one of its earliest expressions in Young's (1971) publication, but which builds on earlier marxist and phenomenological approaches to knowledge — asked even more fundamental questions about the nature of the curriculum and the educational experience itself.

While the earlier sociological paradigm took educational institutions (and much of the wider social formation) for granted, and considered that its work was confined to helping a variety of students to gain entry and experience success in the schools, the authors in Young's collection of readings considered the educational institution and its definitions of knowledge as part of a larger process of social control. Schools, like other institutions in the superstructure of society, were seen to safeguard the interests of the powerful, and this realisation led to the goal of conceiving alternative forms of social life and

a critique of the status quo in the name of more rational, just and humane criteria — an order of things which could and should be made to come about (Brosio, 1981).

In the early stages of this new theorising, overwhelming emphasis was placed on the part played by education in the economic, cultural and ideological reproduction of the class structure (Giroux, 1982). In showing that social inequalities persist not *in spite* of schooling, but *because of it*, reproduction theories have made an outstanding contribution to the development of educational theory. Such theories represent the first sustained attempt at breaking down the still prevalent meritocratic belief that intelligence (or innate ability) plus effort leads to increasingly better life-chances. The three strands of reproduction accounts are briefly described below with reference to authors credited with their development.

Baudelot and Establet (1971) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) were among the most influential economic reproduction theorists to argue that students from different social class are differentially processed in schools and this in turn predisposes them to fit positions in the occupational structure accordingly. A number of ethnographies — such as those provided by Anyon (1980, 1981) and Da Silva (1988) for instance — have provided qualitative and empirical evidence to show that in different schools characterised by different social class membership there are differences between school tasks, pedagogy and control.

Bourdieu and his colleagues (1977) explained societal reproduction by showing how schools imposed a cultural arbitrary on all students, so that those coming from top socio-economic groups found the cultural system of the school approximating closely to their own values, attitudes and perceptions. The school however does not recognise the cultural and linguistic capital of those coming from the lower socio-economic groupings, and in a process of 'symbolic violence' subtly and almost totally excludes these from access to credentials and from the more lucrative positions in the job market. In this way, the children of the ruling class rule once again.

Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony was increasingly used to explain how consent to such structural injustice could be engineered. Ideological reproduction through overt and covert means 'made sure' that the needs of capital were given precedence in schools, a vital superstructural site (Apple, 1979).

. . . To a language of possibility

The problem with reproduction theories was that they over-emphasised the success of capital in determining the character and direction of social institutions and in fulfilling its needs. Human beings seemed to have no other alternative in front of them than to accept these dictates and to enter into dehumanising and damaging relationships in a variety of social sites and with

reference to life-changes generally (Wright, 1978). Much more fruitful was the exploration of the ways individual and groups resisted this imposition, and acted in such ways as to win spaces for themselves within large, impersonal and undemocratic structures.

Under the influence of a number of theorists, but perhaps of Giroux especially so,¹ the new sociology increasingly turned to the insights developed by the Frankfurt School for theoretical sustenance. The links between critical theory and the new emphasis within the sociology of education can be readily seen in Inglis' (1985, p.16) depiction of the programme for an empowering education in the following terms:

. . . critical theory . . . is reflexive, possesses its own valid epistemology and cognitive processes, and above all, is 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 . . . These three goals (or telos), freedom, fulfilment, and self-critical awareness, are the epistemes (or given grounds) of the epistemology which vindicates the knowledge produced by critical theory.

Simon (1985) outlines three moments in the development of such a critical education. According to him, critical education acknowledges the social production, legitimation and distribution of knowledge within the school; it admits that school knowledge is not value-free but represents specific interests and values, and finally it ought to lead to transformative action in favour of a democratic vision of life.

Reading about the development of Critical Theory² one is impressed by the extent to which the programme of the Institut Für Sozialforschung has been appropriated by radical educational theory. Honneth (1987, p.351) shows for instance that in contrast to the positivism of 'traditional theory', 'critical theory' is constantly aware of its social context of emergence as well as of its practical context of application. Like critical theory too, critical education follows the three agendas which Horkheimer outlined, namely 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. All three concerns can be identified in one or the other of the reproduction models of education outlined above.

It is interesting to note as well the parallelism between the ultimately functionalist Marxism of the 'inner circle' of critical theorists (i.e. Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse) and a similar emphasis which can be discerned in the early work of radical education theorists and their emphasis on reproduction. This contrasts with the now familiar Habermasian emphasis on the dimen-

sions of everyday practice in which socialised subjects generate and creatively develop common action-orientations in a communicative manner (Young, 1988).

Indeed, radical theorising entered into a most promising phase when it succeeded in linking the macro-analysis and understanding which structural Marxism encourages with the micro-level accounts of how individual human beings create meanings within specific circumstances. It was with the development of 'resistance theory' — which really took off with Willis' (1977) ethnographic work — that an important methodological goal of the critical theorists was actualised. 'Interdisciplinary materialism', as it is referred to today, sets out to weld a diagnosis at the philosophico-empirical level to empirical social research as a second current of reflection. As the founder of the Frankfurt School put it:

. . . philosophy, as a theoretical intention focused on the universal, the "essential", is in a position to give inspiring impulses to the specialist disciplines and, at the same time, is open enough to the world in order to allow itself to be impressed and changed by the advance of concrete studies (Horkheimer, 1972, p.41).

Such an agenda has led to a more creative approach to those perennial dualisms of social theory, namely society and the individual, determinism and voluntarism, structure and agency. In the case of resistance theory, there developed a renewed emphasis on human agency and a concern with the *production* rather than mere reproduction of culture (Willis, 1981). It helped to save radical educational theory from an over-deterministic view of human nature, where the economic base overwhelmed every possible human initiative and where reproduction necessarily followed. For those who wanted to find a 'language of possibility' within education, reproduction theories were found to be much too sterile in comparison to this new approach.

Sociologists of education could now bring together their critical insights in identifying structural constraints and in exposing prevalent mythologies on the one hand, and a new strategy in actively highlighting contested spaces and meanings on the other. The weakness of the structures could thus be demonstrated, and transformation brought about. Student (and teacher) resistance showed that human beings are not structural dopes necessarily following the logic of capital, but that contradictions and contests over meaning presented ideal spaces through which critical thinking could enter, and persons could move from 'common sense' to 'good sense' (Gramsci, 1971).

'Resistance theory' pointed to a mechanism for change through the actualisation of three sequences. These do not necessarily succeed each other chronologically, but they could be said to form a typology, a social psychological map of a track which leads from reproductive to transformative subjectivity. Thus,

- (a) Resistance theory requires that a subjectivity becomes partially or fully aware of its submersion within hegemonic consciousness. Such a 'penetration' (Willis, 1977) could take the form of 'transitory, sporadic and personal insights into the nature of power and control relations' (Aggleton and Whitty, 1985, p.63). It could however also be a realisation which is 'more socially and collectively shared, in which insights become more systematically organised so as to prefigure counter-hegemonic practice' (ibid., p.63).
- (b) While individuals and groups can arrive at a penetration of hegemonic consciousness, resistance theory highlights the role of 'organic' or 'transformative' intellectuals in mobilising critical insights into a transformative practice. In the site of schooling, 'the issue of teaching and learning is linked to the more political goal of educating students to take risks and to struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to alter the oppressive conditions in which life is lived' (Giroux and McLaren, 1986, p.226). Teachers and schools have an active and directive part to play in challenging the status quo at the ideological level (hegemony) and at the material level (sexual and social reproduction of labour).
- (c) While the above two agendas are specifically related to schools, resistance theory also looks at the wider social formation. Resistance which becomes collectively articulated and which finds expression in social action within one particular sphere can be transported to other sites (Bowles and Gintis, 1980). Apple (1988b) thus urges the building of alliances between progressive groups from the ground up in the economic, political and cultural spheres so that not only will the progressive gains in one site be transported to another, but that they have lasting democratic effects.

Work within critical education has developed the tool of resistance and from merely identifying it, it has moved on to politicising and actually promoting it within schools (Burbules, 1986). One aspect of this development can be seen in the attempts to link the philosophical issues discussed above to a practical pedagogy which includes but transcends notions of technical efficiency in the communication of knowledge. Freire's work is of the utmost importance in this regard, and many look to him for the development of a critical pedagogy. Simon (1988, p.2) has defined the latter process as a

deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within particular sets of social relations . . . in other words, pedagogy is simultaneously about the details of what students and teachers might do together and the cultural politics such

practices support. Thus to propose a pedagogy is to propose a political vision.

In another context, Simon (1986) elaborates and suggests that critical pedagogy empowers students by drawing upon their own cultural resources as a basis for engaging in the development of new skills and interrogating existing knowledge claims. It helps them decode and interpret their everyday realities and facilitates the consideration of possible alternatives which are more humane, just and equitable.

Developments in critical education

Despite the theoretical strengths of resistance theory and the language of optimism and of possibility that it has encouraged, there are a number of authors who are questioning its transformative potential (cf Lauder et al, 1986; Wexler, 1988; Sultana, 1989). Others have questioned resistance theory's chances of success given its inability to find in teachers the allies it needs to translate theory into transformative practice (cf Sultana, 1987, 1988). Viegas Fernandes (1988) rightly argues that teachers need to have available a variety of counter-hegemonic curricula, school materials (such as texts, audio-visual aids), and practical ideas if they are to develop counter-hegemonic practices.

While progress *has* been made in the development of these kinds of counter-hegemonic curricula and materials,³ the current climate in education in a variety of countries discourages teachers from politicising their work or from reflecting critically on the link between their work and larger issues of power and control. Apple (1988a) has, in this context, analysed the relationship between standardised curriculum packages and the deskilling of teachers. In a variety of countries the educational emphasis has been placed on efficiency-related goals. The 'new vocationalism' (cf Dale, 1985) — with its emphasis on human capital theory and the role of education in the revitalisation of an economy under recession — has replaced the social concerns of education in earlier decades, where real gains were made by disadvantaged groups such as women, ethnic 'minorities', and working class students. Carnoy and Levin (1985, p.41) address this tendency of education to historically respond to industrial or democratic imperatives in the following manner:

In historical periods when social movements are weak and business ideology is strong, schools tend to strengthen their function of reproducing workers for capitalist workplace relations and the unequal division of labour. When social movements arise to challenge these relations, schools move in the other direction to equalize opportunity and expand human rights'.

It is in this context that the need to mobilise educators as a social movement around normative goals such as social justice and equality becomes even more apparent. Shapiro (1988) argues that the struggle for progress towards a more just, humane, and rational society is bound to appear at a number of different sites within capitalist society. He adds 'There is no logical reason why education might not provide a particularly propitious site for progress toward a better society — indeed . . . there are good reasons why it *should* do so' (ibid., p.420). However, the winning over of teachers to this project is not an easy one. Despite Cole's (1984) positive appraisal of the likelihood of this happening, my analysis is less optimistic. My own research has pointed out the widespread conservatism among teachers who personalise rather than politicise their alienation from the system, and who develop strategies for survival rather than for transformation of unjust structures.

The task of translating into practice the theoretical insights developed throughout the past decade and a half within sociological literature on education is therefore even more urgent. How does one bring such abstract considerations to the level of classroom reality for the student-teacher? This should be the vital concern of every transformative teacher educator, especially when one is confronted by research — summarised by Sachs and Smith (1988, p.430) — that 'rhetoric and visions proposed in pre-service teacher education exert little impact on the beliefs and later practices of teachers'.

In this context I refer to a sixteenth century pedagogical invention, the 'catechism' — or a tool developed by Luther⁴ which, through a series of questions, engages the attention of the reader-practitioner and helps the latter apply abstractions to his or her everyday life. The following questions, organised around issues related to preparation, relationships, pedagogy, control and assessment,⁵ are intended to help the student-teacher focus on concerns which have developed within critical education approaches. It has been trialled out with groups of student-teachers at the University of Malta, and evaluative comments kindly provided by both colleagues and students have been taken into account in the version presented below.⁶

PART TWO

Towards a critical teaching practice

Guidelines:

The following sheets are meant to help you — as actual or prospective teachers — to become critical about your teaching practice. The questions are formulated in such a way as to challenge you to bring some of the educational theory you learn to the level of practice.

Whatever we do in the classroom, even when we are not conscious of it, reflects a particular theory or set of beliefs about teaching. We are never neutral, but are constantly making choices in favour of presenting and promoting one world view instead of another. For instance, I can choose to assume the part of the Expert in the classroom: that has so many repercussions, such as: teacher-centred learning, teacher-led assessment, teacher-as-authority, students-as-ignorant. You might choose to consider that teaching is a relationship of equals, with sharing and critical reflection on knowledge as being the normal practice. That too will have many repercussions. Your classroom will probably be characterised by dialogue, participation, discussion, peer/self-assessment, etc.

Such choices are important, and we need to be critical and conscious of them. What we do in the classrooms — the structures we promote, the pedagogy we utilise, the very language we use — has very real effects on our students.

The questions asked in the following pages are not neutral. They are biased in favour of an approach which uses the word 'education' to refer to a series of dialogues:

- There is dialogue between teacher and taught.
- There is dialogue between the student, the teacher and the curriculum — the latter is not imposed, but negotiated.
- There is dialogue between the student, the teacher and the world — the latter is not accepted as it is, but considered as a site where transformation towards more equitable and equal relationships — in terms of power, wealth, health, opportunities, outcomes, etc — can be fostered.
- There is dialogue between school subjects: they are not separated artificially, but integrated, for the world is a whole: to separate is to alienate oneself from the world.
- There is dialogue between the mental and the manual, the abstract and the concrete, the intellectual and the practical. Both have status. Both are necessary.

The list can go on and on. Those who would like to know more about this approach — called 'Critical Education' — could read one or more of the following books:

- Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmond, Penguin)
- Shor, I. (1980) *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)
- Livingstone, D.W. (1987) *Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Power* (S. Hadley, Mass., Bergin & Garvey)
- McLaren, P. (1989) *Life in Schools* (White Plains, N.Y., Longman)

Preparation:

1. Are your long-term/short-term teaching goals clear to you? To what extent is the knowledge you would like to communicate going to make your students more fully human? Will some students, identifiable by their gender, ethnicity, race or class membership feel more empowered by the knowledge you would like to give? What planning, resources and teaching strategies are required to achieve these aims?
2. Are you preparing lessons which are appropriate for the level of conceptual development of your students? How do you know? Do you think in terms of 'classrooms' or of 'individuals'? Are there identifiable groups who have special needs? How does your preparation cater for them?
3. Do you rely totally on the text-books and resources that your school provides, or do you create your own? Are you using the tapes, charts, books, teaching aids etc available? Are there hidden messages in these resources which stand in conflict with your educational values?
4. Thinking of your teaching during the past week, and of the lessons you are preparing for next week:
 - (a) Does one lesson build on another?
 - (b) Are you noting any improvement in your students generally, and in particular individuals and groups? What does 'improvement' mean?
 - (c) Are you noting any improvement in your teaching?
 - (d) Are you yourself clear about the concepts you want to teach?
5. Are you preparing your lessons week by week or day by day? What are the advantages/disadvantages of the system you are using?
6. In what ways can your students be involved in the planning and preparation of their own education? Do you sometimes ask them:
 - (a) What it is that they would like to learn from you?
 - (b) Which directions they would like to move towards?
 - (c) To evaluate you as their teacher?
 - (d) To help you in the construction of teaching aids?
 Should such participation be central or peripheral?

7. Who else besides teachers and students can be involved in the preparation of a teaching programme? What about parents? Do you think that the knowledge which is given status by the official curriculum the only knowledge worth knowing? What about the knowledge students bring with them to the classroom, or the knowledge they consider to be relevant and important?
8. Are you finding it possible to introduce modern and progressive elements in your teaching, despite the constraints of rigid syllabi and general lack of resources? How many of the following have you planned for in the coming week's scheme:
 - (a) Centre-of-interest (i.e. integrated or holistic approach);
 - (b) Group work; group projects; group discussion; debates etc;
 - (c) Drama, miming, music, singing, movement, body sculpture;
 - (d) Experiments, practical work, integration of hand and mind;
 - (e) Student productions, student teaching (i.e. peer teaching);
 - (f) Surveys, learning in the community, student production of knowledge/information.
9. Are you prepared to give your students 'dangerous' knowledge? For instance, are you ready to reveal hidden institutional practices such as assessment practices, decision-making processes, streaming and tracking, the control function of counselling, etc which affect the lives of students within the school?

Relationships:

1. Do you deserve the respect you are expecting from your students? In other words, are you respecting them and their rights as much as you would like them to do likewise in your regard?
2. Should you be open to learning from your own students? In that case, as a 'teacher-student' you enter into a horizontal (equal/dialogic) vs. a vertical (hierarchical/authoritarian) relationship with your 'student-teachers'. Are you aware of the implications of this to your teaching? To your pedagogy?
3. According to Freire (1972), there must be six attitudes in a 'teacher-student' for dialogue to occur. How many of the following characterise what happens between you and your students?
 - (a) Love: 'Dialogue cannot exist . . . in the absence of a profound love for the world and for human beings' (p.78).
 - (b) Humility: 'Dialogue . . . is broken if I always project ignorance on to others and never perceive my own' (p.78).

- (c) Faith: 'Dialogue requires an intense faith in people, faith in their power to make and re-make, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human' (p.79).
 - (d) Trust: A true indicator of dialogue is trust . . . 'mutual trust between the dialoguers is a logical consequence' (pp.79-80).
 - (e) Hope: 'Dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the dialoguers expect nothing to come of their effort, their encounter will be empty, sterile, bureaucratic and tedious' (p.80).
 - (f) Critical Thinking: 'True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking. The important thing is the continuing transformation of reality on behalf of the continuing humanisation of people' (p.81).
4. Do you sometimes/often think of your students in terms of labels such as: s/he's 'bright'; 'lazy'; 'nasty'; 'naughty'; 'uncooperative'; 'unmotivated'; 'from a bad home background'; 'dumb'; 'ignorant' etc. How does this labelling affect:
- (a) Your relationship to these individuals/groups?
 - (b) Your expectations of them and hence their performance?
 - (c) Your thinking about your teaching: i.e. do you presume it's their fault, or do you consider whether they are 'unmotivated', 'lazy' etc because you have not motivated them etc?
 - (d) Do you know the reasons for such attitudes and behaviours?
 - (e) Have you discussed this with the student/s concerned?
5. How are you handling your feelings of preference for one student or group over another? Does it show in the way you treat them?
6. Is it O.K. to be angry in class? Is the way you express your anger productive or counter-productive? Do you find it easy to discuss your anger, frustration, etc with your class? How would that help you, them, and the relationship?
7. Are you trying to foster equality among genders by:
- (a) Avoiding sexist language, jokes, etc.
 - (b) Avoiding stereotyping: E.g. Do you assign traditionally-male tasks only to boys; do you use stories, examples, pictures, teaching aids, proverbs, folk tales, texts which reinforce stereotypes?
 - (c) Do you encourage the fostering of equality by discussing such issues? By cross-gender role-playing? By criticising actual sexist practices in schools, homes, T.V., in society generally? By yourself being a good role-model?
 - (d) Are girls and boys getting an equal share of your attention in class? Are they all participating?

8. Which of the following words best characterise the quality of the relationship you are fostering with your students:
 friend expert judge parent leader facilitator
9. In your class, do your students feel they have a right to:
- choose what they want to learn;
 - challenge your decisions and opinions;
 - speak about and develop their own interests;
 - knowing the reasons for learning X and not Y;
 - knowing the criteria used for assessments;
 - assert their individual/group experiences and language;
 - resist school practices which they experience as irrelevant, frustrating, insensitive to their realities and needs?
10. Do you feel responsible for changing unjust structures at school and outside which are creating a world where it is more difficult to love? What about the following situations at school:
- Undue stress created by competitive environment;
 - Little tolerance to different opinions, cultures (be they social, class or ethnic based), beliefs, etc;
 - High status and best resources given to top stream classes;
 - Older students bullying younger ones?
 - Not enough air, light, physical recreation, etc.
11. Are you aware of medical problems that your students might have, such as asthma, epilepsy, dyslexia, etc. What do you know about these conditions?

Pedagogy:

- How excited are the students about your teaching? How enthusiastic are you? How does this excitement show? How severe is the distinction between learning (work) and fun (leisure)? Can learning (and teaching) be fun?
- Is your voice generally?
 monotonous cheerful stimulating shrill loud
- How many of the following teaching strategies have you used today:
 chalk-and-talk discovery learning singing mime
 discussion group work dancing debate
 peer teaching language games research slides
- Have you done something, or facilitated the happening of something in your class, which will be today's bright highlight for one or more students in your class?

5. Is the class colourful? Is there a stimulating environment? What are the dominant colours? Are the students allowed to express their personalities through the class decorations?
6. How are you using the room space?
 - (a) Are the seating arrangements rigid, lasting throughout the year, or do you often change them to form groups?
 - (b) What kind of social relationships are the seating arrangements encouraging?
 - (c) How is an individual's seating encouraging her/his educational development?
 - (d) Do you always occupy the teacher's traditional 'territory' (i.e. near blackboard)? Do you allow students to move into that territory and take your role?
 - (e) Is the classroom the only teaching space, or do you think of the school and community as a wider classroom?
7. Are you unconsciously putting off students from learning by:
 - (a) your language: E.g. formal tone, formal English all the time, etc;
 - (b) your formal manner;
 - (c) your constant negative criticism;
 - (d) your teaching style.
8. How good are you at bringing the abstract to a concrete level by relating abstract knowledge to the realities of students' everyday lives? Do you accept the distinction that it is often made between abstract and concrete knowledge, and the higher status often attributed to the former? Do you split manual (practical) work from mental work? Do you give more importance to Maths and English rather than to P.E. and Crafts?

Control issues:

1. In your role as monitor of an environment which facilitates learning, would you compare yourself to:
An orchestra maestro a sergeant A parent
2. Do you establish the rules of classroom behaviour? What about encouraging students to evolve rules which they endorse and wish to keep? How about students themselves accepting responsibility for their own behaviour, so that they can monitor themselves? Is this possible with young children (primary school level)?
3. Is misbehaviour necessarily 'deviant', or are those misbehaving saying something about their experience of schooling, the classroom, your teaching, their lives by resisting what you are offering? Do you accept that your students might be experiencing very different realities than yours,

and that these differences must be catered for?

4. In your attempts at keeping order, do you find yourself having to make frequent use of external motivators such as:
 - competitions threats punishments blackmail
 - sarcasm stars extra work black points
 Holt (1964) found that competitions only motivate a few.
5. What happens to students when they finish a task earlier? Do they:
 - (a) read material from the Library or tackle work cards?
 - (b) help others who have not yet finished?
 - (c) help you in preparing the next learning/teaching task?
6. If and when you punish, do you make sure the student understands why s/he is being punished? Are you consistent and fair when you punish? Do the students consider you to be so? Do you ever threaten your students with punishments which you have no intention of carrying out? How will these effect your next attempts to keep order in the classroom?
7. Different students may respond differently to different control techniques. Do you have access to the following repertoire in dealing with difficult cases?:
 - (a) Putting the difficult student in charge (role-switch);
 - (b) Giving him/her responsibilities and tasks in the classroom;
 - (c) Asking the class what they think should be done;
 - (d) Using positive reinforcements frequently.

Assessment:

1. What right do I have to assess? Am I living their realities to be able to judge them? Am I assessing in order to select or to help the students learn? Am I indeed testing what I set out to assess in the first place? Do class, gender, ethnic cultural features influence negatively my assessment procedures?
2. Are you aware that some assessments you might be using have failure built into them, i.e. are assessment procedures which require a percentage of students to fail democratic? Are there democratic ways of assessing students? What about the following alternatives:
 - (a) self-assessment by student;
 - (b) peer assessments;
 - (c) assessing effort rather than actual result;
 - (d) emphasising positive achievements rather than failures;
 - (e) criteria for assessment established together as a class;
 - (f) students encouraged to comment on teacher's assessment.

- A democratic assessment procedure makes the norms and criteria used available to students.
2. Do you assess to compare one student with another, or one student with his/her own progress over time? Are different variables acting on individuals or groups of students, negatively affecting their performance and results? What educational and human goals are achieved by ranking X 'better' than Y? Are you encouraging co-operation or competitiveness?
 3. Should you allow students to critically evaluate you, as you critically evaluate them? Do parents have this right?
 4. Is it true that some students are innately 'brighter' than others? Are you acting as if this were an established fact?
 5. Is the way that you are correcting students' work actually helping them to improve? Is assessment geared to provide follow-up and remedial action?

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Notes

1. See Sultana (1985) for an account.
2. See Jay (1973), Held (1980), and Geuss (1981) for instance.
3. Among the excellent work currently available and which explores critical theory in a language which is accessible to practicing teachers, one could mention the following: Shor (1980); Kemmis et al. (1983); Ashenden et al. (1984); Greene (1986); Freire and Shor (1987); Livingstone (1987); Simon (1987); McLaren (1989). John Smyth of Deakin University, Victoria, Australia has recently taken an important initiative in the right direction by launching a 'Critical Pedagogy Networker'.
4. Luther's 'Small Catechism', first published in 1529 has been referred to as the masterstroke of the Reformation, and probably the most influential book published by any Reformer. 'The beauty of the smaller (catechism) lies in the precision with which it made matters of faith luminous and memorable' (Bornkamm, 1983, p.60). An obvious but important difference between that pedagogical tool and the one presented in this paper is that the former provides answers to the questions posed, while the latter invites the reader to explore possible alternatives.
5. There is less of a focus on wider institutional practices of the school as an organisation since the 'Critical Teaching Practice' tool is aimed primarily — though not exclusively — at student-teachers.
6. Further details may be obtained from the author at the Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida, Malta.