


Interview with Professor E. Wayne Ross

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Context of the interview

 In November 2014, the First International Conference on Education and Politics took place at the Faculty of Education of Universidad de Antioquia (Colombia). In order to publish the results of this Conference, the journal *Revista Educación y Pedagogía*, associated with Universidad de Antioquia, will publish a monograph, *Education and Politics*. This monograph will be presented at the Second International Conference on Education and Politics that will take place at Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia (Mexico) on September 22-25, 2015.

The monograph will include an interview to E. Wayne Ross, Professor in the Faculty of Education at the British Columbia University in Vancouver, Canada.

Goal of this interview

Examine how Professor Ross links politics and education and the ways in which these connections have been put into practice in his professional life.

Questions concerning your professional activity

Review briefly:

- *Your professional trajectory.*
- *Your research-academic interests.*
- *The main concepts, questions, and ideas of your academic work.*

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I began my career in education working part-time in a child-care centre, my responsibilities were primarily in after-school care for children between five and eight years old and during the summer I planned and led activities for school-age children and drove them all around in a Volkswagen microbus. I was a basically a one-person summer program for 10-15 youngsters!

Even though I worked for five years in child-care, as a university student I didn't seriously consider becoming a teacher until the end of my undergraduate studies at the University of North Carolina, when I switched from a history major to social studies education. As an education student, I met two professors who had a profound effect on my work as a teacher and researcher: Richard C. Phillips and Phillip C. Schlechty.¹

Phillips' teaching of social studies methods was decidedly non-technical. I don't even remember him mentioning lesson planning or classroom management. His approach was to get us thinking about possibilities and challenging our beliefs about social studies content, schools, students, and what it means to be a teacher. In addition to a focus on John Dewey's philosophy, we learned systems theory, cybernetics, and social psychology. Besides Dewey, our intellectual role models included Buckminster Fuller and Leon Festinger, of cognitive dissonance theory fame.

Schlechty, a sociologist, and leading thinker on educational innovations and leadership, focused on the ways schools and schools systems are organized, managed, and led their affects on teachers and students in classrooms. He had me read Willard Waller's ethnographic studies of school,² which added material depth to Dewey's philosophical approach to teaching, learning, and education. The influence was lasting and today I still describe my research interests as understanding how teaching and learning are affected by social, political, and cultural forces that exist beyond the classroom. Waller also taught me that while it might not be acceptable in some circles, you could hate schools while devoting your life to education.

After teaching secondary social studies (geography, anthropology, economics, world history) for several years, I completed my doctorate in curriculum studies at The Ohio State University. Since then I have been a faculty member at the State University of New York, University of Louisville, and for the past 12 years Professor at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada.

I teach and write about the politics of curriculum, critical pedagogy, social studies education, and academic labor, focusing on the role of curriculum and teaching in building democratic communities that are positioned to challenge the priorities and interests of neoliberal capitalism as manifest in educational and social policies that shape both formal and informal education experiences.

In recent years, my principal research interests have been the influence of the educational standards and high-stakes testing movements on curriculum and teaching. Investigating the surveillance-based and spectacular conditions of postmodern schools and society my goal has been to develop a radical critique of schooling as social control and a collection of strategies that can be used to disrupt and resist the conformative, anti-democratic, anti-collective, and oppressive potentialities of schooling, practices described as dangerous citizenship.

Questions concerning the role of politics in the globalization era

What are your views on the present political and social situation in the English-speaking countries, in the Latin American countries and in Colombia (if you are familiar with this last context)?

In North America, and globally, democracy exists only rhetorically. Elections in the USA and Canada are examples of how voters chose who would most charmingly oppress the majority of the people from what is the executive committee of the rich,

1 See: Phillips (1974), and Schlechty (1976).

2 Waller, W. W. (1932). *The sociology of teaching*. New York: Wiley.

popularly known as government. But in most places, capitalist democracy and the spectacle of elections has actually speeded the emergence of fascism as a mass popular force in North America. For example, capitalist democracy has given us: the corporate state, the rule of the rich, near complete merger of corporations and government; the continuation of the suspension of civil liberties; attacks on whatever free press there is; the rise of racism and segregation; the governmental/corporate attacks on working peoples' wages and benefits; intensification of imperialist wars; transformation of domestic police forces into unaccountable murderous gangs targeting people of color and dissenters. Unfortunately, this is just a partial list.

The recent municipal and regional elections in Spain are encouraging examples of how popular movements/parties might be able to take back democracy as real people power, but it's too early to tell, though I am hopeful that movements such as Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece will be models of the rejuvenation of real democratic politics.

In the book *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord (1994) describes how capitalism, the commodity, colonizes social life. The history of social life, we could also say "democracy," can be understood as the decline from being into having then to merely appearing to have. We no longer have democracy, all that is left is the appearance of it.

Do you think that it is possible for present politics to face economic neoliberal globalization? And if so, how?

No, because present politics is neoliberal globalization. Perhaps Podemos and Syriza can ultimately change some aspects of the present political situation or perhaps they will become the leading wedges of what might ultimately be a revolution from below. But, as I said before, global politics is now the near complete merger of corporate capitalist interests and government. To speak of "government" is to speak of the interests of capital, neoliberalism. For the most

part, the interests of government stop where the interests of capital stop.

It could be argued that in contrast with the internationalist agenda of neoliberalism, left-wing ideologies have lost the internationalist approach that they did have back in the 19th and 20th century. What would you say about this? What is your understanding about internationalism?

I agree that left-wing ideologies and parties have lost the internationalist perspectives that were at the core of their programs. The best example of it was, I believe, the revolutionary industrial unionism of the Industrial Workers of the World, which had ties to both socialist and anarchist movements.

It is splitting hairs, but I do not think of neoliberalism as internationalist, but rather as global. While there is a world internationalist movement that advocates economic and political cooperation among nation-states, as I mentioned a moment ago it is clear that capital dominates the state, not the opposite. An internationalist movement that opposes nationalism, jingoism, chauvinism, etc., will not, in my opinion, emerge from capitalist democracy and the nation-state. Rather, as Rich Gibson and I have argued over the years,³ what is required is the development of class consciousness, which seems to me that can be seen, at least in embryonic forms, in the resistances movements that have emerged over the past decade, from Occupy Wall Street to anti-austerity movements in Spain, Greece, Taksim/Gezi Park protests in Turkey, "Jasmine Revolution," and 2011 pro-democracy demonstrations in China, etc.

You haven't asked, but in terms of an envisioned future, I am attracted to models of association that have been described as anarcho-syndicalism, organic communities, decentralized free associations in cooperation—a kind of libertarian socialism or communist anarchism, which Noam Chomsky frequently advocates.

In the era of globalization, what should be the role of Social Studies Education?

3 See for example: Gibson and Ross (2015).

Reduced to its most basic elements, I believe that social studies education, indeed education in general, should create conditions in which students can develop personally meaningful understandings of the world and recognize that they have agency to act on the world, to make a change.

Traditional social studies instruction fragments and compartmentalizes knowledge, separating what cannot be separated without distortion. What we need to do is provide students with opportunities to make connections between prior knowledge and various forms of new knowledge, rather than learning skills in isolation or examining only fragments of information. As Bertell Ollman (2003) has pointed out in his work on dialectics, most people see the parts well enough, but not the connections and the overall patterns of human existence.

To make that more concrete, if social studies education is going to effectively face the crises of our day we, and our students, must connect cause and effect, the whole with the parts, past-present-future. This means connecting war with imperialism; economic collapse with capitalism; and the imperial project to the global education reform movement, what people know and how they come to know it. It means connecting solutions, that is, recognizing that fights in health care are necessarily fights in education; that the battles about immigration are also battles about wages, hours, and benefits. It means recognizing what the social, economic, and political events add up to: class war, an international war of the rich on the poor: the social relations of capitalism. The economic restructuring, austerity economics, going on now will result in either a horrific defeat for the world working class, or be mark as an awakening when people recognized the many boots on their throats. Last, making connections means transformation, overcoming the system of capital.

Pedagogically, making these connections is not about merely substituting one narrative to another. It means challenging students to investigate social, political, economic issues, which provides an opportunity for examining the history of an issue, its social context now, and to think about what the issue means for us in the future. Studying how people (and things)

change is at the heart of social understanding. For me, perhaps the most compelling element of a social issues approach to teaching is that active investigation of issues contributes to change. As Mao Zedong said, "If you want to know the taste of a pear, you must change the pear by eating it yourself. If you want to know the theory and methods of revolution, you must take part in revolution. All genuine knowledge originates in direct experience".

Mao's position on the role of experience in learning is remarkably similar to those of John Dewey. Both philosophers, although poles apart ideologically, share an activist conception of human beings, that is the view that people create themselves on the basis of their own self-interpretations. Although, as Marx points out, while people make their own history, they do not make it as they please, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. This activist conception of human beings can be understood as a function of intelligence (the ability to alter one's beliefs or actions based on new information), along with curiosity, reflectiveness (evaluation of our desires, beliefs, and actions), and willfulness or the disposition to act on one's reflections.

Mainstream social studies education too often promotes "spectator democracy", a system where a specialized class of experts tell the public what our common interests are and then think and plan accordingly. The function of the rest of us is to be "spectators" rather than participants in action (for example; casting votes in elections or implementing educational reforms that are conceived by people who know little or nothing about our community, our desires or our interests).

From a Deweyan perspective, democracy is not merely a form of government nor is it an end in itself; it is the means by which people discover, extend, and manifest human nature and human rights. For Dewey, democracy has three roots: free individual existence, solidarity with others, and choice of work and other forms of participation in society. The aim of democratic education and thus a democratic society is the production of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality.

I see threads in these Deweyan roots of democracy that are in sync with at least some strains of anarchist thought, particularly opposition to authority and hierarchical organization in human relations and mutual aid and respect. I am not saying Dewey was an anarchist (or a Maoist), far from it. But, as Chomsky has pointed out, Dewey's conceptualization of democracy and democratic education can be understood as supportive of social anarchist principles. While Dewey's democratically informed education philosophy is quite familiar to people in education, it has largely been influential only conceptually, its radical potential remains, in almost every respect, unrealized in schools and society and that is a challenge for critical pedagogues.

Questions concerning the links of education and politics

What are, in your opinion, the links between education and politics?

Education and politics are inextricable from one another. Education, teaching, curriculum making are all normative activities, that is, by definition education is a means of social control, something Dewey discusses in *Democracy and Education* (1916). He argues, rightly so, that education is a social process and function that has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind. In other words, there is no "scientifically objective" answer to the question of the purposes of education, because those purposes are not things that can be discovered. All education is values-based, political, ideological. We must decide what education is, and as a result the work of education, schooling, teaching, curriculum necessarily become the objects of political agendas, there is no way around this.

Could you give us some examples of these links in the English-speaking countries or elsewhere?

For more than three decades now there has been a steady intensification of education reforms, worldwide, aimed at making public schools and universities more responsive to the interests of capital than ever before. And neoliberal ideology is at the heart of what has been labeled the global education

reform movement or GERM. Key neoliberal principles such as reducing government spending for education (and other social services) and privatizing public enterprises have led to targeting the very existence of public education or more precisely education in the public interest. Indeed, a key aim of neoliberalism is the destruction of the commons, the very idea of the common good, instead substituting individualism and individual responsibility. This idea is reflected in Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's calls to avoid "committing sociology" or Margaret Thatcher's declaration that there is "no such thing as society." Denying the existence of the commons and public interests transforms long-held notions about what democracy is and the role of public education in democratic societies.

Neoliberal education reform aims for a large-scale transformation of public education that opens it up to private investment, enabling extraction of private profits. In 2005, the global education market was valued at \$2.5 trillion; and the latest estimates are \$4.4 trillion, with projections for rapid growth the next five years. So, the opportunity for profit extraction is huge. Corporations and the governments that serve their interests, along with neoliberal think tanks in Canada, like the Fraser Institute and Frontier Centre, and philanthro-capitalist entities like the Gates, Broad, Walton Foundations have been systematically reconstructing the discourse about public education as well as education funding and the nature of teaching and learning that goes in classrooms so that public education better serves the interests of capital. As a result, education aimed at helping students develop personally meaningful understandings of the world and contributing to a flourishing civil society is stifled.

There are three key strategies of neoliberal education reform: (1) School choice and privatization; (2) human capital policies for teachers; and (3) standardized curriculum coupled with the increased use of standardized testing.

Charter schools are publicly funded independent schools that are attended by choice. Neoliberal education reformers promote policies that would close public schools deemed "low performing" and replace them with publicly funded, but privately run charters

and/or expanded use of vouchers and tax credit subsidies for private school tuition.

Human capital policies for teachers aim to alter the working conditions of teachers, which makes eliminating or limiting the power of teacher unions a primary objective of neoliberal education reform. Human capital education policies include increasing class size (often tied to firing teaching staff); eliminating or weakening tenure and seniority rights; using unqualified or “alternatively certified” teachers; increasing the hours that teachers work and reducing sick leave; and replacing governance by locally elected school boards, with various forms of mayoral and state takeover or private management; and using the results of student standardized tests to make teacher personnel decisions in hiring, firing, and pay.

Key parts of the education reform discourse in the USA, which can be traced directly through every Republican and Democratic presidential administration from Reagan to Obama, include a focus on standardization of the curriculum and de-professionalization of teachers as teaching is increasingly reduced to test preparation. There has been an ever-tightening grip on what students learn and what teachers teach. The primary instruments used in the surveillance of teachers and students and enforcement of official knowledge has been the creation of state level curriculum standards paired with standardized tests, creating bureaucratic accountability systems that undermine the freedom to teach and learn.

In parallel to the rise of standards-based, test-driven education there has been an ever-growing resistance at the grassroots levels in the USA. What started as a small movement in the education community in the 1990s—led by groups such as the Rouge Forum, Chicago public schools teachers and other educators who produce the newspaper *Substance*, including teacher and writer Susan Ohanian, The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest) and the Rethinking Schools collective—has blossomed into a wide-spread resistance movement.⁴ For example,

teachers in Chicago and Seattle have recently won important victories for the resistance to corporate education reforms.

While community-based groups across the USA continue to gain traction in efforts to derail test-driven education, the education de-formers led by Obama’s education secretary Arne Duncan and corporate/philanthropic backers still have the upper hand, demanding use of student standardized tests results to make teacher personnel decisions in hiring, firing, and pay. And, the next big thing in standardized curriculum is known as the Common Core State Standards, which were created by Gates Foundation consultants for the National Governors Association. The Common Core is, in effect, a nation curriculum that will be enforced via tests that are currently being developed by publishing behemoth Pearson.

The political and educational landscape in Canada differs in important ways from the USA, but it is certainly not immune from the deleterious effects of neoliberal education reform. The Canadian education system is a collection of regional systems in which governments have advanced neoliberal agendas for public education, including “increasing choice” by fostering private schools, introducing a number of market mechanisms into the public education, imposing standardized tests that used to create ranking or “league tables” to enhance competition between schools as well as allowing private companies to advertise in schools.

The province of British Columbia, in particular, is an important battleground over neoliberal education reform. BC is home to one of the most politically successful neoliberal governments in the world and schoolteachers have been waging a pitched battle against the BC Liberals since the party swept into power in 2001.

School governance in the province is also entirely top-down, with the appearance of local influence via local school planning councils. While BC does

4 See, for example: FairTest’s, “Testing and Resistance Reform News” (n. d.); *Substance News* (n. d.); Susan Ohanian.Org (n. d.); Rethinking Schools (n. d.); and The Rouge Forum (n. d.).

not have the proliferation of standardized tests that exist in the USA, standardized tests scores are used by the Fraser Institute, an influential neoliberal think tank, to rank schools in BC. Fraser Institute rankings are used to promote the notion of “choice” in education and generally serve as a means for categorizing poorer, more diverse public schools as “failing”, while wealthy private schools dominate the top spots.

In BC, government retains its authority over public education, but no longer undertakes the responsibility of assuring the educational well being of the public. Instead, this responsibility is devolved to individual school boards.

The funding model for public education in BC reflects the neoliberal principle that more of public’s collective wealth should be devoted to maximizing private profits rather than serving public needs.

Canada, like the USA, has also seen a dramatic pushback against neoliberal education reform. Perhaps the most widely known recent action was the 2012 Quebec student protests, aka Maple Spring, in response to government efforts to raise university tuition. Significant examples of resistance to the common-nonsense of neoliberalism in the past decade are the British Columbia teachers’ 2005 and 2014 strikes, which united student, parent, and educator interests in resisting the neoliberal onslaught on education in the public interest.

The first step in resisting neoliberalism is realizing that we are not “all in this together”, that is, neoliberalism benefits the few at the expense of the many. The corporate mass media would have us adopt the mantra that what is good for the corporate capitalist class is good for the rest of us—thus we have the logic of efficiency, cost containment and (deceptive claims about) affordability in education prized over the educational well-being of the public.

The central narrative about education (and other social goods) has been framed in ways that serve the interests of capital. For example, in North America, free market neoliberals in think tanks and foundations and in the dominant media outlets have been successful in framing discussions on education in terms of accountability, efficiency, market competition,

and affordability. The assumptions underlying these narratives are typically unquestioned or at least under-analyzed. Indeed, neoliberal education reforms are not only flawed in their assumptions, but also zeven when judged on their own terms these reforms are empirical failures and have worsened the most pressing problems of public education, including funding inequalities, racial segregation, and anti-intellectualism.

It is imperative that educators challenge the dominant neoliberal frames that would define education as just another commodity from which profits are to be extracted.

Would you say that you have managed to put into practice these links in your professional life? How?

Outside of my teaching in schools and universities there are two groups I have worked within that have been indispensable in this work, The Rouge Forum and the Institute for Critical Education Studies (ICES).

The origins of the Rouge Forum can be traced back to anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-chauvinist actions carried out in the USA by social studies, literacy, and special educators in the mid-1990s. The Rouge Forum emerged from a series of political controversies within the National Council for the Social Studies (the largest professional organization for social studies teachers and teacher educators in North America) during the 1990s. Specifically, two events at the 1994 annual meeting of NCSS in Phoenix galvanized a small group of activists who later founded the Rouge Forum. First, a staff person from the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (who was also a certified social studies teacher) was arrested for anti-military leafleting at a NCSS conference event; and secondly, the governing body of NCSS rejected a resolution condemning a California’s law that established a state-run citizenship screening system and prohibited undocumented US persons from using health care, public education, and other social services and calling for a boycott of the state as a site for future meetings of the NCSS. These events fueled a level of political activism the NCSS had rarely experienced and emphasized the need for organized action in support of free speech and anti-racist pedagogy in the field of social studies education in general and within NCSS in particular.

In 1998, Rich Gibson, Michael Peterson (both then on the faculty at Wayne State University), and myself organized what became the first meeting of the Rouge Forum in Detroit. The meeting of around 300 education activists was described by one participant as a “72 hour conversation without end.” People came and went and the agenda flowed with the ideas of attendees. Most found it a refreshing change from the routine of reading papers to each other. One important advantage was having access to a venue that was open 24 hours a day, offering a large room for plenaries and small breakout rooms—at no cost; testimony to the working class roots of Wayne State University.

Toward the close of the meeting, we chose the name, Rouge Forum, after the nearby Ford River Rouge Complex, and all of its implications, and our dedication to open investigations of the world. We have never been troubled with the relationship to the French “red”, but that was not on the minds of the locals to whom The Rouge means a river, and a huge factory in death throes, and the possibility to overcome. We’ve stuck with the name since and the reds inside the Rouge Forum seem comfortable with the action-oriented liberals, and vice versa. Friendship, sacrifice for the common good (solidarity), all remain ethics of the Rouge Forum.

The Rouge Forum is perhaps the only school-based group in North America that has connected imperialism, war, and the regulation of schooling. The Rouge Forum has been active in efforts to resist curriculum standardization and high-stakes testing in schools. The Rouge Forum produced the first petition against high-stakes testing in schools in the USA and has been a key player in the testing resistance movement from its beginning, working strategically with groups like FairTest (The National Center for Fair and Open Testing) and locally organized groups in Michigan, New York, Illinois and many other states in a variety of campaigns, protests, and direct actions.

Rouge Forum members have also joined, and assumed leadership in, community coalitions organized against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, usually coalitions involving labour, leftists, grassroots collectives, and religious groups aimed at ending the war, and they are frequently involved in school-based or-

ganizing, and counter-military recruitment as well. The Rouge Forum holds an annual, theme-based, meeting and members also participate within various professional organizations and union conferences as well organizing local events.

The operative principle for the actions of the Rouge Forum is the idea that schools hold a key position in North American society and educators play a critical role in the creation of a more democratic egalitarian society, or one that increases inequality and authoritarianism. At issue for the Rouge Forum, as Rich Gibson and I wrote in a 2008 *CounterPunch* article, school workers do not need to be missionaries for capitalism, and schools its mission. The metaphor is nearly perfect.

Schools hold centripetal and centrifugal positions in North American society. One in four people are directly connected to schools: school workers, students, or parents. Many others are linked in indirect ways. Schools are the pivotal organizing point for most people’s lives, in part because of the de-industrialization and, in part, the absence of serious struggle emanating from the industrial working class despite its historical civilizing influence.

The Institute for Critical Education Studies is a relatively new entity, which I co-founded with two of my colleagues in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, Sandra Mathison and Stephen Petrina.

As Paul Simon sings, “that’s astute... why don’t we get together and call ourselves an institute”. On the lighter side, that’s what we’ve done. We had been informally networked since 2004. The Institute for Critical Education Studies was formally established in October 2010 to support studies within a critical education or critical pedagogy tradition. ICES maintains a network that conducts and circulates cultural, educational, or social research and discourse that are critical in method, scope, tone, and content.

ICES, and its two journals, *Critical Education* and *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, defend the freedom, without restriction or censorship, to disseminate and publish reports of research, teaching, and service, and to express critical opinions

about institutions or systems and their management. Co-Directors of ICES, co-Hosts of ICES and Workplace blogs, and co-Editors of these journals resist all efforts to limit the exercise of academic freedom and intellectual freedom, recognizing the right of criticism by authors or contributors.

ICES (n. d.), *Critical Education* (n. d.) and *Workplace* (n. d.) all function with an independent and free press ethic, as a publisher and as media for its academic and citizen journalists. *Critical Education* and *Workplace* publish academic research along with a range of critical opinion while the ICES and *Workplace* blogs (n. d.), Twitter stream (@icesubc), and Facebook walls support academic and citizen journalism. The co-Directors of ICES function in various capacities as editors, researchers, teachers, cultural critics or intellectuals, and academic and citizen journalists.

ICES, *Critical Education* and *Workplace* promote and defend open access and the principle that making information or research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge. *Critical Education* is one of small handful of journals in the field of education that exclusively publishes articles in the critical social science tradition. *Workplace* was one of the very first online, open access scholarly journals ever, and was founded by a collective of scholars in higher education, with close ties to the Modern Language Association, particularly the MLA Graduate Student Caucus.

In its short history, ICES has been involved with advocacy on public education issues in BC through its own media outlets as well as contributing to mainstream and independent print and broadcast media in BC and nationally on a variety of topics including school curriculum, teaching, education funding, teacher education, academic labor, and education policy.

The Institute's major new project is a cohort-based Masters of Education program in Critical Pedagogy and Education Activism (CPEA) through Faculty of Education at The University of British Columbia (UBC) (n. d.). Labor action, appeals to environmentalism, equity and social justice, and private versus public education funding debates challenge teachers to negotiate the fluid boundaries between everyday

curriculum and evaluation within the schools and critical analysis and activism in communities and the media. This new program is built on the rationale that teachers, teacher educators, and researchers must realize that intellectual (and political) activism is essential to teaching, learning and evaluation that is transformative.

Based on principles of solidarity, engagement, and critical analysis and research, the CPEA master's program frames education activism as an intentional action with the goal of bringing about positive change in schools and education. An education activist works for positive change at the school level in how teaching and learning are conceptualized and the nature of relationships in education, and also at the workplace and community level in how educational policy, working conditions, and community relations are conceptualized, developed and maintained.

Questions concerning Political Education

Who do you think are the most important scholars in the area of Political Education?

In North America, "political education" is not a term that is in general use, but there are a large group of scholars across various disciplines whose work falls in the category. There are many scholars in both political science and in social studies education who do work on citizenship education, civics, and democratic education, which are the more common terms used here.

I am most familiar with scholars in the discipline of education. Joel Westheimer is at the top of the list for me, particularly his collaborations with Joseph Kahne. I highly recommend the work of my close colleagues Kevin D. Vinson and Rich Gibson, as well as Ronald W. Evans, David Hursh, Jack L. Nelson, Curry Stephenson Mallot, Peter McLaren, Paul R. Carr, Elizabeth E. Heilman, Neil Houser, Joel Spring, Abraham P. DeLeon, Wayne Au, Julie Gorlewski, Brad J. Porfilio, Rebecca Goldstein, Dennis Carlson, and Richard Brosio. These are some of the best critical scholars in North America. Derek R. Ford and John Lupinacci are younger scholars who are redefining questions of political education via Marxism and anarchism. Mike Cole and Dave Hill are Marxist

educators in the UK whose work I greatly admire. I am surely forgetting worthy people. More mainstream scholars whose work is widely respected in civic and citizenship education include Diana Hess, Walter C. Parker, Carole Hahn, Judith Torney-Purta, and Richard Nimei.

What political knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, etc. are taught/learnt in the educational contexts you are aware of?

I believe I'm rather pessimistic about what actually happens in the classroom, at least in North America. For the most part, as I mentioned earlier, traditional social studies education is a vehicle for teaching "spectator" citizenship, a passive acceptance of the social, political, and economic status quo. Students learn to be passive, obedient. Students are taught that the only points of entry to political participation are voting or politely expressing their concerns through the appropriate channels. The dominant pattern of classroom social studies pedagogy is characterized by text-oriented, whole group, teacher-centered instruction with an emphasis on memorization of factual information. This has long been the case, but in the face of increased standardization of the curriculum and surveillance of teachers work, resisting this approach has become even more difficult.

What political knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, etc. are taught/learnt in Teacher Education?

Teacher education in North America is aimed at preparing teachers to be successful in the schools where they are, not for what they might become. Critically minded teacher educators have always been faced with the near impossible task of preparing teachers to question the status quo and work for change within schools, while simultaneously having the capability to be hired and judged as successful within institutions that are the primary force for the maintenance of the status quo.

What is for you a 'good' Social Studies teacher when she/he teaches politics?

First, I don't believe that to be a good social studies or politics teacher you need to have any specific

ideological or political view. The good teacher is one who helps students come to develop, understand, express, and analyze their own political viewpoints, explore where these views come from historically and what they imply for the future.

The same applies to teacher educators working with beginning and experienced teachers. I do not expect my students to think the way I do, but I do require them to develop and examine their own political beliefs and claims in critical ways.

Teaching politics, like teaching any social issue, is done best when teachers encourage their students to develop habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking that go below surface meaning; to question dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions; to inquire into the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, process, organization, experience, media, or discourse. This is a definition of critical pedagogy and a description of a dialectical way of thinking.⁵

How could Teacher Education, in particular in the area of Social Studies, encourage students-teachers to become this/these teacher/s?

I have been trying to figure that out my entire career. I do not have a simple answer, or perhaps my answer is oversimplified; in any event, I believe it requires teachers and teachers educators who have courage to resist the status quo, this is a professional and political risk because those who rule (and their technocrats) are ruthless. And if educators are going to stand for equality and freedom, and teach in ways that support these values, it is important for them to recognize they will have formidable enemies. As my colleague Rich Gibson often says, "we have to construct reason and then connect reason to passion, passion to ethics, ethics to organization and organization to action". There is no recipe for this work, it is contextual and relies on the development of critical knowledge for everyday life.

In my own classes I spend a great deal of time encouraging students to think about their role as

5 See: Shor, I. (1992).

workers within an institution that is responsible for the creation and perpetuation of the inequalities and social ills that many of them believe they will be fighting as teachers. Teaching and preparing teachers to work in schools is full of contradictions.

Questions concerning young people and politics

Do you think there is political apathy among young people? And if so, why do you think this apathy exists?

Yes, political apathy is rampant among both the young and old. It is warranted. And, while it might seem counter-intuitive, it can be seen as a positive development.

The politicians, political scientists, and political educators who lament political apathy are merely pointing to the symptom of a disease the public already knows it should avoid. I have called it capitalist democracy. Many people would say they are not interested in politics because what they think, say, or do in the political arena does not matter, that it is a waste of time. And they are right. The current political system aims to dominate and alienate the public. It exists for the expressed purpose of furthering the accumulation of capital for the elite. Indeed, from the elite perspective, 80 percent of the public doesn't really matter, the aim is to keep them distracted with football and beer. There is a tier of cultural workers, the professional class, teachers, social workers, managers, etc., who are the primary target of political propaganda or what counts as the news. These people are crucial to the maintenance of the system and this is why our work as teacher educators, raising questions and disrupting the system, trying to encourage and support transformative pedagogy is critical to creating a more just and free world.

What we should be telling students is to engage politically, but that doesn't mean voting. While there are some positive signs in Spain and Greece with regard to progressive, anti-austerity movements moving into electoral politics, I do not believe that real social, political, and economic change will result from participation in the current political system. You cannot vote your way out of oppression. You cannot vote in a revolution.

What is necessary is political engagement and that is much more complex, risky, and potentially rewarding than participating in the capitalist version of democracy.

How would you discuss the relationship between young people and consumerism?

Just briefly, I mentioned earlier Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and his analysis of how commodity colonizes social life. Consumerism is an example of the decline of our lives within capitalism from being into having then to merely appearing to have. Not just for the youth, but for all of us entangled in the web of capitalist society, are subject to the alienation produced by capitalist social relations. The only way out is overcoming capital.

We understand your notion of 'dangerous citizenship' as a synonyme to disobedient citizenship. Would you agree with this understanding? And if so, against whom should the citizenry be disobedient to and why they should be disobedient?

Yes, that's the idea. Dangerous citizenship is a notion that attempts to communicate the risks, as I mentioned earlier, that are part of any thought or actions that resist the status quo and involve analysis and deconstruction of dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, or received wisdom. It requires inquiry into the deep meaning and root causes of the current contexts, developing a vision for the future that resolves the contradictions we have identified, and a political platform for taking action. To whom should the citizenry be disobedient? Anyone or anything that inhibits freedom or imposes inequitable conditions on our lives. I don't presume to make this decision for others, but for me the enemy is the system of capital. Others may stop short of that goal and work for more just conditions with capitalism or merely aim for the creative disruption of the authoritarian and alienating aspects of everyday life.

As rigid, coercive, and hierarchical institutions in service of capitalism, schools are not environments in which pedagogical imaginations are fostered or encouraged, although many creative teachers overcome the circumstances of their work. Dangerous citizenship is an idea that aims to provoke pedagogies that attempt to maximize the possibilities that

education can fulfill the fundamental human needs for creative work, creative inquiry, and for free creation without the limiting effects of coercive institutions (Ross & Vinson, 2014).

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