Situating radical pedagogies in social studies classrooms: An extended review of *Critical Theories, Radical Pedagogies, and Social Education*

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Introduction

As a student and teacher of social studies curriculum and pedagogy, I have encountered a range of conceptions of social studies, by experiencing and witnessing it as both practice and as praxis. Social studies pedagogy, at least in scholarly discourse, is contested, complex, evolving, dynamic, and amorphous (Clark, 2004; Nelson, 2001). As a school subject, it offers multifold potential to be a site of insightful and enriching engagement in the life world contexts that students inhabit, as well as a venue for purposeful and deliberate agency, encouraging students and teachers to engage in transformative action (den Heyer, 2009; Richardson, 2002; Sears, 2004; Segall & Gaudelli, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Social studies pedagogy in practice, however, is often conservative, reified, and stultifying. Its Deweyan democratic promise is largely undermined through covert class and race-based streaming that serves, more often than not, to sustain the status quo rather than encouraging students and teachers to overcome it (Apple, 1986; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000).

The scholarly literature critiquing social studies pedagogies is vast, rich, with the most provocative critiques emerging out of neo-Marxian inspired perspective. *Critical Theories, Radical Pedagogies, and Social Education: New Perspectives for Social Studies Education,* edited by Abraham DeLeon and E. Wayne Ross, is a refreshing collection of essays that offers a range of critical and radical voices which are generally marginalized in the critical social studies 'mainstream.' The editors argue that there is an urgency to transform social studies pedagogy and activate students' and teachers' potential to be agents who can address and overcome economic, social and political disparities in power, wealth, and access to resources, especially in the context of current global economic crises (DeLeon & Ross, 2010).

Critical theory-inspired pedagogies are eclectic and can prove difficult to reconcile with each other. Essays in this collection concurrently complement each other while challenging each other for pride-of-place in the struggle for attention and justice, sometimes leveraging power in ways that harm other marginalized communities and causes. What is evident in reading these essays is the intellectual and emotional challenge of grasping the complex challenges and tensions teachers encounter when their commitment to social justice is overwhelmed by a torrent of injustices. A further complicating reason that justifies teachers' resistance is the demand for a depth of understanding of political, social, and economic theories beyond anything that teacher education programs provide.

What is common among these essays is their critiques of neo-liberalism and marketplace logics. As an increasingly experienced reader of this genre, I have learned to both expect a bit of the unexpected, but to also encounter the familiar. The familiar is that these essays challenge readers to think and reimagine teaching practice and praxis, yet they are, collectively, light on remediation. The consequence is an audience problem. While there is much here for people in the academy, the counter-neoliberal discourses in these essays are short on deliverables for practicing and pre-service teachers, an irony I am sure is not lost on this books' editors. This collection is a good read with valuable insights that can impact teaching practice. Critical social studies pedagogies demand intellectual engagement and imagination if teachers are to make their subject area about fostering a desire to learn and act for change. While teachers may not *buy,* fully, into what is offered in these essays, readers have the chance to play with ideas they might not have otherwise encountered.

Working through the chapters

In chapter one, Abraham DeLeon (2010) argues for the inclusion of anarchistic radicalism in social studies. He points out that previously edited volumes of radical theory infused critical social studies pedagogy and omitted anarchist praxis. In this essay, DeLeon offers a critique of neo-Marxian critical theory's "over-reliance on a mythical state coming that may or may not come into being" as a temporal condition that tantalizes agents with the potential for change in an imminent future time (p. 3). Anarchism, instead, demands that teachers and students be autonomous agents to facilitate change both now and in the immediate future. He suggests that anarchism's potential stretches beyond neo-Marxian inspired critical theory by promoting action and sabotage to address, undermine, and overcome economic oppression. He writes that social studies teachers must imagine a praxis where sabotage-as-pedagogy is thought of as "creative and hopeful in remaking our world into something new," and that sabotage can be a "model for direct action" (p. 3) in social studies classrooms.

This sense of urgency runs through the whole collection of essays, yet, talk of a crises in social studies, especially in regards to engaged citizenship is not new (Sears & Hyslop-Margison, 2007). Current economic conditions both in North America and globally are aggravating economic and political disparities at a faster tempo than just a decade ago, but this receives insufficient attention in social studies classrooms. DeLeon argues that exploitive neo-liberal education has made "the lived reality of social studies is one of innate boredom where students are drilled about dates, dead white men are deified and worshiped, history is offered as a totalizing narrative and [students] are fed a decontextualized and sanitized curriculum" (2010, p. 5). As a counter-argument, DeLeon offers a subversive, infiltrating vision of social studies. His most radical idea is infiltrationism.

Infiltration must be a long-term commitment to secure the credentials and tenure necessary for subversion. While there may be committed individuals willing to invest the time, infiltration seems like a strategy unlikely to succeed. For the radical pedagogue,

sustaining a cover identity long enough to infiltrate a school and secure tenure runs contrary to the urgency at play in this essay. Further, the language of sabotage is likely to be understood in reductive ways, limiting the scope of what it might mean. Recognizing these opposing tensions, DeLeon's anarchism is tempered by pragmatism later in the chapter which renders some of his ideas more palatable to risk-taking teachers. For instance, 'micro-resistance' pedagogies with rhizomatic potential can encourage students to challenge assumptions, market logics and the authority of Western epistemologies.

In chapter 2, Nirmala Erevelles takes on the ostensibly *open-mindedness* of the academy that is too often a cleverly cloaked closed-mindedness clothed in liberal idealism, good will, and altruism. Too many faculty and students seem unable and unwilling to move from conversation about to praxis for social justice. A central issue is the convenient invisibility of domains that many students and scholars, myself included, have little exposure to. Erevelles helps unpack a range of intertwining domains of invisibility by employing a transnational feminist disability studies perspective to reveal how the privilege-to-not-know is reinforced by market logics that pit marginalized identifications against one another in a struggle for pride of place.

Some genuine intellectual work is necessary to ascertain Erevelles' pedagogic implications for social studies education. Readers are challenged early in her essay to take on the nature of privilege that opens the door to pity, revulsion, and surprise at the conditions in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Although questions central to purposeful democratic discourse and critical historical engagement likely permeated many social studies classrooms in the aftermath of Katrina, especially regarding the responses by various levels of government, what understandings might students and teachers have taken from classroom conversations, research, and action? Did Katrina-focused pedagogy lead to meaningful changes in the ways students live with each other and understand their capacities to act to transform their communities and the world?

Many teachers and students likely explored difficult questions about how governments responded, or the historical, political, social and economic circumstances led to the conditions in New Orleans, or critically analyzed the media coverage. While these avenues of inquiry are necessary and important to explore, Erevelles pushes readers to ask important critical questions likely left out in many classrooms: To what extent was the objective of government intervention the restoration of the status quo and the re-concealment of categories of the marginalized? What is the function of pity? Why is it that remediation after a crisis functions to re-conceal those we typically fail to see? How might we reconcile our indifference to the invisible with our rhetoric on equality?

Erevelles argues that marginality and invisibility are hierarchical, meaning that pride-of-place struggles take place beyond the gaze of the middle class. Critical disability studies offers an avenue to grasp how sublime taxonomies pathologize difference, forcing marginalized individuals and communities to cleave difference along imposed categories of gender, race, and ability/disability, competing for scarce resources and the attention of power, and denying access to means and opportunities to exercise collective political, economic and social power, themselves.

Pride-of-place in critical discourses frequently comes into play in social studies pedagogy, and justice-focused remediation as pedagogy crosscuts many domains. Which crises and injustices get our attention? How can we know, understand, and share with students the complexity of crises that are simultaneously distinct and integrated? How might the blurring of lines between and among the crises be an opportunity for democratic learning and living? Which pedagogies justly treat the multitude of injustices?

In chapter 3, Rebecca Martusewicz and Gary Schnakenberg make a case for the immediacy and divisiveness of ecojustice in public discourse. They argue that social studies classrooms are especially well suited to its pursuit concurrently with social justice and democracy. They open their chapter by articulating the goals of ecojustice pedagogy, among which is the necessity for students to engage in:

> an analysis of the linguistically rooted patterns of belief and behavior in Western industrial cultures that have led to a logic of domination leading to social violence and degradation, and secondly, to identify and revitalize the existing cultural and ecological "commons" that offer ways of living simultaneously in our own culture, as well as in diverse cultures across the world. (Martusewicz & Schnakenberg, 2010, pp. 25-26)

The revitalization of the commons is tied to countering the effects of a culture of violence embedded in capitalist neo-liberal logics. This, of course, is no easy task for teachers. Martusewicz and Schnakenberg argue that the ecological crisis is actually a cultural one tied up in transactional nature of language which reinforces status quo structures and epistemological assumptions in schools

Interrupting and challenging epistemological and disciplinary constructs that inhabit social studies is necessary for students to appreciate the possibility that other logics might govern human/human and human/environment relationships, but it is a pedagogic minefield for insufficiently committed and prepared teachers, students, and administrators. Importantly, this is where this chapter's authors tread into a critical site of resistance for social studies education – the challenge to extend our gaze to recognize the limitations and situatedness of our worldview. The dominant Western worldview posits capitalism and consumerism as inevitable products of progress. Its historical legacy of colonialism, racism, and oppression are too often characterized as unpleasant practices of less enlightened prior generations subsequently eliminated through legislation and social change (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; McMurtry, 2002). For teachers and administrators to alert students to the nature of the market logics that scaffold their worldview and encourage them to imagine alternatives, they must become political in ways that put employment and funding at risk. Following from the first essay in this collection, perhaps ecojustice might benefit from the notion of micro-resistance.

As a form of micro-resistance, for example, teachers might exploit neo-liberal logics to provoke critical engagement. How might critical pedagogies become more

appealing? What if we regarded them as entrepreneurial opportunities for justice rather than as subversive acts that undermine the security of the status quo? While I offer this somewhat facetiously, the struggle to overcome the resistance of teachers and public education to radical and transformative pedagogies seems ironic, since teachers, as a category of labourers, and "are by far the most unionized people in the USA, [with] more than 3.5 million members" according to Rich Gibson (2010, p. 43). Yet, in chapter four, Gibson notes that unions no longer function in dialectic tension with those in control of the capital funding for education. His Marxian analysis employs dialectical materialism to reveal the historical tension at the heart of the public education project, where the discursive freedoms of school occur in an environment in which capitalism and exploitation operate in both sublime and significant ways that inhibit and suppress students' capacities for agency and engagement. He writes that the "relationship of school to society where schools are, for the most part, capitalist schools is a reality ignored by liberal and even radical educators, particularly in the field of social studies" (p. 44).

While Gibson engages in a momentary ad hominem treatment of President Obama as "the demagogue," and US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan as "Chicago's education huckster," in the early stages of his analysis of capitalist education, the name calling is politically purposeful (p. 45). He argues that democracy, so central to civics and social studies in schools, is taken up in schools in ways that dilutes and diminishes collective will, eroding community-mindedness. Capitalism appeals to individual desires, consumption, and competition. He suggests that the agenda for public education under the current administration has become more corporatist than prior administrations, and that standardized curricula and a passive-aggressive relationship with teachers reinforces economic stratification along race and gender-based lines.

His analysis infers that the vision of schools as sites of Deweyan democracy and possibility are illusory manifestations of a capitalist curricula where freedom and critical engagement are tantalizing promises meant more to satisfy the rhetorical needs of policy makers than provoke engagement. Much of his critique of the capitalist agenda for public education is not new. What is new to me is where he takes his analysis in relation to unions and the diminished character of their antagonistic relationship with capital, especially in public education. Teachers in the United States, and, for that matter, Canada, are largely white and middle class. Historically, unions emerged to maintain the whiteness of labour and the professionalization of teaching moved teachers' unions into securing and sustaining middle-class status for practitioners. As teachers' wages rise, job security and the freedom to consume makes advocacy of a radical agenda difficult to reconcile with the class interests of teachers.

Like the authors of the previous chapters, Gibson argues for the necessity of recognizing, understanding, and challenging the epistemic and ontological assumptions. Similar to other authors in this volume, Gibson advocates for pedagogies that encourage and foster collective interests to displace ones that overtly and covertly train students to

be consumer citizens by limiting the potential scope of agency and participatory citizenship to consumer-like decisions.

Citizenship is a thematic concept central to social studies curricula that is semantically slippery, simultaneously possession and practice, yet in many classrooms its complexity is likely reduced in the interests of clarity and accessibility (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994; Osborne, 2005; Osler & Starkey, 2005). When citizenship is filtered through a liberal egalitarian middle-class lens and shared with students as an enlightened progress narrative, the extension of citizenship to the previously disenfranchised is celebrated as resolved rather than unpacked and analyzed. In chapter 5, Anthony Brown and Luis Urrieta Jr. take up another important body of constraints limiting the scope of personal agency and engaged citizenship through a comparative analysis of the enfranchisement of African Americans and Mexican Americans. The history of citizenship as a possession in the United States is an ongoing story still permeated by race. Brown and Urrieta Jr. employ racial contract theory to argue that the extension of citizenship to African Americans and Mexican Americans only occurs under conditions that advance white interests and always comes at the price of sustaining marginality.

As they trace elements of the African American citizenship narrative through manumission societies and segregated schools, and the history of Mexican and Latino/Latina citizenship in the US, Brown and Urrieta Jr. strike notes that hit analogous registers in Canadian citizenship narratives. Limiting the extension of citizenship rights to marginalized communities has long been based on notions of White Anglo-Protestant notions of moral superiority in both the United States and Canada (Banks & Nguyen, 2008; Willinsky, 1998). While this gets plenty of attention in scholarly writing and increasing attention in curriculum documents and textbooks, citizenship as a racialized discourse operates in tension with a powerful legislation-transforms-reality fallacy which posits that once a notion becomes law, lived reality is fundamentally and permanently transformed, therefore resolving the injustice. In my own experience as a teacher and teacher educator, I have encountered many students for whom egalitarian rights legislation has closed the book on racism as a current phenomenon.

Brown and Urrieta Jr. point out that egalitarian legislation sublimely extends white privilege, yielding legislative and administrative opportunities that draw on judicial decisions to re-secure the marginal status of racialized communities. What emerges out of this chapter is a rich historical appreciation of how whiteness continues to manifest itself as normative condition in curricula, rather than as a category of identification, thus avoiding meaningful interrogation in schools as it operates as the frame through which students are taught to perceive themselves and the world.

Throughout these essays, readers are regularly reminded of how market logics erode community-mindedness. In chapter 6, Kevin Vinson, Wayne Ross, and Melissa Wilson both sustain this theme and depart from the expected. Their essay takes up critical social studies education in relation to Guy Debord's notion of *spectacle* for which they

provide readers with sufficient explanation before transitioning into their conversation about social studies.

Debord's *spectacle* offers an interesting frame for unpacking and understanding human interaction with and in relation to streams of images encountered in the everyday consumer world. Despite being articulated nearly half-a-century ago, Debord's works is still timely, as images increasingly reach us through multiple and converging vectors, aggressively marketed to complement, supplement, and supplant one another.

Fundamentally, for social studies teachers and students, is learning how to understand and counter(balance) the effects of the *spectacle*, especially in how it erodes community and human-to-human relationships. Vinson, Ross, and Wilson make clear that rather than being Luddites, they appreciate the ways that technology can be purposeful and valuable. Their critique is that interactions inside and outside of schools are over-mediated and that "we simply e-interact as if there were no other choice. This is Debord's "pseudo-world," his "autonomous movement of non-life"" (p. 86).

Critical to understanding and addressing the challenges posed by the ways that capital-driven technologies and marketing shape human interaction and purposeful citizenship, teachers and students need to learn together to understand how *spectacle* functions through the dominance of images that elevate virtual experiences over lived ones. The *spectacle* is alienating as it mediates the boundaries between people, making them spectators in their own lives, subjecting them to marketing as a key element of almost any interaction. When *spectacle* takes on the appearance of life and supplants real life, it diminishes possibilities for community cohesiveness to exercise political, economic, and social agency.

This provides a foundation for the authors to offer a vision for critical social studies pedagogy, resituating it in the living world of people and their communities. To counter the powerful neoliberal thread of the *spectacle*, where individualism and narrow parochialisms suppress and deny community, critical pedagogy returns to its roots, to some extent, complemented by a range of *traditional* and contemporary critical perspectives and frames, such as drawing substantially on the work of Joe Kincheloe. They do offer a more current vision of critical pedagogy as theory and praxis which ties in well with the visions for social studies pedagogies offered throughout this volume and other recent articulations of purposeful critical engagement (den Heyer, 2009; Segall & Gaudelli, 2007).

This leads to the articulation of a Debordian vision of critical citizenship, a radical, playful, and purposeful reimagination of community-minded interaction and engagement, which emphasizes the humanness of community. Its *constructed situations* are intended to be playful and game-like, not governed by market-like competition rules. The intention of the game is to imbue human communities with life in the pursuit of liberation, countering the effects of the *spectacle* that diminish engagement. *Constructed situations* are one of three elements necessary to engage in Debordian citizenship as

praxis. The second element, the *dérive*, is an especially urban element of the playfulness of this vision of citizenship, involving walking or strolling in your community, not guided by a desire to necessarily reach a destination, but meant to facilitate encounters with the communities where we reside, restoring our connection with the people and places where we live. The idea of the *dérive* is to counter the *idiocy* of separation emerging out of the technological boundaries we purchase and erect around ourselves, and, instead, engage in a living critique of the *spectacle*. The final element is the *détournement*, "a mode for subverting the normal, [and] of contradicting or negating accepted behavior" (p. 105) such as squatting or occupying a public park to disrupt and reconstruct the ambiance of public spaces.

So, where does this fit in relation to radical social studies pedagogy? The authors argue that teachers must help students develop critical competencies that will help to ground them in recognizing and resisting the institutional and neoliberal mechanisms that perpetuate the *spectacle* and promote community fragmentation. Debord's writing offers avenues to engage in necessary inquiry about how our lives are shaped by the ubiquity of technology, especially how it mediates our connections and relationships from micro to macro levels, interrupting, controlling, and constraining what information reaches us by distracting or redirecting our attention while normalizing the capitalization of our gaze.

Technology as *spectacle* is increasingly central to curriculum and pedagogy by replacing and bypassing libraries, changing the ways students research and write, adding technology-based outcomes and standards to programs of study, and filling classrooms with expensive equipment that must be integrated into pedagogy. But how might technology's pedagogic value be extended beyond content sharing and mediating students' relationships with information? Students in technological societies implicitly recognize progress narratives as consumers of media devices. In chapter seven, Brad Porfilio and Michael Watz take on the place of progress and critical history in unpacking the progress narratives of industrialization, particularly how such stories operate to construct non-white *others*, concurrently suppressing and concealing inequity and injustice while celebrating technological advancement.

They begin with a consideration of world and state fairs to explore the *naturalness* of progress narratives that employ industrialization as evidence of the superiority of white Euro-American culture. Such fairs render an image of industrial progress and commercial output as natural material manifestations of human desire that ignores and erases the presence of underclasses and non-white others in the process of rendering a fantasy encounter with a promising present and glorious future. Porfilio and Watz argue that teachers and students need to take advantage of critical history opportunities to develop skills, values, and dispositions that contribute to the critical literacies necessary to redefine and reimagine themselves and their communities. In social studies and history education this means sharing the tools and understandings that allow them to unpack 'progress' to appreciate the absence and ignorance of other narratives not present in the narrative they know (den Heyer & Abbott, 2011).

Sounding a familiar critical pedagogy refrain, albeit a necessary one, Porfilio and Watz identify key zones of resistance in the American context that are extendable to other domains. Standardized exams and neo-liberal competitiveness policies tied up in programs like *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* deny social studies pedagogic time and resources, as well as critical literacy, in favor of functional literacy and numeracy. Further conservative pedagogic practices in social studies tend to render history as a stream of information celebrating the progress narrative and its ethno-racial and gender-limited gaze, which results in social studies and history classes being perceived as dull, resolved, uncontested and meaningless.

Their critical history of fairs and sporting events as *spectacle* is insightful, as they draw on Debord, neo-Marxian analysis, and critical race and gender theories. They argue that the bombardment of the working class with spectacle after spectacle is intended to stupefy and limit the scope of participatory citizenship to marketplace decisions. The authors offer insight into large-scale sporting events, gender-coded as male, such as the Olympics, that follow the market logics of competition and superiority tied to tremendous capital power. This capital is employed to overcome and suppress the interests of marginalized communities and transform cityscapes and landscapes by displacing the poor and others who have limited political and economic power.

Sporting events, though, are only one form of *spectacle* taken up in their chapter. Political *spectacle*, too, warrants attention as a rich site for the application of critical literacies by students and teachers. Here, readers encounter an unpacking of fear-mongering as a national, political and economic discourse, the normalization of the erosion of privacy and other sublime and overt policy actions, all complex and confusing, and all conveniently distilled down for the stupefied consumer by media outlets driven by advertising and powerful interests. Unquestionably, Debord's *spectacle* offers an alternative lens and playful manner through which students and teachers can critically encounter, understand, and engage with corporate power. Fundamentally, the playfulness of *constructed situations*, the *dérive*, and the *détournement* offer avenues to humanize communities and address injustices, and are potentially appealing in social studies classrooms because they seem to lack the overtly anarchistic edge of other radical pedagogies. But, in the light of the *Occupy* movement's moment in the sun, its *détournement* of disruption and parody, interrupting neo-liberal logics, fell victim to the *spectacle* itself. Its transformative power initially exploited technology to humanize the movement, but was too static to sustain momentum. The ubiquity of media avenues for the *Occupy* movement to reach their audience operated in tension with the deliverables-based expectations of a consumer audience. *Occupy's* disruption served as a distraction rather than an interruption of the ambiance of the public space. In some respects, the message acted to reinforce the *spectacle* and diminish individual and community agency.

The challenge that critical social studies pedagogy comes up against with students is not only continuing to hold their attention, but in viewing and participating in disruptions of the *spectacle*, youth need to perceive that change is taking place and that somehow their participation contributes to change. While *constructed situations* like the

Occupy movement may wake them up to possibilities, an absence of perceived transformation and agency risks alienating youth from commitments to critical engagement. When media coverage whithers and the *détournement* is no longer trending, students', teachers', and the community-at-large lose interest.

In chapter 8, *The Long Emergency*, David Hursh writes that the dominant approach to social studies pedagogy in the United States is to offer a myopic and exceptionalist vision of American society as the best of all worlds and the rightful terminus of the Western telos. He argues that social studies must be an interdisciplinary venue where students take on the essential question of our time: "How are we to create a world that is environmentally and economically sustainable?" (p. 139). The structure of the question opens curricular opportunities for students and teachers to engage in environmental and social justice oriented citizenship that impacts both themselves and their communities, by engaging a question worthy of resolution through purposeful transformative pedagogies (den Heyer, 2009; Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). As a central question around which teachers can build their pedagogies, students are positioned as agents capable of sharing in the resolution of the challenges rather than being, largely, receivers of others' wisdom.

We must include children in resolving the *long emergency* because their future is at stake. Collectively, the challenges are deep-rooted in the physical, temporal and ideological realms of the Western episteme, and solutions, even if they come soon, are too late to prevent damage (Hursh, 2010; Smith, 2006). Hursh notes the lack of political will to make schools into sites of research, imagination, and action for change, in an education system where neo-liberalism is ubiquitous, unacknowledged and uninterrogated. The notion that economic choice is the key means of exercising one's democratic franchise has permeated the language of schooling, government policy, and public discourse to the extent that students, teachers, and the public have accepted the atomism of neo-liberal subjectivity as normal.

In chapter 9, William Aramline builds on this by arguing that schools must offer opportunities for horizontal democracy where students can imagine themselves as engaged agents. This means that students must develop intellectual capacities to understand the contextual complexities necessary for purposeful participation in the polity. Armaline, like Hursh, argues that students need an appreciation of the complexity of the challenges they face as members of communities, but he shifts the centrality of social studies inquiry to human rights rather than the environmental and economic foci of the previous chapter. Like Hursh, Armaline's approach to social studies is a form of pedagogic *détournement* in the sense that students and teachers extend the parameters for decision-making beyond the mundane choices normally offered to students, negotiating with the curriculum rather than consuming it.

In fostering students' intellectual and democratic capacities, Armaline envisions schools as preparing students to understand and appreciate the complexity of their political, social, geographic, historic, and economic contexts. This vision is one that is

intended to undermine the hidden curricular notion that schools are there to train a workforce and sustain status quo inequalities (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). Aramline draws on Joel Spring's advocacy for education as a human right as well as a human rights discourse, emphasizing an emancipatory education to counter sublime and ignored narratives and assumptions that maintain the status quo.

In chapter 10, Wayne Au examines critical reflective practices in social studies education. His essay speaks to the potential of social studies praxis in accessing the ameliorative capacities of education to address social, political and economic inequalities and injustices. He begins with an accessible introduction to a dialectic theory of consciousness and its relationship to praxis and the generation of knowledge. Drawing on the work of a number of theorists, he argues that appreciating the dialectic tension of consciousness in relation to the material world is necessary to understand human capacities to both change the material world and to adapt to it. Au, drawing on Freire, points out that praxis emerges from the tension of being and consciousness that is inseparable from the world. Further, drawing on Vygotsky, being cannot be sustained as a solitary act; it is relational, acting as a foundation for language, thinking, and community, and praxis is the conscious human capacity to adapt, reflect and transform material reality so as to reveal "how external relations impinge upon our praxis – our thinking and acting – and considering whether such relations contribute to or liberate us from forms of oppression" (p. 169). Critical reflection must be introspective and retrospective, seeking to ensure that praxis does not result in the reproduction of oppressive conditions. The point he is making is an important one – students and teachers must appreciate that they have the capacity to think and act in ways that challenge the assumed order of things.

The collection of essays concludes with a brief chapter by Stephen Fleury where he offers his own critique of the essays in this book and speaks to the need for critical and radical pedagogies for social studies, as well as for the larger educational project. Social studies, it seems, is bereft of theory and lacks a coherent social vision and ethic. This is consistent with the critiques of social studies to which we are all familiar – it is a subject area where engagements with the social world seldom engage, account for, or interrogate the epistemological frame through which knowledge and understanding of the world are encountered and developed. The stories shared with students are linear, national ego-massaging, and reflective only to the extent that they are shared with students as enlightened and redemptive narratives already resolved by scholars and intellectuals for students to consume.

Fleury reinforces a point that permeates the text and the title of this collection, that approaches that critically challenge status quo practices are inevitably considered subversive. Social studies has long had an identity crisis that reinforces it listlessness (Clark, 2004; Nelson, 2001). The authors of essays in this collection still see possibility and promise in social studies as a subject area that can be a site of transformative engagement and that can interrupt conventional and conservative knowledge acquisition.

Appreciating how neoliberal thinking permeates this review

A book review inescapably functions to assess the potential value of a piece of writing for the field. While this collection is interesting, theory rich, and a challenging read, as a reviewer, I struggle with trying to figure out who the audience might be for this book. Some content is approachable for undergraduates in teacher education programs, but many essays require readers to have a good handle on theory and a solid grasp of the nature and evolution of social studies curriculum and pedagogy. While I read these essays as a researcher and teacher educator, I also tried reading them as a classroom teacher looking for the kind of pedagogic deliverables these essays are trying to counter. For better or worse, there are few deliverables that yield discreet and deployable pedagogies. I did find congruencies with my thinking, theorizing, and teacher education practice, but my experience with the latter tells me, anecdotally, that pre-service and practicing teachers will be the most strident resistors of the kinds of critical engagements taken up in this book.

The knowledge-as-commodity model is a feature of Western (and Western-style) education that is very difficult to disrupt, a point made by directly and indirectly in throughout this book. Further, the logics that reinforce status quo economic, social and political divisions and maintain conditions of injustice are ontologically well entrenched in the Western episteme. Essay authors know that what they are offering is a *hard sell*, and that transforming practice is daunting, feels risky, and, potentially, compromises the middle-class safety.

As a Canadian, I found these essays had an especially American flavour, particularly in relation to national education policy and standards, but also in relation to the nature of the narratives in which critical and radical pedagogies were grounded. A certain amount of intellectual work is involved in identifying and articulating analogous narratives in politically, socially, economically, and geospatially in Canada. This, too, might make it a more difficult sale in Canada.

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