

Critical Contemplative Pedagogy

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Abstract

In this paper, I make a case for a *critical contemplative pedagogy* that synthesizes critical pedagogy and contemplative pedagogy. A critical contemplative pedagogy may seem like a merger of two vastly distinct educational practices. Contemplative pedagogy is often posited as an inner-directed practice of helping students find balance and wholeness in their lives. Critical pedagogy is generally viewed as a form of education that is outer-directed and attempts to foster radical social change. I suggest that there is a logical and maybe even necessary fit between contemplative and critical educational practices. I offer the following five dimensions of critical contemplative pedagogy as a way to explain what is meant by this hybrid approach and why contemplative and critical educators might adopt it: (1) Establishes a foundation of nonduality; (2) Promotes an awareness of interdependence; (3) Encourages us to embrace impermanence; (4) Fosters intentionality; (5) Grounds the political with the personal.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, contemplative pedagogy, Paulo Freire, nonduality, interdependence; impermanence; social justice education

“If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” These words, attributed to Aboriginal activist Lilla Watson, serve as an important caveat to those of us who fashion ourselves as educators for social change. Critical education must begin with a reimagining of the relationship between teachers and

students. If educators fail to welcome students into the process of creating knowledge and constructing social reality, then our efforts will be futile. Critical education cannot be an exercise in filling students' heads with our expert database of arcane facts and definitions. As Freire (2000) famously argued in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a critical pedagogy needs to be premised on the idea of eradicating the teacher-student contradiction whereby the teacher is the only one who teaches and the students are the only ones who learn, the teachers know everything and the students are ignorant, and the teachers are subjects and the students mere objects.

These sentiments can also be found within the literature on contemplative practice, particularly in the context of awakening to our non-duality. Although the language used is somewhat different, the sentiment of having our liberation bound up with others is much the same. Consider how the Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön (1994) explains how transformative actions must arise from an understanding of our mutuality with others: "In order to have compassionate social action, there has to be a fundamental change of attitude. The notion 'I am the helper and you are the one who needs help' might work in a temporary way, but fundamentally nothing changes, because there's still one who has it and one who doesn't. That dualistic notion is not really speaking to the heart" (p. 103).

My purpose in this essay is to make a case for a *critical contemplative pedagogy* that synthesizes critical pedagogy and contemplative pedagogy. To some, a critical contemplative pedagogy may seem like a merger of two vastly distinct educational practices. Contemplative pedagogy is often posited as an inner-directed practice of helping students find balance and wholeness in their lives, whereas critical pedagogy is generally seen as a form of education that is outer-directed and attempts to foster radical social change. But as I detail below, there is a logical and maybe even necessary fit between contemplative and critical educational practices. I offer five dimensions of critical contemplative pedagogy that attempt to explain what is meant by this hybrid approach and why contemplative and critical educators might adopt it. Before offering this explanation, I provide a brief overview of both critical and contemplative pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogy

As initially articulated by Freire (2000), critical pedagogy is a radical approach to teaching and learning that attempts to use education as a vehicle for social transformation. For Freire, and the many educators and activists who followed in his footsteps (Darder, 2002; Giroux, 1983; hooks, 1994; McLaren,

2003; McLaren & Leonard, 1993; Shor, 1987, 1996; Wink, 2005), education is not something that is done *to* students; instead, education is something that is done *with* them in the mutual struggle for liberation (see *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, for a good introduction and comprehensive overview, and the *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* for more cross-cultural applications). The world is full of oppressive social structures and countless injustices and inequalities. Critical pedagogy, as form of teaching and learning, is explicitly intended to problematize these social ills so that students and teachers can work together toward their eradication.

Since the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's ideas have been advanced by supporters as well as altered by those who were sympathetic to his ideas but had issues with some of his assumptions and analytical omissions. Here, I am referring specifically to a variety of feminist (Fahs & Bertagni, 2013; hooks, 1994; Larson, 2006; Maher & Tetreault, 1994; Weiler, 1991) and critical race (Hughes, 2008; Jennings & Lynn, 2005; Lynn 1999, 2004) educators who took issue with a number of limiting assumptions in Freire's work. To his credit, Freire was open to these critiques. In true critical pedagogical fashion, he engaged in conversation with many of his critics and he used the dialogical process as a form of praxis to revisit and revise many of his assumptions (hooks, 1994; Horton, & Freire, 1990). The contributions of these educators and theorists are important and they have extended the analytical and the transformative scope of critical pedagogy.

Still, not all of these educators are comfortable with being labeled as critical pedagogues. Some would rather refer to their work in specific terms—feminist, queer, or critical race educators—while others have sought out more general labels such as anti-oppressive (Berila, 2016) or transformative (Mah y Busch, 2014; Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003). In my own work, and for the purposes of this essay, I still find the term "critical pedagogy" to be a useful and appropriate centralizing framework for those of us involved in radical and progressive education. Like Hattam (2008), I use critical pedagogy as an all-encompassing term that captures not only the Freirian tradition but also pedagogies based on feminism, multiculturalism, and multiliteracies. The common denominator for all of these critical pedagogies is to approach education as a process that uses content largely generated from the lived experiences of the learners with a desired outcome of social transformation. In this sense, the concept of critical pedagogy can be used to denote the preferred means and the desired ends of progressive educators. By proposing to use the term critical pedagogy in this universal way I am in no way negating or denying the importance of these other versions of critical education.

Instead, I am merely settling upon a term that I feel best expresses the educational intent of these critical approaches to teaching and learning.

I am also employing critical pedagogy as an umbrella term because there is already a growing tradition of synthesizing critical pedagogy with other educational philosophies and approaches that are related to contemplative practices. For example, Freire's work has been merged with the *Tao Te Ching* (Roberts, 2013), socially-engaged Buddhism (Hattam, 2008), and Buddhist meditation (Golding, 2015). Additionally, Pigza and Welch (2010) formulated a "spiritually engaged pedagogy" that builds on the inherent interconnections between spirituality and social justice (Pigza & Welch, 2010). Similarly, Ryoo and associates (2009) posited a "critical spiritual pedagogy" that seeks to reverse the dehumanizing effects of mainstream education by focusing on spirituality, humanity, and power.

More specifically, an increasing number of pedagogues are introducing various contemplative practices into the classroom with the explicit intent of addressing issues of social justice (Adarkar & Keiser, 2007; Berila, 2016; Chatman, 2014; Kahane, 2009; Magee, 2012, 2015; Mah y Busch, 2014; Makransky, 2011). In my view, referring to these approaches individually as, say, "contemplative feminist pedagogy" or "contemplative critical race pedagogy" runs the risk of weakening the educational movement of which they are all part. Instead of adopting such conceptual disaggregations of these similar approaches, I am proposing that we embrace the term *critical contemplative pedagogy* because it reflects this unique fusion in a clear and succinct manner. In espousing this term, I hope that the growing number of educators who combine contemplative educational practices with critical educational practices will coalesce and build both a social identity and a social movement as critical contemplative pedagogues.

Contemplative Pedagogy

Compared to critical pedagogy, which dates back to the 1970s, contemplative pedagogy is a relatively new movement within education. It is somewhat ironic that the implementation of contemplative practices in teaching and learning is still so new given that the majority of these practices date back thousands of years. Although there is no doubt that various educational practitioners have used contemplative practices in their classroom for many years, as a widely recognized movement and with a still developing institutional structure (associations, conferences, journals, books), what we today call contemplative pedagogy dates back to only the late 1990s.

Because it is still emerging and evolving, there is not always consensus as to what constitutes contemplative pedagogy. For example, Zajonc (2013) refers to the “educational methods that support the development of student attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion, and altruistic behavior, while also providing new pedagogical techniques that support creativity and the learning of course content” (p. 83). Barbezat and Bush (2014) focus on educational practices that have an “introspective, internal focus” and that “have an inward or first-person focus that creates greater connection and insight” (p. 5). And Hart (2004), views contemplative pedagogy as “a practical epistemic question” that encourages “the natural human capacity for knowing through silence, looking inward, pondering deeply, beholding, witnessing the contents of our consciousness, and so forth” (pp. 29-30).

Although each of these definitions is somewhat distinct, and there are others like them, they do share a focus on the inner lives of students and providing space in the classroom to let this “first-personness” breathe. Contemplative pedagogy, like contemplative practices, revolves around introspection, reflection, and attention. Moving away from the traditional educational framework where students are seen as disconnected receptacles for one information dump after another, contemplative pedagogues strive to treat students and the educational process with humanness and compassion.

It should not be too surprising that the specific practices of contemplative pedagogy are as wide and diverse as the types of contemplative practices that exist. Contemplative practices have been in development for many millennia and in all cultures. Although the contemplative pedagogy movement has only crystalized over the past five years or so, educators working in this realm have not been reticent about adopting and adapting an impressive diversity of practices that date back hundreds if not thousands of years. To get a sense of the range of contemplative pedagogical practices that educators are bringing into the classroom, it is useful to consult the Tree of Contemplative Practices developed by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (<http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>). Beyond just various forms of meditation and yoga, the Tree of Contemplative Practices identifies a range of other practices, or branches, from storytelling and singing to centering and deep listening.

One of the main branches on the Tree of Contemplative Practices is labeled "activism." This branch contains a number of practices such as taking trips to sites of social justice activity, working and volunteering for social causes, attending

marches and vigils, and bearing witness. Beyond these examples, the activist component of contemplative practice has been gaining some traction over the past few years to the point where it might be justifiably sprouting its own sapling. As noted above, there is a growing body of literature by contemplative pedagogues who are working in this vein. In books and articles as well as conference presentations and even whole conferences, the practice of using contemplative pedagogy as a vehicle for social change is slowly taking hold.

Critical Contemplative Pedagogy

So what, then, does a critical contemplative pedagogy look like and why should we even consider blending these two educational practices? Educators working for many years in either tradition may want to rightly know what the rationale is for a critical contemplative pedagogy.

Contemplative pedagogues may question why they cannot just have students engage in meditation, yoga, and other practices and maintain a focus on presence, attention and stillness. Why must they include activism and social action into these calming and centering exercises? Will they run the risk of burdening and overwhelming students by addressing issues of social change and oppression? Should they really incorporate themes that might lead to further stress and worry when one of the main reasons for introducing contemplation is to alleviate stress and worry? And what if the educators are not comfortable addressing these issues either because they feel they are not well-versed in these themes or because they do not want to (or are not allowed to) “politicize” the classroom? How are they supposed to discuss ideas, concepts, and even actions that are foreign to them or that they do not have the administrative support to present?

On the other side, some (maybe many) doing social justice work in the classroom may balk at incorporating contemplative practices into their curriculums. These educators may not be comfortable with and may actually outright reject what they deem to be spiritual, religious, or even introspective practices. For these educators, such practices have no place in a secular classroom. And even if they do not exhibit such explicit resistance, they may wonder how these seemingly inner-focused practices help in the day-to-day struggle against macro-level inequality and injustice. How are meditation, yoga, and other contemplative practices going to help bring about the revolution? Don't we need students getting out of their seats and into the streets? What good is it to have them sitting quietly and calmly in the secluded environs of the classroom when there is so much injustice and oppression in the world?

These are all valid and important concerns. If there is to be a movement or branch of critical contemplative pedagogy, then we must be able to articulate a foundation for this educational approach. As noted above, a number of educators are already on this path and critical contemplative pedagogy is beginning to take hold. As a way to support and contribute to our developing understanding of critical contemplative pedagogy, I offer the following five dimensions. These dimensions are intended to answer the questions: what is critical contemplative pedagogy and why do we need it? These five points are drawn largely from my academic background in sociology and my contemplative practice, which has been primarily influenced by Buddhism. This approach, what we might call a “Buddhist sociology” or “Buddhist social theory” (Immergut & Kaufman, 2014; Jones, 2003; Loy, 2003; Schipper, 2012), should be acknowledged as my epistemic orientation; however, I hope that it is not viewed as limiting or overly subjective. My goal in offering this framework is that all critical contemplative pedagogues, as well as others who are intrigued by this path, will see the universality of these five dimensions.

1. Establishes a Foundation of Nonduality

When many of us think of contemplative practices we often focus on the inner, first-person work of moving within. The mainstream conception of meditation, mindfulness and even yoga is that individuals engage in these practices, in part, as a way to deal with the stresses and worries of our everyday existence. Many even embrace the idea that these practices are done as a way to retreat, if only momentarily, from the intensity of daily life. There is no denying the utility of contemplative practices for these purposes. Particularly when employed in an educational context, these practices are often intended to help students deal with the pressures, anxieties, and preoccupations they experience. And for most students who begin these practices, these are exactly the types of positive effects they experience.

But contemplative practices, both within the classroom and in the larger context, are not only intended to shield us from the unwanted, nor are they merely a mechanism for each one of us to find solace in our own equanimity. Engaging in contemplative practices is also an important mechanism for us to recognize that we are not separate from others. As Buddhist scholar David Loy (1992) argues: “Meditation is learning how to become nothing by learning to forget the sense-of-self, which happens when I become absorbed in my meditation-exercise” (p. 173). Another way to say this is that “most contemplative practices have a fundamentally nondualistic orientation” in which “the ordinary dualistic way of approaching self

and world will be challenged and finally dissolved” (Klein & Gleig, 2011, p. 192). “Relating with nonduality,” as Chogyam Trungpa (2013, p. 22) refers to it, is a crucial component of contemplative practice because it helps us to recognize that we are not the center of the universe, nor do we exist in our own little bubble. When nonduality becomes part of our epistemic reality, our mindset shifts to not only be attentive to our own needs but also to the needs of others.

Nonduality is also central to critical pedagogy. Although Freire acknowledged that “teachers and students are not identical” nor are they “on the same footing professionally” (1994, p. 116-117), his critique of the student-teacher contradiction is clearly based on a non-dualistic orientation: “There is, in fact, no teaching without learning. One requires the other. Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning” (1998, p. 31). In other words, learners and educators must see themselves not as separate entities but as mutually supportive and equally responsive; otherwise, the educational process is not only dualistic but also unequal. Critical pedagogues who fail to renounce dualities in schools are guilty of supporting the types of unbalanced and unjust relationships that they are purporting to be against. One cannot promote equality, social justice, and anti-authoritarianism in society if one is not cultivating these same things in the classroom.

A critical contemplative pedagogy is necessary, then, because it serves as an experiential reminder that the self-other mindset not only pervades our thoughts but also poisons our actions. Approaching social justice work in a typical dualistic framework is a recipe for the type of privileged paternalism that posits “us” as the saviors and “them” as the ones in need of saving. As Chödrön reminds us in the quote cited at the beginning of this essay, compassionate social action is not possible within a me versus you or us versus them framework. However, by seeing ourselves in non-dualistic ways, and by participating in a non-dualistic classroom, we reinforce Lila Watson’s assertion that working (or educating) for social change is a process of working *with* and not a process of working *for*. Thich Nhat Hanh (1988) makes this point succinctly when he notes, “Any meaningful work for peace must follow the principle of nonduality” (p.12).

2. Promotes an Awareness of Interdependence

Once a foundation of nonduality is established we are able to develop a clearer understanding of interdependence. For many of us in the West, interdependence may be a difficult concept to grasp initially. There is so much emphasis in our culture on individualism, individuality, and independence that we

are often oblivious to our interconnectedness with all sentient beings. Without others we could literally not exist. And yet, we often proceed through our daily lives with a “go-it-alone” sense of bravado that suggests the only person we need and can count on is our own self. Interdependence is a necessary corrective to this myopic view and helps us to see the entire forest beyond just the one tree staring back at us in the mirror.

It is well established that bringing contemplative practices into the classroom greatly facilitates our connection with others (Barbezat and Bush, 2014). By having students engage in various forms of contemplation we offer them as well as ourselves an alternative orientation to the prevailing paradigm in academia. As Bache (2011) points out, “our academic institutions for the most part have committed themselves to an ‘atomistic psychology’ that emphasizes separation and self-autonomy” (p. 65). When we incorporate contemplative pedagogical strategies into our course curriculums we are able to cultivate a collective dynamic that accentuates our interdependence and helps us recognize “the simultaneity of our experience with others” (Blinne, 2014, p. 12). This emphasis on union, commonality, and connection is central to many contemplative traditions. Consider, for example, this passage from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

He who is rooted in oneness
realizes that I am
in every being, wherever
he goes, he remains in me.

When he sees all beings as equal
in suffering or in joy
because they are like himself,
that man has grown perfect in yoga. (BG 6.29-32)

In addition to planting the seeds of interdependence, contemplative practices also help to form the basis for social action because “it is the feeling of interconnectedness with everything that allows us to feel empathy with and sympathy for other beings (Kyabgon 2007, p. 51). Empathy and sympathy are indeed important ingredients for activists but they may not always drive us to social action. However, interdependence also helps us to see how we are accountable to each other and this mutuality is difficult to ignore when we exert our agency—a point made cogently by Loy (2003) in his essay, “The Nonduality of Good and Evil”:

The delusion of separation becomes wisdom when we realize that no one is an island. We are interdependent because we are all part of each other, different facets of the same jewel we call earth. This world is not a collection of objects but a community of subjects, a web of interacting processes. Our “interpermeation” means we cannot avoid responsibility for each other (p. 108)

From a critical perspective, the notion of a “web of interacting processes” is often referred to by a different name: intersectionality. Knowledge of intersectionality is crucial for any critical perspective—be it critical pedagogy, critical theory, or critical social action. Intersectionality refers to the manner through which systems of oppression (racism, sexism, classism, etc.) are interconnected such that it is impossible and incomplete to look at one dimension without also accounting for the other dimensions (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1991; Weber, 1998). In developing our capacity to see our oneness with others, contemplative practices can open the door of awareness so that we can recognize that our successes and failures—both individually and collectively—are inherently tied up with others. As Patricia Hill Collins (1991) points out, this is a central insight of intersectionality:

Although most individuals have little difficulty identifying their own victimization within some major system of oppression—whether it be by race, social class, religion, physical ability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or gender—they typically fail to see how their thoughts and actions uphold someone else’s subordination. [...] In essence, each group identifies the oppression with which it feels most comfortable as being fundamental and classifies all others as being of lesser importance. Oppression is filled with such contradictions because these approaches fail to recognize that a matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors. Each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone’s lives (p. 229)

Critical contemplative pedagogy facilitates the development of this awareness by fusing together the experiential wisdom of interdependence that is gained through contemplation with the analytical understanding of oppression that we learn from critical theory. Once we have a solid grasp of this perspective it will be easier and more likely for us to engage in informed and mutually sustaining social action.

It is important to point out that a critical contemplative pedagogy facilitates these process and outcomes but it does not necessitate them. It is possible to gain

an appreciation for interdependence and intersectionality without contemplative practices; similarly, one may gain an orientation toward social change without being immersed in critical education. But the fact that the two pedagogies have this symbiosis makes it more likely that objectives of both contemplative and critical pedagogy will be better understood and achieved when adopted simultaneously. Educators practicing a non-critical contemplative pedagogy may highlight our interdependent reality for students but then leave the class without any direction for how to channel this new-found knowledge. And educators who are promoting a critical pedagogy without incorporating contemplative practices may find that students are working for social change because it makes them feel good and not because they harbor a deep fellowship with others. Much like Freire's classic definition of praxis, reflection + action = social transformation, critical contemplative pedagogy brings together two sides of the same coin to their rightful realization.

3. Encourages us to Embrace Impermanence

One of the powerful lessons we learn from contemplative practices is impermanence. As we meditate, do yoga, visualize, sit with our thoughts, journal, or even chant, we come to understand and appreciate the transient nature of all things. Thoughts, bodily sensations, and sounds all come and go. As mindfulness meditation teacher Bhante Henepola Gunaratana (2002) tells us, “the essence of our experience is change. Change is incessant. Moment by moment life flows by, and it is never the same. Perpetual fluctuation is the essence of the perpetual universe” (p. 9). We often resist this lesson because we are conditioned to grasp onto a solid and permanent conception of reality, especially a solid sense of self. We ignore the lesson of impermanence because if all things do come and go then that means *all* things—including our family, friends, jobs, hobbies, possessions, and ultimately, ourselves. Introducing contemplative practices into the classroom is particularly powerful because they help to illuminate “the changing, contingent, and creative character of ourself and the world [and thereby] undermine the fixated, frozen view of things that traps us in cycles of craving and anguish” (Batchelor, 1997, p. 95).

The notion of constant change is also central to critical pedagogies. In one of the most famous statements by one of the earliest critical theorists, Marx (2013) expressed the ubiquity of impermanence under capitalism: “All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air” (p. 64). Change is not only recognized as an ever-

present process among critical pedagogies; more importantly, it is recognized as the desired outcome of our efforts. Bringing about social change is central to all critical approaches to education. We study the social world and we learn about the layers of injustice, inequality, and oppression so that we may work to eradicate these social ills and change society for the better. Critical pedagogues want to help students recognize the need for change, help them envision change, and ultimately, contribute to bringing about such change.

A critical contemplative pedagogy fuses together the inevitability of change at both the micro and the macro level. It helps us understand that what we experience individually is also transpiring collectively. Much like the lesson of interdependence, a critical contemplative pedagogy brings together experiential wisdom and abstract knowledge. Initially, impermanence may help us deal with our own feelings of anxiety, angst, and worry because we come to see these troublesome things as mere thoughts that come and go. The next step, however, is to view impermanence in a macro context and recognize that oppressive social structures and social institutions may also come and go (especially if we work to change them). Getting to the point of seeing the mutability of social life is challenging because we “habitually assume the world presented through the senses to exist out there as it appears” and subsequently we lose sight of the fact that the “world is always an arena of possibilities” (Batchelor, 1997, p. 70). But the lesson of our ever-changing reality is crucial if we are ever to exert our agency and create alternative and less oppressive social conditions. As Buddhist monk and filmmaker Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse (2007) succinctly points out, “if there is no impermanence, there is no progress or change for the better” (p. 27).

There is one last point about impermanence that bears mentioning. A critical contemplative pedagogy helps us deal with the inevitability of our letdowns and disappointments as we struggle for social justice. A personal practice of contemplation serves as a form of regular exercise that strengthens our muscles of equanimity. When we are confronted by life’s vicissitudes we can flex these muscles and manage adverse circumstances in a more poised, level-headed, and balanced manner. Through regular contemplative practice, we develop non-attachment to “success, praise, fame or pleasure” and therefore are less likely to suffer “when the winds of life change direction” (Fronsdal, 2004). Such equanimity is particularly important when we are working for social change. As any activist knows, winning every battle is unlikely. If we do not have the inner resolve to handle these regular setbacks, and even see value in what Courtney Martin calls “good failure” (Martin, 2010), then we may succumb to frustration and disillusionment and quickly experience burn out. By getting to know

impermanence experientially from our contemplative practice, we are better equipped to both deal with it and bring it about when we engage with the world as activists.

4. Fosters Intentionality

If we are making a conscious decision to introduce contemplative practices into our classes, we have probably reflected on why we are doing this, what we hope to achieve, and what we would like the classroom community to gain from it. It is hard to imagine someone introducing these practices unless they have reflected on their usefulness and were also committed to doing them personally. Questions about process and motivation are crucial ones to be asking about any curriculum decisions we make; unfortunately, we do not always ask them. Sometimes we unreflectively teach in the same manner we were taught: we lecture to students just like our professors lectured to us, we give midterms and finals in the same way that we endured these exercises in regurgitation, and we prize disciplinary content over the learning process in much the same fashion that we were treated as objects and not subjects.

A critical contemplative pedagogy encourages educators to think carefully about the things we are doing. Just as we would not have students meditate without a clear rationale and commitment to using meditation, we should not teach the way we do without a clear commitment and consideration of our methods and strategies. If we want students to be agents of change, to engage in action-research projects that address issues of discrimination and inequality, to co-create the syllabus so they have a voice in what they learn, or to organize rallies and events on campus and in the community, then we need to contemplate why we are choosing to implement this sort of radical curriculum. We also need to give some thought to how we expect it to transpire. We need to become what Stephen Brookfield (1995) calls critically reflective educators so that we “understand how considerations of power undergird, frame, and distort educational processes and interactions . . . [and] question assumptions and practices that seem to make our teaching lives easier but actually work against our own vest long-term interests” (p. 8).

Because it combines a deep personal awareness with an equally deep social awareness, a critical contemplative pedagogy is ideally suited to fostering the type of intentionality and conviction that is necessary for this sort of teaching and learning. There is no going through the motions with a critical contemplative pedagogy. Committing oneself to practicing contemplation for an entire semester

requires the same level of devotion and dedication as agreeing to study and struggle against injustice and oppression. Moreover, as should be evident by now, there is a synergy between contemplative and critical pedagogies. By engaging in both practices simultaneously, students and faculty alike have a greater sense of sincerity and a genuine commitment to both personal and social transformation. This point was articulated by the thirteenth-century German theologian Meister Eckhart in *The Book of Devine Consolations*. Although using different language, Eckhart's words suggests how contemplative pedagogy lays the groundwork for and substantiates critical pedagogy: "Thus the outer work can never be minor, when the inner work is a major one; and the outer work can never be major when the inner work is a minor one and without value."

5. Grounds the Political with the Personal

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2000) writes that his greatest concern is that the oppressed will break free from their shackles of oppression only to become the latest generation of oppressors. Because "the very structure of their thought" assumes that "to be human is to be [an] oppressor," the oppressed must work to "surmount the situation of oppression" and "create a new situation ... which makes possible the pursuit of fuller humanity" (p. 28-29). Loy (2003) raises a similar concern when he points out that there are too many recent and historical examples of well-intentioned revolutionary leaders who were ultimately responsible for the same type of repressive regimes that they fought against so passionately. But we need not even look at the political landscape to see examples of this. How many educators (or parents, older siblings, coaches, supervisors, administrators, etc.) act in ways that they abhorred and bemoaned as unfair when they were in subordinate positions? How many of us fail to practice what we once (or still) preached? How many of us reflect the dictum: Do as I say, not as I do? The conditioning we get from our socialization is a powerful force. Unless we make conscious efforts to de- and re-condition ourselves we will be unintentionally culpable of becoming the new oppressors in whatever capacities of leadership we find ourselves.

An important benefit of a critical contemplative pedagogy is that it largely guards against our conditioning becoming deterministic (Freire, 1998, p. 26). Just because we may have learned that oppressive, overbearing, and authoritarian conduct is the norm in some settings, we do not have to necessarily reproduce such contemptible behaviors. We have the capability to choose to act otherwise. By anchoring ourselves in our own personal practice of contemplation, and by coming to realize our non-dual, interdependent, and impermanent nature, we begin to shed

the “it’s-all-about-me” mentality of greed and wanting that underlies the quest for power, control, and domination. Narcissism, competitive individualism, and even the distrust or dismissal of others become less pronounced the further we venture into our contemplative practice. This point was captured by Nāgārjuna (ca 150–250 CE), one of the most important Buddhist philosophers, in the following excerpt from his masterpiece, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way) (cited in Batchelor, 2000, p. 114):

What is mine
When there is no me?
Were self-centeredness eased,
I would not think of me and mine—
There would be no one there
To think them.

What is inside is me,
What is outside is mine—
When these thoughts end,
Compulsion stops,
Repetition ceases,
Freedom dawns.

Once we begin shedding the many layers of this me-mine mindset, we position ourselves to be true *social* agents of change. Instead of working for change because it may make *me* feel good or because it may assuage *my* guilt, we engage in anti-oppressive actions because we know that our fleeting lives are intricately tied up with the lives of all others. We are no longer just working for others but, rather, we are working with others in solidarity. Similarly, instead of engaging in contemplative practices merely as a mechanism to alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression in our own lives, we learn to move away from this self-preoccupation and the egotism and duality that it reinforces. Although we may acknowledge and even appreciate the personal benefits we may gain from these practices, we also come to acknowledge, appreciate, and revere the collective well-being that our practices engender. Through critical contemplative pedagogy self-interest is readily replaced with social interest; the personal grounds the political.

Concluding Thoughts

The ideas presented here should be taken as pieces of an ongoing and developing conversation. By all measures, what I am referring to as critical

contemplative pedagogy is still very much in its nascent form. Although critical pedagogy has a long-standing tradition in education, and contemplative practices have existed since the dawning of humanity, the fusion of these two as a unified strategy for teaching and learning is just now gaining attention. The purpose of this essay is to contribute to this emerging dialogue, encourage others to advance these ideas further, and inspire educators to incorporate a critical contemplative framework in their curriculums. There is no shortage of pain and suffering in the world, at both the individual and collective level. Although it is no panacea to the weight of the world's (or our personal) problems, a critical contemplative pedagogy is at least a conscious attempt to not just be the change we wish to see in the world but to work to bring about that change as well.

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