

## ABSTRACT

GUTHRIE, NICHOLE HURLEY. Necessary Contradictions: Critical Pedagogy and Kenneth Burke's Pentad. (Under the direction of Patricia Lynne.)

Critical pedagogy, a teaching philosophy that encourages critical reflection in students so that they may expose and change oppressive societal structures, has been plagued by criticisms from a variety of sources. Critics charge that critical pedagogy is marred by irreconcilable contradictions such as its inappropriateness for non-oppressed students, its neglect of students' needs, and its unsuitability for most instructors privileged by the dominant ideology. Examining the internal consistency of Kenneth Burke's pentadic ratios can be a useful tool for analyzing these contradictions, specifically those related to scene-act, agent-purpose, and act-agent. However, these contradictions, inherent in the very nature of critical pedagogy, seem to defy Burke's pentad. Without inconsistencies between critical pedagogy, its purpose, its agents, and the broader scene in which it operates, the impetus for the enactment of critical pedagogy would not be present. Therefore, instead of seeking to deny or eradicate contradiction, critical theorists and educators need to make use of it in their own philosophies and practices. Because both critical educators and their students should confront and grapple with these contradictions in critical practice, the apparent flaws in critical pedagogy can actually encourage the critical consciousness that is the goal of the enterprise.

**NECESSARY CONTRADICTIONS: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY  
AND KENNETH BURKE'S PENTAD**

by  
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## **Introduction**

Critical pedagogy is a theory of teaching that seeks to counteract the often oppressive conditions of schooling and society. Through dialogue and active questioning of the mechanisms that perpetuate inequality, teachers and students of critical pedagogy can become more active and critical citizens. Critical educators, armed with “a vision of a better world,” ultimately hope to help students understand and eventually alter society in ways that lead to more equitable social, political, and economic landscapes (Miller 11). Yet despite these admirable goals, many critics have pointed out flaws and inconsistencies in critical pedagogy. For example, some argue that critical pedagogy is not an appropriate method for privileged students who benefit from society’s oppressive structures. Others claim critical pedagogues risk ignoring students’ goals in order to achieve the pedagogy’s goals. Finally, several educators question how true to critical pedagogy many teachers can remain when they themselves are privileged by the very structures critical pedagogy requires them to critique.

These criticisms, in part, have diminished the impact of critical pedagogy, especially in the classroom itself. Perhaps for these reasons, critical pedagogy has had limited influence in actual classrooms, even as it has enjoyed “persistent development [...] as manifested in books, scholarly journals, and presentations at professional conferences” (Stanley 93). This paper will further that theoretical development through a careful examination of the apparent inconsistencies in critical pedagogy. Henry Giroux writes that such inconsistencies “offer a number

of questions that need to be addressed by critical educators about not only Freire's earlier work but also about their own" (19). I will address these questions and illustrate the necessity and value of the perceived flaws of critical pedagogy, in terms of both Freire's theoretical ideas as well as their implementation in the classroom. My study will reveal that the inconsistencies in critical pedagogy can be exploited in useful ways in the classroom itself.

As Jennifer Gore explains, critical theorists "need to theorize the contradictory moments—to introduce theories that make spaces for the many exceptions found in the experiences and classrooms of teachers and students" (49). In this paper, I will explore at length three of these contradictory moments using Kenneth Burke's pentadic ratios. Burke's pentad allows critics to analyze the relationships between various elements of a discourse, and a study of the consistency between these elements can reveal the sources of the contradictions in critical pedagogy. Ultimately, I will show that these contradictions are inherent, unavoidable, necessary, and even beneficial in the discourse and enterprise of critical pedagogy. Accordingly, I will also argue that critical educators must make contradictory moments a central part of their pedagogical practices. Rather than seeking eradication of contradiction, these scholars and teachers must make use of the opportunity contradiction provides for the achievement of critical pedagogy's goals.

### **Critical Pedagogy and Its Critics**

Because even veteran scholars find it difficult to define, critical pedagogy does not easily fit the confines of a traditional scholarly review. Known variously as critical pedagogy, liberatory pedagogy, and radical pedagogy, this philosophy and method of teaching is used in a variety of disciplines, and critical instructors enact the theories of critical pedagogy with various strategies. As Peter McLaren notes, “Critical pedagogy does not [...] constitute a homogenous set of ideas. It is more accurate to say that critical theorists are united in their *objectives*: to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices” (*Life* 160). Yet even if the objectives of critical pedagogy can unite critical educators around a common cause, not everyone agrees on how to achieve its goals. More importantly and more problematically for advocates of critical pedagogy, not all educators agree that the goals of critical pedagogy are admirable or worth pursuing. Because of the divisions and disagreements critical pedagogy creates among scholars and educators, an examination of its foundations, problems, and possibilities may all serve to illuminate the murky terrain of this complex field.

Many of the philosophical assumptions supporting critical pedagogy originate in critical theory, most of which stems from the German Frankfurt school (Burbules and Berk 50). McLaren explains, “A number of critical educational theorists, Henry Giroux, for example, continue to draw inspiration from the work of the Frankfurt School of critical theory [...]” (*Life* 159). Critical

theorists believe that the ideals of democracy, including schooling, have been usurped by the “market logic of capitalism” (Kanpol, *Issues* 8, 9). These theorists, arguing that traditional classrooms work in the service of capitalist economic relations at the expense of encouraging critical and active citizens, have developed models of schooling based on what they call reproduction theory. Alan A. Block describes reproduction theory as “the ways in which the schools reproduce the social relations prevalent in the larger society in order to maintain the status quo and the existing relations of production and power” (67). Reproduction theorists posit that schools are both created by and create socioeconomic stratification. In this way, schools reproduce the existing economic and social order despite the apparent democratic aims of education in America.

Block points to Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis’ *Schooling in Capitalist America* and Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron’s *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* as the pioneers of reproduction theories. Bowles and Gintis detail the ways in which schools prepare students for integration into the capitalist workforce rather than for a democratic and civic engagement that might challenge that workforce. They also describe the mechanisms in schooling that perpetuate class structure. Similarly, Bourdieu and Passeron claim that schools endorse the culture of dominant classes and devalue the culture of marginalized groups. They call the values, beliefs, and practices of the ruling elite “cultural capital” and argue that classrooms reinforce this capital

in order for students to succeed in the dominant ideology (Hardin 41). Yet despite the impact of reproduction theories, critical theorists like Bowles, Gintis, Bourdieu, and Passeron have been criticized for offering a very dismal view of schooling without constructive suggestions for change (Miedema and Wardekker 75).

However, as McLaren points out, many critical theorists define schools in two ways: as reproductive mechanisms *and* as “agencies for self and social empowerment” (*Life* 160). Some scholars propose student resistance as a means to achieve this empowerment. For critical theorists and critical educators, resistance occurs when students actively question and critique dominant ideology. Joe Marshall Hardin defines resistance as “behaviors and practices that work against the unconscious reification of cultural values or that disrupt the strictly acculturative goals of the [...] classroom” (38). However, not everyone agrees on the power of resistance to create significant change. As Barry Kanpol cautions, acts of resistance are necessary to perpetuate hegemony and reproduction: “Resistant acts are needed and must be incorporated in social relations for reproduction, accommodation, or conformity to be accomplished” (*Issues* 38). Token acts of resistance can be commodified in order to make an entirely hegemonic institution appear radical. Yet ultimately, despite Kanpol’s serious warning, critical theorists and critical educators can take some measure of hope from the possibility that resistant acts can counteract the reproductive nature of schooling.

This promise of the power of resistance to essentially liberate students from the oppressive nature of reproductive schooling inspired Paulo Freire to formulate his own critical philosophy of teaching. Interestingly, despite all of the contributors to the theories supporting critical pedagogy, scholars often credit Freire as the founder of critical pedagogy as we know it today. Daniel Schugurensky writes, “Even though Freire was influenced by these and other authors, his merit was to combine their ideas into an original formulation.” Freire developed this formulation in the 1950’s and 1960’s in Angicos, Brazil and published his findings in his most famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In this work, he describes why and how he teaches literacy to impoverished, oppressed peasants in his native Brazil. First, Freire criticizes what he calls “banking education,” traditional schooling’s insistence on a simple, one-way transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. As Freire puts it in his description of banking education:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (58)

As Freire sees it, this banking education creates students who simply receive their education from the authority of the teacher, disallowing their ability to create and

critique knowledge on their own. This lack of agency prevents them from critically understanding their environment, creating a “false consciousness” that perpetuates their complicity in their own oppression.

To counteract this false consciousness, Freire first describes the importance of focusing his teaching on “generative themes,” ideas and concepts central to the everyday lives of the peasants. Using these themes in an interactive and egalitarian dialogue between himself and the students, Freire not only teaches them to read words themselves, but also to critique the meanings behind the words that contribute to the continuation of their oppression. This act of critique he calls “problem-posing” because the instructor problematizes themes usually considered benign to the students. In this way, Freire demonstrates that his pedagogy is less a means to teach reading and writing and more a tool to teach skills that empower the oppressed to understand and eventually change the conditions in society that oppress them. Through problem-posing and dialogic interaction, the instructor can help students reach a newfound understanding called “conscientization” in order to mediate the false consciousness and allow for change and empowerment. The combination of reflection and action Freire calls “praxis,” and in many ways his notion of praxis mirrors traditional resistance theories.

In the United States, critical pedagogy has become prominent in the field of composition studies. Composition seems to be a particularly appropriate venue for critical pedagogy because of its history of affirming rather critiquing dominant

ideology. Hardin writes, “From the beginning, English language instruction [...] has been a way to inscribe, disseminate, and promote culture through the representations and values carried in texts and language conventions” (17). Because of this problematic nature of writing instruction, many composition instructors have been drawn to the radical aims of critical pedagogy. Ira Shor, a vocal advocate of critical pedagogy in the field of composition, has written several books describing his use of critical pedagogy in his own writing classroom. In *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, for example, Shor explains that he connects students’ writing to the themes of their everyday lives such as work, relationships, and school (in accordance with Freire’s notion of generative themes). Through writing instruction and dialogic interaction focusing on these themes, Shor and his students problematize them and discover how they contribute to oppressive societal structures.

Yet despite the enthusiasm with which Shor and others have taken up critical pedagogy, even more have harshly criticized it, both in terms of its role inside writing classrooms as well as in other venues. For example, even among those who support critical pedagogy, many complain that the literature is opaque and elitist, limiting the impact that it can have on a wide audience. Schugurensky explains that critics have described the discourse of critical pedagogy as “difficult, pompous, snobbish, elitist, convoluted, arrogant and metaphysical.” Kanpol and Fred Yeo write that many critical theorists “have unintentionally obfuscated potential practical frameworks for transformative change within the esoterica of

theory” (“Series” xi). The absence or at least mystification of practical guidelines within the jargon of theoretical discourse likely alienates potential critical teachers, even as it protects critical pedagogy from becoming diluted or domesticated. Still, the few pedagogical “how-to” guides that exist in the field seem to have a limited impact when juxtaposed with the almost exclusively theoretical literature of critical pedagogy’s pioneers. Consequently, the minimal influence of “practical” literature likely explains the relatively unimpressive impact of critical pedagogy on new and existing instructors.

Dismissing charges of obscure language, Freire and Donald Macedo argue in a published dialogue that such claims tend to come from those who ignore or deny the power of “ordinary” language to perpetuate oppression. Macedo asserts, “I can go on and on [about] how academics who argue for language clarity not only seldom object to language that obfuscates reality, but often use the same language as part of the general acceptance that the ‘standard’ discourse is a given and should remain unproblematic” (392). Macedo goes on to describe a “semi-literate” woman and her sixteen year-old son who both have no trouble understanding the language of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, further evidence that critical scholarship need not be revised for accessibility (393). Similarly, Giroux defends the theoretical emphasis in the field and warns against de-emphasizing it for the sake of easy application in the classroom. He states, “Freire’s ongoing political project raises enormous difficulties for educators who situate Freire’s work in the reified language of methodologies and in empty calls that enshrine the

practical at the expense of the theoretical and political” (16). Thus, despite groans over critical pedagogy as elitist or unnecessarily complicated, critical theorists and pedagogues continue to defend these qualities.

Beyond differences over language, many educators simply find critical pedagogy too radical for their endorsement. These critics fear critical pedagogy might indoctrinate students into the belief system of an ostensibly already critical instructor. Stephen North warns, “[I]t’s very easy to simply replace one hegemony with another” (134). John Ruskiewicz agrees, writing, “Somewhat like North, I find myself uncomfortable exploring the question of the politicized classroom in personal terms” (25). In his essay, “Advocacy in the Writing Classroom,” Ruskiewicz explores his personal resistance to critical pedagogy and concludes that despite claims by its proponents, critical pedagogy risks indoctrination by an instructor whose intrinsic authority may force her personal political agenda upon her students. While most critical educators would argue with Ruskiewicz that *every* classroom is political and that enforcement of the status quo is an agenda in itself, Ruskiewicz asserts that “[advocacy classrooms] are not political at all, merely politicized—for what is at stake finally seems not to be important civic and social issues, but the instructor’s ability to control them” (32). Like Ruskiewicz, Maxine Hairston calls critical pedagogy “a model that puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student” (180). Opponents of critical pedagogy question the ethics of such an

approach and fear the abuse of power by the instructor to indoctrinate students into radical politics.

Critical educators argue that indoctrination can be avoided if instructors approach their teaching with caution and reflection. Hardin writes that responsible critical educators “face compelling and fundamental questions about how their own political and ethical values inform their teaching and about the role they play in promoting the specific ideological and ethical values contained in the textual and linguistic conventions they teach” (63). When critical educators confront these questions often and honestly, indoctrination can be avoided. Peter Roberts has a similar view. In “A Dilemma for Critical Educators,?” Roberts argues that there is in fact a difference “between (a) transmitting a political or moral point of view and (b) doing this in a dogmatic way” (23). Roberts explains that instructors can carry out Freire’s pedagogy without dogmatism because their perspective should be one of many viewpoints given voice in a critical classroom (21). To Roberts, Hardin, and other critical educators, all education is political, and critical pedagogy, if practiced with concern and caution, can encourage democratic reflection in students rather than submission to indoctrination

More recently, postmodernism has also inspired much criticism of critical pedagogy. Postmodernists question the binary between oppressed and non-oppressed that critical pedagogy seems to devise. They also doubt the ability for students of critical pedagogy to become real change-agents towards the kind of progress that critical instructors envision. Indeed, even that vision of progress

itself is problematic to postmodern critics. Thomas S. Popkewitz writes, “The idea of progress is itself a secularization of a specifically western messianic tradition” (24). Postmodern critics like Popkewitz believe that critical educators may inscribe their own version of progress onto their pedagogical aims.

Postmodernists question critical pedagogues’ “a priori identification of the direction and agents of progress” (Popkewitz 27). In this way, their fears are similar to those who fear indoctrination by critical instructors.

Yet advocates of critical pedagogy have not been silenced by postmodern critiques. In fact, many critical scholars have mounted a counterattack against what they feel are problematic assumptions by postmodernists. For instance, McLaren states that postmodernists are wrong to decree the end of ideology, because “class inequalities do exist in the West and are growing” (“Traumatizing” 6). In the same volume, Freire agrees, writing that ideology “remains quite alive, with its power to dull reality and make us nearsighted” (“Education” 90). Critical educators deny postmodernist claims that ideology no longer creates inequality. For them, calls for an abandonment of modernity are just not feasible, considering their understanding of the reality of oppression and the ability for human beings to act against it. Michael Collins writes, “Men and women are still acting purposefully to advance community interests and their own development within our institutions” (29). This faith in human agency and human progress forms the very foundations of critical pedagogy. Critical theorists staunchly defend these foundations even as postmodernists question their validity.

In addition to these criticisms of postmodernism itself, others have criticized postmodernism's detrimental effects on critical pedagogy. Kanpol and Yeo write, "The influences of postmodernism on critical theory, although insightful, have acted to splinter transformative possibilities resulting in a dizzying array of balkanized positions and interpretations among radical educational theorists" ("Series" x). Because of its iconoclastic nature, postmodernism has had an enormous and very damaging effect on critical pedagogy, challenging previously unexamined assumptions and causing the very basic tenets of critical pedagogy to crumble. In this way, postmodernism applied to critical theory is "irrationally and ultimately dysfunctional" (Collins 76). Collins explains that the desire to find a compromise between postmodernism and critical theory "blunts the cutting edge of critical discourse" (77). Even as critical theorists agree postmodern critique has offered "important insights" for the field, it has in many ways damaged the future of critical pedagogy by causing an already fractured field to further splinter.

While many feminists admire critical pedagogy's goals of social and economic equality, some criticize it for its lack of attention to gender oppression. For example, many feminists question the masculinist beginnings of critical pedagogy in which the rhetoric of liberation is couched in sexist language. Others have in particular condemned critical pedagogy for excluding the voices of marginalized or oppressed groups rather than liberating them. Nicholas C. Burbules and Rupert Berk explain that these critics feel that "[critical pedagogy's]

ostensibly universal categories and issues in fact exclude the voices and concerns of women and other groups” (56). In fact, William B. Stanley admits that his own neglect of feminist issues has stemmed from an erroneous assumption “that the oppression of women [can] be addressed via some more general framework” (135). While Freire and others have since attempted to revise critical pedagogy in order to address these criticisms, Gore explains that “critical pedagogy’s ‘adding-on’ of gender is viewed by many women as simply inadequate” (47). Thus, although many critical educators have increased their attention to gender issues, some feminists have devised their own pedagogies in contrast to critical pedagogy.

Yet even as feminists and others call for more attention to the role of gender (and race) in oppression, several critical educators fault what they feel is an overemphasis on “identity politics” at the expense of traditional Marxist and neo-Marxist understandings of class relations. Denying that critical pedagogues exhibit “class reductionism,” McLaren has been one of the most outspoken critics on what he believes is an overemphasis on identity politics in critical pedagogy (“Traumatizing” 21). He laments that postmodernists have not been able to achieve “the rearticulation of class with discursive formations associated with ethnicity, race, gender, and religion” (20). McLaren sees missed opportunities by postmodernists and critical theorists alike to explore how our understandings of class can be informed by new understandings of other social categories. Instead of furthering understanding, McLaren posits that a postmodern focus on identity

politics alone (combined with other problematic postmodern assumptions) will only serve to further reinscribe class inequalities: “[Postmodernism] end[s] up advancing a philosophical commission that propagates hegemonic class rule and reestablishes the rule of the capitalist class” (22). These consequences are unacceptable to critical pedagogues who wish to reduce the impact of class inequality rather than exacerbate it.

The solution to this troublesome threat for some critical educators is a merging of class issues and identity politics in critical pedagogy. Freire and Macedo, reacting to opposing concerns of postmodernists and McLaren, propose an integrated look at how oppressive factors interact. Freire elaborates on the notion of studying relationships between issues like race and class: “[W]hile one cannot reduce the analysis of racism to social class, we cannot understand racism fully without a class analysis” (401). Here, Freire stresses the need for a balance between class analysis and identity politics, a direct challenge to postmodern critics but also a possible compromise. McLaren agrees: “We need to understand how discursive constructions of race and ethnicity are linked to economic exploitation” (“Traumatizing” 30).

Even amidst troublesome criticism, scholarship in critical pedagogy continues. Several recent trends can be identified, suggesting that despite intense criticism, critical pedagogy still inspires the attention of scholars and educators. For example, some critical researchers are reacting to the rise in technology in the past decade, especially electronic communication and hypertext. James D.

Marshall worries that “critical theory as traditionally construed [...] is not well suited to deal with electronic communication” (162). Taking a postmodern perspective, he suggests that new technologies must be used to further problematize “multiple, unstable, dispersed, and decentered selves” (165). On the other hand, McLaren argues for a “critical media literacy” to make students critically aware of power relations and hidden agendas in electronic communication (*Traumatizing* 30). Answering this call, Donna Lecourt examines how electronic communication and hypertext can enable students “to investigate the ideological nature of text and its attempts to reproduce itself on the writer” (*Critical* 278). Using asynchronous discussions about issues of race, class, and gender oppression, Lecourt exposes to students the ways in which discourse can “‘catch students in its web’ without their conscious recognition” (279). She also argues that using technology in critical classrooms can teach students ways in which they may develop agency towards achieving social transformation (291).

Several scholars have explored recently the ways in which Freire’s pedagogy connects to pragmatism. As McLaren notes, critical pedagogy has not only drawn on critical theories originating in Europe but also on the “distinctly American tradition” of John Dewey’s progressive movement (*Life* 161). Recognizing these connections, Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly argue that critical pedagogy can work best in a North American context if Freire’s ideas “work alongside, if not within, [...] [the] tradition of North American pragmatic philosophy” (613). Drawing comparisons between pragmatism and critical

pedagogy, the authors examine Freire's conception of "untested feasibility" and "limit situations" in relationship to the tenets of pragmatism. They conclude that a blend of the two philosophies can enable educators to claim "a philosophy that embraces both idealism and practicalism, individuality and social responsibility, inquiry and faith" (630).

Along with these recent trends, suggestions for the future of critical pedagogy have also been raised. William H. Thelin regrets that there is not more description of how critical pedagogy looks when enacted, and suggests that students' voices be included much more in future research and scholarship (46). Lee agrees, calling for more practical advice on classroom strategies for critical pedagogy: "For it is not enough to have visions, we need also to consider the contexts and conditions that foster or constrain our efforts to *realize* them" (5). Because critical pedagogy is such a complicated venture, Lee's request for more practical work is not surprising. Scholars historically have failed to situate critical pedagogy in specific classroom or institutional contexts. Kanpol and Yeo call for a more moral, ethical, and even spiritual turn among critical educators (xi). Finally, Gore suggest the need for more interaction between the advocates of critical pedagogy in the United States and critical teachers elsewhere (45).

Despite such interesting and promising trends in recent scholarship, critical pedagogy may be experiencing its demise: "[C]ritical pedagogy is now considered by many to have been a stillborn child that is interesting mainly for historical reasons" (Miedema and Wardekker 68). Siebren Miedema and Willem

L. Wardekker go on to call critical educators “products of bygone times” and the entire enterprise of critical pedagogy “outdated” in the postmodern world (68). Their assessment of critical pedagogy is harsh but sobering for advocates of critical pedagogy. Even McLaren, a strong supporter of critical pedagogy, concedes, “In fact, some might argue that critical pedagogy is already dead and can only rehearse the aesthetics of its disappearance” (“Traumatizing” 20). Many scholars, disappointed in this apparent demise of critical pedagogy, remain pessimistic about its future.

These dismal appraisals of critical pedagogy’s influence are confusing when juxtaposed with more positive outlooks such as Kanpol’s 1997 chapter entitled “The Continuing Resurgence of Critical Pedagogy” in which he calls critical pedagogy a “joyful response” to oppressive schooling (*Issues* 3). Kanpol may be more accurate when he writes that critical pedagogy is alive and well in the theoretical terrain of education, but that it has been “highly underused, underrepresented, and misunderstood” inside classrooms themselves (4). Even as McLaren questions the viability of critical pedagogy, he believes it can still impact school immensely: “The movement constitutes only a small minority within the academic community and public school teaching as a whole, but it presents a growing and challenging presence in both arenas” (*Life* 160). Scholars and educators seem to disagree about the future of critical pedagogy. Some have resigned critical pedagogy to limited impact in theoretical scholarship only, while others view the future of the enterprise more optimistically.

Even amidst such optimism, the fate of critical pedagogy is uncertain. Until the perceived contradictions and flaws are better understood, critical pedagogy's influence may continue to diminish. In order to revive the possibility for a resurgence of critical pedagogy both in the theoretical and practical realms, advocates of critical pedagogy must take a closer look at their critics' charges and address the problems that seem to plague critical pedagogy as a theory and pedagogical practice. Transferred to a very different United States from Freire's Brazil, critics question the appropriateness of critical pedagogy as a means to liberate elite, arguably non-oppressed American students. In other words, a "pedagogy of liberation" seems a contradiction in terms when its students seem to need no liberating. In fact, some argue that critical pedagogy will only ignore the needs of these students who must learn certain hegemonic skills to enter the workplace. Finally, some instructors see a contradiction between their own allegiances to the dominant ideology and a pedagogical act that requires them to critique that ideology outright. These contradictions are the source of critical pedagogy's criticisms. Critical theorists must not deny nor ignore such contradictions but instead should further interrogate them for their implications for theory and practice. Kenneth Burke's dramatisitic pentad can be one such tool for this interrogation.

## The Relationship of Kenneth Burke's Pentad to Critical Pedagogy

Kenneth Burke, an American philosopher and rhetorician, created a system called "dramatism" for describing human relationships and human motives. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg write that Burke's dramatic system "is intended as a way of analyzing not actual human behavior but only descriptions of behavior" (1296). For this reason, Burke's notion of dramatism is an ideal tool for the analysis of rhetoric. Burke places five key terms, called the 'pentad,' at the core of his system for analyzing descriptions of human behavior:

We shall use five terms as generating principles of our investigation.

They are: act, scene, agent, agency, purpose. In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*. (*Symbols* 139)

The five terms of the pentad can be applied to virtually any description of human behavior. By understanding how a rhetor represents each element of the pentad, critics can discern motives and expose underlying contradictions. In this way, they can study the persuasiveness of a message, given Burke's understanding of the limited ability of communication to overcome our divisions that have resulted from our not being of one "substance." The pentad can reveal the ways in which

a rhetor achieves “consubstantiality,” or shared substance, in which identification with others makes communication possible.

Rhetoricians find the pentad particularly useful for analyzing descriptions of human behavior because of the way in which we may “violently disagree” about each term in a given situation (Burke, *Symbols* 139). This disagreement can reveal much about human motives and how people attempt to portray their motives. Burke, explaining his pentadic terms, writes, “[W]hat we want is *not terms that avoid ambiguity, but terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise*” (*Symbols* 142). Since much of the rhetoric and scholarship of critical pedagogy is ambiguous and contradictory, Burke’s pentad seems an obvious analytical strategy to further expose and interrogate the inconsistencies that seem to plague the discourse of its proponents. Like any other act represented in scholarship, a study of the scene, agents, agency, and purpose of critical pedagogy can reveal hidden intricacies in the discourse of this field. Furthermore, because advocates of critical pedagogy themselves stress the need to critically examine the symbolic and material nature of language, such a Burkean inspection into the discourse of critical pedagogy itself seems a especially appropriate venture.

Naturally, each element of the pentad as it relates to critical pedagogy should first be explained before an examination of the ratios between these elements is undertaken, especially since even the seemingly simple explication of how critical pedagogy operates pentadically can reveal important tensions,

disagreements, and complexities. Furthermore, multiple interpretations of the pentad's application to critical pedagogy may be possible. Some may disagree about its scene, purpose, agents, and agency, while others may even dispute that critical pedagogy itself is an act in the Burkean sense.

Burke describes an act as something that “takes place, in thought or deed” (*Symbols* 130). Critical pedagogy takes place both in thought (in the theoretical discourse of journals, books, conferences, etc.) and deed (in literature describing practical implementation as well as that implementation itself). As an act, it takes place in the scene of schools, though these schools and the classrooms within them are highly varied. It also takes place within the regional and national scene surrounding these classrooms with the nearly infinite contextual factors that these broader scenes impose. Teachers and students of various backgrounds work together as agents to enact critical pedagogy, and they use the methods of dialogue and problem-posing described by Freire as the agency through which to achieve critical pedagogy's purpose of social transformation and liberation of the oppressed.

This explication seems simple enough, yet disagreements remain over how these parts of the pentad apply in more specific terms to the enterprise as well as what these applications mean for critical pedagogy's theory and practice. For example, the scene of critical pedagogy has important implications for how critical pedagogy should be defined. Burke's notion of scene is intuitive. He describes it as “a blanket term for the concept of background or setting *in general*,

a name for *any* situation in which acts or agents are placed” (*Grammar* xvii). The *scene* of critical pedagogy is multifold. The immediate scene in which critical pedagogy operates is the school and all of the rules and conventions that accompany it. Shor characterizes the traditional school setting as “an environment of rules, curriculum, tests, punishments, requirements, correction, remediation, and standard English” (*Critical* 123). Critical pedagogy must be carried out in accordance with acceptable practices in school systems while critiquing and resisting many of these practices. Critical educators often try to construct the scene of the critical classroom in opposition to the already well-established traditional scene of banking education. Through dialogue, decentered authority, and problem posing critical teachers devise classrooms antithetical to traditional ones.

Furthermore, as Burke points out, the scene of any act is shiftable depending on one’s scope. He writes, “Obviously, for instance, the concept of scene can be widened or narrowed (conceived of in terms of varying ‘scope’ or circumference)” (*Symbols* 136). The broader context for critical pedagogy in the United States is the current political and economic climate. Currently, a conservative majority dominates the government, and economically, free market capitalism still prevails. Notably, much of the philosophy supporting critical pedagogy actually rests on a critique of these components of the scene. Many advocates of critical pedagogy believe that capitalism creates the social inequalities in the United States, and they charge that schooling reproduces these

inequalities. They also accuse the educational system with simply preparing obedient and unreflective workers for smooth integration into the capitalist system. Shor writes, “School vocationalism begins the stifling of human potential, towards the creation of a non-critical, divided adult workforce” (*Critical* 50). In some ways, through this critique of the existing capitalist scene, critical pedagogues attempt to create a more equal and democratic one.

Like the multiple scenes in which critical pedagogy operates, multiple *agents* enact this approach. Most critical educators insist that the critical instructor is not the sole agent as is customary in traditional pedagogy. Instead, the teacher works with students as co-agents to create and critique knowledge. Shor notes, “The learning process is negotiated, requiring leadership by the teacher and *mutual* teacher-student authority” (*Critical* 16, emphasis added). It must be noted, however, that many critics of critical pedagogy have charged that a true equality between teacher and students is impossible and that there will always be a hierarchical relationship. Richard E. Miller writes, “The students, however, never forget where they are, no matter how carefully we arrange the desks in the classroom, how casually we dress, how open we are to disagreement [...] They don’t forget, we often do” (18). Such a reality, critics argue, creates students who are potentially objects rather than agents of critical pedagogy.

Advocates of critical pedagogy, in turn, have defended their position that students and the teacher are co-agents in critical pedagogy, stating that the instructor always has the authority to lead and direct the class, but should not act

with the authoritarianism that characterizes traditional pedagogy. Freire states, “I’m not against the authority of teachers, I am against the hypertrophy of authority against the fragility of students’ freedom, and I am against the hypertrophy of students’ freedom against the fragility of authority (Olson 160). While critical educators insist that both teachers and students are agents in the critique and construction of knowledge, and that instructors themselves learn along with their students, they cannot and do not deny that teachers are in a hierarchical position above their students in terms of existing knowledge and institutional authority. This hierarchical position is in many ways the result of a classroom scene that encourages disparate power relations between teacher and students. Given this reality, Robert P. Yagelski writes, “Both are ‘agents’ but each retains a distinct identity; and that teacher’s identity, though necessary, nevertheless complicates the relationship between the two” (43). Therefore, student and teacher may be regarded (albeit problematically) as co-agents.

Students and teachers as co-agents use dialogue as the *agency* through which critical pedagogy takes place. Freire writes, “Dialogue is the sealing together of the teacher and the students in the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study” (Shor, *Liberation* 100). Instead of simply depositing information for the student to take in, critical teachers act as “problem-posers” to encourage dialogue. Within this dialogue, teachers and students together examine the problematic relationship between themselves and the objects of their world (Freire, *Pedagogy* 67). This mutual examination encourages dialogic learning in

which both the instructor and students critique knowledge and remake it anew, an educational experience in direct opposition to the type of lecturing that Freire describes as the “banking method.”

The *purpose* for critical teaching is what Freire calls conscientization. Freire believes that oppressed students exist within a Marxist conception of false consciousness in which they do not fully understand the reified mechanisms that perpetuate their oppressed state (*Pedagogy* 62). Through the agency of dialogical education, the critical educator can bring about a critical consciousness reflective and questioning of these mechanisms (74). Ideally, this critical consciousness leads to praxis in which the renewed understanding of power structures creates action to change those structures for the better (75). Notably, these goals of critical consciousness and praxis are also often conceived of in the admittedly utopian terms of empowerment or liberation of the oppressed student.

Now that the pentadic parts of critical pedagogy have been established, the real utility of Burke’s dramatism lies in his description of the interconnectedness, or ratios, of the elements of his pentad. Burke explains, “We want to inquire into the purely internal relationships which the five terms bear to one another [...] — and then see how these various resources figure in actual statements about human motives” (*Symbols* 140). Burke presents the ratios as a tool for examining (among other things) the internal consistency of the dramatisic pentad. He explains, “The principles of consistency binding scene, act, and agent also lead to reverse applications. That is, the scene-act ratio either calls for acts in keeping

with scenes or scenes in keeping with acts — and similarly with the scene-agent ratio” (*Grammar* 9). By extension, other elements of the pentad should also be consistent; for example, the purpose of an act as well as the act itself should serve the interests of the agent. An examination of the requisite consistency of Burke’s terms in this way can reveal the sources of contradiction and ambiguity in critical pedagogy.

In all, Burke’s dramatism is comprised of ten pentadic ratios (scene-act, scene-agent, scene-agency, scene-purpose, act-purpose, act-agent, act-agency, agent-purpose, agent-agency, and agency-purpose). My work will focus on the ratios of scene-act, agent-purpose, and act-agent. I chose to explore these ratios because the others focus more on the methodology or practice of critical pedagogy and less on the theoretical goals behind it that make it seem so contradictory to many critics. For example, questions regarding agency as well as the more local scene of schools themselves focus more specifically on classroom interactions than on the broader assumptions of critical pedagogy. While inevitably factors involving the more local scene of the classroom will come up, I am more concerned with the broader societal factors that affect that local scene. Therefore, despite the number of useful ratios that involving agency and classroom scene, for the purposes of focus this study will highlight the sources of contradictions in critical pedagogy that seem to be those at the center of the philosophical foundations of the enterprise. Arguably, the more practical

contradictions inherent in the other ratios may be less troubling to most critics and less damaging to the movement as a whole.

For these reasons, my study is an attempt to resolve or explain the contradictions in the theoretical foundations of critical pedagogy inherent in the scene-act, agent-purpose, and act-agent ratios rather than in ratios that focus more on classroom practice alone (though the relationship between theory and practice is never this simple). Within the scene-act ratio, for example, critics charge that in various ways the act of critical pedagogy contradicts its scene because its origins in an impoverished Brazil arguably differ significantly from its current position in the United States. The agent-purpose ratio is also troubling because many critics claim that the purpose of critical pedagogy does not match the motives of many of the student-agents who wish to adapt to capitalism rather than critique or resist it. Finally, in terms of the act-agent ratio, detractors argue that the act of critical pedagogy does not accord with the beliefs of the teacher-agent who may feel troubled by her own benefits and consequent allegiances to the structures that critical pedagogy critiques. An analysis of the inconsistencies in these three ratios may illuminate disagreements over critical pedagogy and suggest possibilities for its future.

### **Scene-Act Ratio**

Burke discusses the connections between a scene and its act, or, as he also calls it, the “container and thing contained” (*Symbols* 146). He writes, “Insofar as

men's [*sic*] actions are to be interpreted in terms of the circumstances in which they are acting, their behavior would fall under the heading of a 'scene-act ratio'" (*Symbols* 137). Of particular importance for critical pedagogy and its critics, Burke also stresses the need for a scene and act to work in harmony. He explains, "[T]he nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene" (146). Critics charge that the practice of critical pedagogy as an act is not consistent with its scene, both in the classroom and in the broader social context of the United States. Central to the latter criticism, some feel that while Freire's philosophy and methodology worked well in the scene of Brazil in the 1950's and 1960's, it does not translate adequately from third-world Brazil to first-world United States.

In Angicos, Brazil in 1962, Freire helped 300 illiterate impoverished rural workers learn to read and write in 45 days; two years later his methods were used to teach 2 million illiterate workers (McLaren, "Paulo" 3). Obviously, the majority of critical educators in the United States do not face the daunting task of teaching basic literacy to students. This difference is one obvious characteristic that differentiates the scene of the United States from that of Brazil. Nevertheless, the fact that students of critical educators in the United States do not face the disabling illiteracy of the oppressed in Brazil may be irrelevant for the implementation of critical pedagogy here. Peter Mayo writes, "I would submit that adult literacy, though it served an important purpose in Brazil in that it enabled the learners to vote, was availed of by Freire only as a vehicle for the

more important process of political conscientization” (269). Freire himself characterizes his pedagogy in this way: “Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words, or syllables [...] but rather to an attitude of creation and recreation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one’s context” (*Critical* 48). As Freire shows, the scene for critical pedagogy does not seem to ‘require’ illiteracy; rather, it requires oppression and the presence of a false consciousness in students in order for the recreation that Freire describes to be possible.

While the presence of illiteracy may not be a necessary component of the scene, scholars disagree about the presence of oppression and false consciousness in the United States versus Brazil. Freire describes the scene in Brazil as one of great poverty, injustice, and oppression: “I saw society divided into such different classes that it was shocking to me. In the same city, I saw millionaires living a very good life while millions of people were hungry, eating nothing” (*Liberation* 47). Critics claim that because this description does not characterize a more affluent and economically advanced United States, Freire’s pedagogy is not transferable.

However, others claim that some connections between the class inequalities of Brazil and those of the United States can be made. Brazilian historian Boris Fausto writes that during Freire’s time in Brazil, efforts were being made to reduce the “deep social inequalities” caused by capitalism (268). Many critical pedagogues believe that similar social inequalities exist now in the

United States. McLaren writes that our capitalist economy “has given priority not to the furthest reaches of human dignity but rather to the ceaseless accumulation of capital” (“Traumatizing” 2). McLaren and others argue that the social and economic problems caused by capitalism in Brazil are mirrored in the United States, but that these problems are more hidden here.

Freire, having lived in both Brazil and the United States, describes the similarities that he sees in the two countries:

Here, you have wealth, power, many big buildings. But, the wealth in the North only disguises great manipulation, domination, in the culture.

Americans and Brazilians both live in capitalist societies. [...] In Brazil, we are on the periphery [of capitalism], strongly dependent on the finance centers in the North. Our dependence keeps us poor and this poverty makes the social contradictions very visible everywhere in the streets of Sao Paulo, for example. (*Liberation* 139)

While the effects of capitalism may be much more pronounced and apparent in his home country, Freire maintains that the underlying manipulations of capitalism are the same in both countries. Therefore, as he argues, critical pedagogy may be even more necessary in the United States to uncover the hidden manipulations of capitalism that seem, on the surface, to make it seem so different as a scene from Brazil. In this way, the scene in the United States may be an even more appropriate location for critical educators to operate because the need for students to understand the oppression and inequality in the United States is so

urgent and the task so much more complex. In the United States, it can be argued, more students suffer from a “false consciousness” in which they are unaware that oppression even exists, let alone what causes it.

In addition to the existence of poverty and inequality, the level of populist and grassroots action might also be a factor in determining if critical pedagogy is consistent with its scene. In the face of harsh inequality in Brazil, Freire was able to take advantage of his students’ already existent desire for change. He reminisces, “It was a time of fantastic popular mobilization” (*Liberation* 32). Fausto concurs: “[I]t was clear that social movements were on the rise and new actors were on the scene” (264). This scene of resistance, mobilization, and grassroots action against class inequality seems to be lacking in the United States. Despite some recent stirrings of protest over war in Iraq, there certainly does not seem to be the same kind of social and political volatility in regards to racial, social, and gender inequality that Brazil (or the United States, for that matter) experienced in the 1960’s. While calls against war are highly visible, most would argue that capitalism is still heralded more than ever and that attention to social inequality is deflected to other potentially less subversive issues such as the war, terrorism, drug abuse, etc. McLaren, describing the allegiance to capitalism, writes that U.S. citizens “have grown chary of any perspectives that smack of socialism [and] look askance upon the very word *Marxism*, as if it has embedded within its ontology the demon seed of totalitarianism” (“Traumatizing” 3). This apathy and even outright resistance to social and economic reform makes the

United States a difficult and complicated scene for critical pedagogy, especially when compared to the socially active scene of Brazil.

Nevertheless, critical pedagogy may be a useful means for diminishing this complacency and resistance and instigating populist political action, thereby creating a scene for itself that corresponds to its act. For this reason, the scene and act may not necessarily need to be consistent in the first place. The inconsistency will drive critical educators to seek consistency. The disparities between critical pedagogy and its scene, both in terms of social and economic inequality and civic complacency, compel educators to enact critical pedagogy. In other words, without inconsistencies, there would be no exigency for action. Furthermore, the complex and contradictory nature of the relationship between critical pedagogy and its scene further warrants action on the part of critical educators to help students themselves uncover these intricacies.

Students can be thought of as part of the overall scene even as they are also co-agents in the critical classroom. For some, treating students as scene risks rendering them powerless, much like Burke's example of the patient, in which the patient's status as a scene renders him powerless to the surgeon's will. Nevertheless, for McLaren and other critical theorists, the individual and society are "inextricably woven, so that reference to one must by implication mean reference to the other" (*Life* 166). In fact, both teachers and students can be considered products of the scene, and both are in some ways powerless to its influence. In this way, describing students as part of the scene makes sense.

Therefore, an examination of the students in Brazil and America is one way in which the scene in these countries can be further compared. For example, many critics charge that the students that Freire taught differ greatly from the students of most American critical pedagogues, even when the considerable difference in literacy levels is factored out. McLaren writes of critical pedagogy in terms of the oppression that traditionally characterizes its students: “Daily struggle provides a reason for the oppressed to take seriously the type of self-reflection that empowers their daily efforts to fulfill their material needs and to be treated with dignity and respect” (“Paulo” 8). Yet inherent in McLaren’s statement is the assumption that most students of critical pedagogy are oppressed, that they experience daily struggles, and that they lack dignity and respect. This assumption applied to middle and upper class elite university students is almost comical. Illiterate, poor Brazilian peasants seem in no way to resemble the middle-class, educated white students who inevitably comprise a considerable portion in most American critical classrooms. In other words, as many critics have argued, the majority of American students are not oppressed on the same scale as Freire’s Brazilian students. North writes, “[I]t isn’t clear how a notion of ‘praxis’ worked out among Brazilian peasants can transfer to an American, state-funded research university” (130). North senses the inconsistency between critical pedagogy and a scene of non-oppressed, privileged students.

Yet even as critics like North question the transferability of critical pedagogy in terms of student identity, others argue that such a transfer can be

achieved. Mayo points out, “Viewing his work in its entirety, I would submit that Freire’s oppressed groups vary from context to context” (267). How to deal with varying degrees of oppression, however, is unclear. One way might be to address the disturbing trend McLaren finds among his elite students. He writes, “Oppression has been relativized and commodified such that it now includes almost everyone who suffers in some way” (21). The preponderance of student anger at what they feel to be marginalization and “reverse racism” frustrates McLaren. Consequently, one goal of an American critical pedagogy may be to simply teach students the meaning and characteristics of genuine oppression and how reactions against racism are quite different from racism itself. Furthermore, James C. Scott writes that dominant classes may operate under a false consciousness even more than the oppressed. Miller, describing Scott’s ideas, writes, “The higher one climbs the social ladder, the more one must, in all phases of one’s life, ascribe to the dominant ideology, the more confined are those spaces for voicing one’s doubts about that ideology, the more one must see oneself as always on stage” (17). Helping non-oppressed students see this limitation of privilege may further the cause of social transformation even more than critical pedagogy’s engagement with the oppressed.

Kanpol agrees that critical pedagogy has a role to play in a scene dominated by privileged students. He claims that even non-oppressed students can understand their daily experiences (micro-narrative) within the context of broader society (macro-narrative) (13). He writes, “To be socially and culturally

transformative, this micro-narrative must be understood within the context of a larger macro-narrative” (13). Even (and especially) non-oppressed students must see how their own experiences connect to a broader scene of oppression for many. Lee furthers this position, arguing that critical pedagogy must make the “benefactors” of oppression understand that “ultimately [they] do not—individually or collectively—benefit from these discourses” (117). Clearly, privileged students must be an integral part of critical pedagogy for its goals of self and social transformation to be achieved. Lee warns, “Any progressive pedagogy that ignores a large sector of potential agents limits its capacity to achieve social change” (117).

Therefore, the troublesome contradiction between Freire’s students as products of the Brazilian scene and current students of critical pedagogy as products of the American scene may actually be the key to making real social progress in the United States. Of course, devising practical strategies for achieving this goal is difficult. As McLaren points out, Freire’s writing does not detail specific instructions for the enactment of his pedagogical philosophy so that it may be “‘reinvented’ in the contexts in which his readers find themselves” (“Paulo” 13). More theoretical and practical work must be done to recontextualize and reinvent Freire’s pedagogy. Furthermore, as postmodernists have demonstrated, students inhabit multiple identities, and critical theorists and educators must resist binaries that reduce identities to dualisms such as oppressor/oppressed. Because contradictions arise when students occupy multiple

identities in which they may be both oppressor and oppressed, critical educators must work to achieve methods to tackle such a complex task. They should embrace such contradictions rather than attempt to simplify them with dualisms.

For this reason, American critical educators must experiment with Freire's philosophy in order to find a method suitable for non-oppressed American students (or those that occupy both oppressor and non-oppressor identities). It is this type of experimentation that is so important to the critical and reflective nature of critical pedagogy, making the American scene again a suitable territory for the enactment of critical pedagogy. The inconsistencies between Freire's students and their own should encourage reflection and adaptation in American critical educators. It might also be a suitable topic for discussion within critical classrooms. Students can explore the various roles they occupy in society, how these roles interact, and how they might contradict one another. No matter the difficulty, the contradictions that arise when Freirean pedagogy is transferred to North America should not be a deterrent to educators who wish to practice critical pedagogy. If anything, these contradictions should be an opportunity for reflection and a guide for practice in the classroom.

### **Agent-Purpose Ratio**

The understandable concern regarding contradictions in scene and act relates closely to another problematic and allegedly inconsistent ratio: the agent-purpose ratio. Because of the capitalist scene, critical pedagogy's purpose for

creating resistance clashes with the student (or co-agent) desire for reward from capitalism. Most students want to be immersed even further and more successfully into capitalism rather than resist it. This desire is for many students the primary reason for attending a university—to gain practical skills necessary for employment. Michael Collins describes the fundamental contradiction between the goals of critical pedagogy and the goals of its proclaimed student-agents: “Herein lies the challenge for those committed to a critical pedagogy who are, nevertheless, pressured to deploy strategies and curriculum formats in which technical rationality is embodied” (70). As Collins observes, many educators are frustrated by their obligation to merely instill in students a set of discrete skills rather than a more encompassing ability to understand and critique injustices. Faced with this obligation, critical educators must reconcile the contradictions that arise between purpose of critical pedagogy and the goals of its student-agents.

Much of this problem, as critics have shown, arises from the problematic relationship between schooling and capitalism. McLaren writes, “The new hidden curriculum, or ‘pedagogical unsaid,’ is the attempt to de-form knowledge into a discreet and decontextualized set of technical skills packaged to serve big business interests, cheap labor, and ideological conformity” (“Paulo” 16). Yet it is these technical skills that students crave because they realize these are what will make them most marketable in the workplace. Shor describes his experience with this desire in his students who “want to know quickly what the market value of a course is. They resent taking required liberal arts courses that ‘waste’ their time

by distracting them from their career majors in business, nursing, engineering, or computers” (67). Shor and other critical educators wish to engage students in a critique of their future occupations and the economy in which these occupations reside, but Bowles and Gintis warn, “By itself a liberated education will produce occupational misfits and a proliferation of the job blues” (252). While Scott feels students who experience such blues may actually be the most powerful sources for change (107), critics fear that critical pedagogy may in the long run be a detriment to students who support capitalism and wish to reap its rewards.

Despite these risks, McLaren asserts that critical teachers are ethically bound to the goals of critical pedagogy before they are ethically bound to the goals of preparing students to enter the workplace. He writes, “Critical pedagogy is founded on the conviction that schooling for self and social empowerment is *ethically prior* to a mastery of technical skills” (*Life* 162). Yet can critical pedagogy achieve both empowerment and a mastery of technical skills? Shor and Freire maintain that it can both teach students the skills necessary for integration into the capitalist employment marketplace as well as instill them with tools to critique that marketplace. Because it is not a case of either/or, the contradiction here between these obligations can be resolved. Shor writes, “Job skills must be criticized *at the same time* they are learned” (*Liberation* 69, emphasis added). Miller agrees, writing, “I don’t believe that these two activities are mutually exclusive—that preparing a student to succeed in business, say, is incompatible the project of teaching a student to think about the effects of discriminatory hiring

practices” (25). Combining these activities can help instructors make use of the contradictions of the agent-purpose ratio.

Collins explains that one way to combine these activities is through a focus on a theme of work that he calls “a critical pedagogy of work” (105). This focus will help make students aware of the difference between “busy work” and “creative activity,” so that they can discover the very different effects each has on quality of life (103). Such a focus, he writes, will “emphasize the importance of acquiring skills and attitudes required for employment while engendering a discourse about the politics of work which explores how, and to what purposes, unequal relationships of power are played out” (105). By examining the contradictions between students’ desires and the requirements of the workplace, critical educators can help unveil for students the oppressiveness of the corporate economy.

The contradictions between student needs and the goals of critical pedagogy also apply in writing classrooms in which students must learn how to read and write in the academy. Hardin writes, “While compositionists who advocate critical pedagogy may hope that their methods may produce radical critique and resistance, they also are usually sensitive to the legitimate concern that students need to learn the conventions and traditions of the academy” (50). In this way, critical educators must teach students standards and conventions of academic discourse, while encouraging them to be critical of its arbitrariness and oppressiveness. Students can use academic discourse as a way to gain access into

academia, where their critical resistance to injustice can be heard. In other words, they can write texts that academia values as well as resist the values of academia. Miller describes an “institutional biography” assignment that meets these characteristics. In this assignment, students can combine the personal and the academic in a way that allows them to display necessary conventions of academic writing while critiquing the institution that imposes them.

Like Miller, LeCourt believes that including the personal in academic assignments can foster both writing skills and critical consciousness. She writes that such assignments “provide the opportunity for students to bring alternative literacies and ways of knowing into the discursive realm of a particular discourse” (“WAC”). By connecting the personal with the institutional in much the same way that critical theorists stress connecting the self to the world, these assignments can fulfill the tenets of critical pedagogy and at the same time serves the needs of the students. Furthermore, LeCourt stresses the need for students to interrogate the features of various disciplinary discourses themselves in order to reveal the privileging of some viewpoints and the silencing of others. She explains that using students’ own identities and differences to inform their investigations can offer insights that “might elude experts without the cultural experiences our increasingly diverse classrooms offer” (“WAC”).

As these assignments reveal, the contradictions of the agent-purpose ratio, like the scene-act ratio, can be beneficial to critical educators. Yet again, this contradiction can both stimulate reflection on the part of the instructor and be

used successfully in the classroom. Educators can confront with students the inconsistencies between the values of democratic learning that emphasize the production of knowledge and critical awareness with the values of a work force that encourages discrete skills. Students can compare the skills they deem necessary for success in the workplace with skills they deem necessary for a life of happiness or purpose. Often, they will find these skills to be very different and very contradictory.

As a cautionary note, in order for these strategies to be successful in exploiting the value of the agent-purpose contradiction, critical educators must ensure that students are true agents of critical pedagogy and not objects of their practice. Students of critical pedagogy must become more invested in the pedagogy itself, allowing them to take an active role both in their learning of necessary workplace skills as well as in critiquing the unequal and often oppressive conditions of the workplace. Lee criticizes descriptions of critical teaching that “reinscribe students as the object of critical pedagogy, those waiting to be empowered by the critical pedagogue” (106). For the contradictions inherent in the agent-purpose ratio to be useful, students must become agents rather than objects. Only then can they take an active role in critiquing the ways in which their education both prepares them for the workforce and limits their potential to alter its oppressive nature.

### **Act-Agent Ratio**

Notably, like his description of the scene-act ratio, Burke also emphasizes the need for consistency in the act-agent ratio. Burke writes that the act-agent ratio “would reflect the correspondence between a man’s [*sic*] character and the character of his behavior” (*Symbols* 136). Because co-agents ideally carry out critical pedagogy, students are not the only ones who may be subject to contradictions between their own desires and critical pedagogy. Critical educators may also experience first-hand the contradictory nature of critical pedagogy, this time in terms of their own beliefs in comparison to the act of critical pedagogy itself. Because critical pedagogues, like their students, are immersed in the hegemonic structures of society, they find it difficult to critique these structures, especially if they find them enjoyable or beneficial. In this way, critics often charge the ratio of act-agent with inconsistency. When the agent of critical pedagogy feels conflict with the act itself, it may be difficult to carry out the method in the classroom without some discomfort.

North, in an essay entitled “Rhetoric, Responsibility, and the ‘Language of the Left,’” describes his personal experiences with the contradiction between his own worldview and that represented in the act of critical pedagogy. North argues that much of his time outside of teaching is spent towards supporting the dominant ideology rather than resisting it. He writes

In short, [my hours] are spent in or on a life that I would characterize as a system-supporting, system-supported, pro-capitalist, American

mainstream life. It is a life that, so far as I can tell, I would fight to defend — or at least one that, in the face of a fair number of genuine options, I keep on living. (132)

North does not feel that he can cultivate resistance in the classroom when his life outside of it reinforces the dominant ideology. Arguably, the majority of educators may agree with North. Even among the appealing optimism and passion of critical pedagogy, they feel internal conflict between the ideology of the act and their own ideology as agents.

Peter Elbow also comments on the virtual impossibility for educators immersed in the dominant culture to ever truly enact critical pedagogy in its purest sense. He calls those who claim to do so to be operating under a “pedagogy of the bamboozled.” He writes

My argument can be summarized as follows. Freire gives principles which I think very few institutional teachers in this country follow. But I think many teachers, both in high school and in college, *imply* in subtle ways that they do follow these principles. In this way, they bamboozle students and themselves. Thus there are two possible reforms: start really doing what Freire describes; or stop implying that you do. (87)

Elbow understands the difficulty almost any American middle-class citizen may face when trying to perform the act of critical pedagogy. Their entire being as an agent has been influenced and shaped by the dominant ideology and the capitalist scene. This conflict between the character of the agent and the act of critical

pedagogy may be a primary reason why the movement has remained on the fringes in colleges and universities. At the same time, this conflict will also keep critical pedagogy from becoming overly domesticated in order to accord with the political beliefs of most educators. Those who feel enormous conflict between their own ideologies and critical pedagogy are likely not suited for critical teaching, and any efforts by them to do so may only corrupt Freire's original intentions.

However, as Collins notes, "[T]he lone gadfly all too often serves the interests of repressive management practices by affording it the appearance of a liberal and tolerant approach" (74). It seems that to avoid domestication, critical pedagogy must be practiced by a number of educators in a form that remains true to its original intentions. To achieve this kind of "critical mass," instructors must not be alienated by the discomfort or confusion that may arise when the initially attempt to practice critical pedagogy in the classroom. As products of a capitalist culture, some unease is natural and productive. Yagelski writes, "Reflective teaching is *supposed* to be troubling" (34). Because this kind of discomfort is inevitable with critical pedagogy (and arguably the kind that should be inevitable with any pedagogy), it should not dissuade teachers from adopting critical pedagogy in their classrooms.

Finally, the contradiction between an agent's ideology and the act of critical pedagogy ensures that instructors do not necessarily hold a privileged "critical" position over their students. The discomfort that many critical educators

may feel between their own values and the values of critical pedagogy is likely quite similar to the discomfort privileged students feel when confronted with the oppression of others at the expense of their privilege. It is not surprising that instructors, many of whom share this privilege, also feel discomfort. Gore criticizes critical theorists who seem to convey comfort and ease in critical pedagogy stemming from a teacher's critical consciousness: "[T]his discourse functions through a general assumption that the right choices will be clear, that the teacher will/should know which voices to affirm and which to silence, which social movements to support and which to fight, and so on" (116). Anyone who has ever attempted to even begin to formulate a critical philosophy and practice knows this assumption to be false. In this way, the act-agent contradiction and the discomfort it causes can address this paradox in the discourse and actually comfort critical instructors who expect critical pedagogy to be simple to carry out.

### **Other Ratios**

Of course, other possible ratios exist that might warrant closer examination in terms of contradiction and inconsistency. For example, one might explore the agent-agent ratio. Since critical educators argue that teachers and students are co-investigators and co-inquirers of knowledge and power, it might be useful to compare how each agent's power and role is constructed. Many critics have argued that critical pedagogy sets up a problematic relationship between teacher and students and that its claims for a more equal relationship

between them are false. The contradiction inherent in the agent-agent ratio can be useful in reminding critical instructors of the institutional authority they cannot escape so that they may be conscious and sensitive to its effects in the critical classroom.

Further ratios to explore might be agency-scene and agency-purpose. In terms of the former, researchers might examine the more local scene of schools and classrooms in terms of how they accommodate critical pedagogy's methods of dialogue and student-teacher equality. Clearly, critical educators are working against many of the procedures and methods of traditional schooling. This contradiction, like that between critical pedagogy and the broader capitalist scene, is inherent and necessary for critical pedagogy to even be necessary. The agency-purpose ratio also deals with these methods, this time in terms of whether or not they can be successful in helping students achieve conscientization. The intricacies of this ratio can encourage critical educators to always be cognizant of the impact their strategies have for achieving the goals of critical pedagogy. It can encourage reflection and revision of their classroom practices and prevent them from being dazzled by the utopian ideals of the enterprise.

### **Implications of the Ratios for Critical Pedagogy**

Burke's ratios and the contradictions it reveals have important implications for both the theory and practice of critical pedagogy. Because these inconsistencies are often the cause of many of the criticisms of critical pedagogy,

resolving or at least understanding them more fully may appease many of critical pedagogy's detractors. Furthermore, because the contradictions and complexities of critical pedagogy may alienate many instructors from attempting such a complicated venture, an examination of critical pedagogy's inconsistencies can give wary teachers more confidence in their abilities. Ann George, noting that critical educators are often represented as the "classroom superhero," explains that the discourse of critical pedagogy needs more descriptions that "keep expectations realistic" (98). An understanding of contradiction and the role it can play in the classroom can fulfill her request, making Burke's pentad an incredibly useful heuristic for understanding and implementing critical pedagogy.

Upon closer examination, it seems that the scene of critical pedagogy links all of the ratios examined thus far. Even in ratios not directly related to scene (purpose-agent and act-agent), the scene is still the main source of contradiction. In terms of the contradiction between critical pedagogy's purpose for resistance from capitalism in opposition to student's desire to be a successful product of it, the capitalist and consumerist scene has produced this desire in the first place. Likewise, when critical educators find that their own allegiances to capitalism or their own benefits from the dominant ideology conflict with the act of critical teaching, the broader capitalist and consumerist scene has created this dissonance within them. Given these conditions, it seems then that the only real way to remedy these contradictions may be to change the scene.

Accordingly, some scholars believe that for educational reform to ever truly succeed and meet its goals of empowerment and conscientization, the scene that prevents full realization of these goals must first be changed. In *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Bowles and Gintis examine the relationship of schools to the broader capitalist scene. They conclude

[O]nly when work processes are self-initiated and controlled by workers themselves will free schooling be an integral part of the necessary process of growing up and getting a job. Nor, we suggest, are these necessary changes limited to the work place alone; they entail a radical transformation of the very class structure of U.S. society. (13)

Interestingly, Burke seems to agree with Bowles and Gintis's notion that an act cannot be successful without a compatible scene. In his call for consistency in the pentadic ratios, Burke suggests that contradictory terms of the pentad limit one another. Burke writes, "[Y]ou can't get a fully socialist *act* unless you have a fully socialist *scene*" (1308). In some ways, critical pedagogy is a socialist act. Emphasizing the public ownership of knowledge, the ultimate economic goal of many critical educators is to restructure the economy in ways that create social and economic equality.

While the scene in the U.S. certainly is not socialist at the current moment, this incongruity does not mean that critical pedagogy cannot work successfully in American schools. While contradictions may create hurdles for critical educators, the conflicts between critical pedagogy and its scene should not warrant the

abandonment of the enterprise. In fact, critical pedagogy should take its purpose from the disparities between its goals and the scene in which it operates. For example, even as Burke's pentadic ratios expose the contradictions the scene creates for critical educators, in many ways, these contradictions are a result of the contradictions inherent in its scene of capitalism. Capitalism promises rewards for the hardest working, yet this promise often results in poverty and extreme inequality. Capitalism also promises rewards for the individual, yet increasingly capital is centralized in the hands of powerful corporate conglomerates. McLaren writes, "In its headlong rush to amass vast pools of capital [...], capitalism has also revealed its most raw and angry internal contradictions and the various means by which it renders as inevitable its circular and exploitative logic" ("Traumatizing" 15). Critical pedagogy, because it is located within this contradictory scene and because its focus is to critique the contradictions within this scene, cannot escape contradictions in its own internal framework. The goal of critical pedagogy must be to illuminate these contradictions in the scene even as critical educators illuminate contradictions in their own classrooms.

The irony then, given Burke's insistence on consistency between the pentadic terms, is that the entire existence of critical pedagogy is founded on inconsistency. Without a problematic and inconsistent scene, critical educators would have nothing to critique and no ultimate goals of social transformation, since a perfectly complementary scene would mean the absence of oppression and

inequality. The scene itself and the contradictions it generates are necessary conditions for the existence of critical pedagogy, creating an intrinsic paradox in terms of critical pedagogy's contradictions between its tenets and the scene. In this way, Burke's pentad begins to collapse when applied to critical pedagogy. Even as Burke insists on the need for consistency between the terms of the pentad, critical pedagogy demands inconsistency. The very nature of critical pedagogy as a counter-pedagogy makes it resistant to efforts to 'systematize' it, even with Burke's very fluid pentad.

Because critical pedagogues must function within this paradox, they will likely face enormous obstacles in their attempts to create critical classrooms. Such difficulties are to be expected. Gore refers to this dilemma as the "circle of conditions that are needed for intellectuals who are needed to change conditions" (109). Certain conditions must exist to attract and sustain critical educators, who then must further alter that scene as part of the goals of critical pedagogy. Of course, critical pedagogues will not simply wait for a scene that makes their task easier in order to have the courage to practice critical pedagogy. Instead, they will use a difficult and contradictory scene as the inspiration for their pedagogy and as grounds for the urgency of its necessity.

While contradictions sustain critical pedagogy even as they make the work of critical educators more difficult, critical pedagogy can be one means to at least influence that broader scene. Bowles and Gintis write, "[S]truggles around [educational] institutions, and the educational process itself, should contribute to

the development of a revolutionary, democratic socialist movement” (269). Freire and Shor agree, conceding that this influence may be slow and minimal at first.

Freire explains

It is necessary to recognize that by doing something inside the space of school we can make some good contributions [towards changing society]. We have to have more or less clear the limits we have as educators. Going far beyond the limits can frighten the people we want to change reality with. (*Liberation* 180)

Critical educators must be sensitive to the conditions in which they must work even as they attempt to change those conditions. Unreasonable expectations may only alienate students and colleagues, limiting the impact of their efforts.

Even with these limitations, Burke’s pentad shows that contradictions are not only a necessity for the existence of critical pedagogy, but they are also quite useful pedagogically. Working with these contradictions in the classroom is precisely the kind of problem-posing and critical reflection that critical theorists encourage educators to undertake. Shor and Freire discuss the value of contradiction. Shor asks his mentor, “Won’t students see [critical pedagogy] as a confusion? You are endorsing and criticizing the material at the same time.” Freire replies, “Ah, no, it is not a confusion. It is a contradiction. They must understand what contradiction means, that human action can move in several directions at once, that something can contain itself and its opposite also” (*Liberation* 69). Contradiction propels critical pedagogy to even more critical

levels of inquiry. Without the difficult work of examining and reconciling contradiction both in capitalist society and within the movement itself, critical pedagogy would be no different than traditional pedagogy.

I would argue, then, that the contradictions in critical pedagogy may not be so troubling if critical educators are always striving to make the inconsistencies in their own pedagogy a means to highlight and eradicate the inconsistencies in the scene. With students, critical teachers can interrogate the contradictions that make critical pedagogy seem inappropriate for most university students by exploring the multiple and contradictory roles we all inhabit. They can discuss how students' goals for employment differ from the democratic goals of critical pedagogy in order to expose the problematic relationship between schooling and capitalism. Critical educators can also be honest about their own resistance to a critique of the dominant hegemony, helping them connect more personally to students who likely feel the same discomfort. Such careful scrutiny of the contradictions of critical pedagogy should be the center of critical practice.

Roger Simon writes

[A] contradiction exists between the openness of human capacities that we encourage in a free society and the social forms that are provided and within which we must live our lives. It is this contradiction which is the starting point for a project of possibility and defines its broad aim: the transformation of the relation between human capacities and social forms.

(145)

Only when critical educators can examine with students the contradictions of critical pedagogy and the ways in which a contradictory scene creates these contradictions can social transformation be possible.

Just as critical educators should encourage a confrontation with contradiction in classroom dialogue, so must critical composition instructors encourage it in their students' writing. Adam Katz explains that teachers must resist the "consensus model" of writing in which students seek resolution and harmony in order to "conceal and reconcile contradictions and oppositions" (215). Katz recognizes the value of maintaining contradictions in student writing. Instead of accepting platitudes such as "we must all come together as a nation" from students, teachers must motivate students to grapple with difficult inconsistencies. In this way, writing can help students understand their "own position in relation to the dominant ideology" (215). Because critical pedagogy itself and the society that it critiques are both intrinsically contradictory, Katz's recommendation for student writing to embrace such contradictions seems intuitive.

As Burke's ratios reveal, contradiction can be useful and productive, a stark contrast to the limitations he seems to claim they might cause. Ignoring these unavoidable and productive inconsistencies is a terrible oversight by many critical teachers who do not realize the opportunity it creates for their own self-reflection as well as dialogue and writing in the classroom. Critical teachers and scholars need to make use of contradiction as a means to inform theory and

practice in the field rather than as cause for disillusionment. When more educators can discover the value of contradiction, they will no longer fear it, creating more interest in Freire's ideas and more effective practice of them. Instead of criticizing critical pedagogy and abandoning it altogether, scholars and teachers should recognize the value of contradiction and use it as a means for further research and more informed practice.

Finally, on a much grander scale, the contradiction inherent in the human condition itself ensures that critical pedagogy will always have a purpose. Burke insists on the "universal paradoxes of substance," the notion that because human beings are not of one substance we will be plagued perpetually by ambiguity and contradiction (*Grammar* 545). While this reality can make human endeavors like critical pedagogy difficult, it denies us neither the desire nor the will to move beyond our consubstantiality. This natural desire will ensure that there will always be educators drawn to the task of exposing and understanding contradiction, making critical pedagogy an eternal response to the paradoxes of human existence.

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