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**Teachers as the Gravediggers of Neoliberalism:
Promoting Dialectical Individualism from the Ruins of the Neoliberal State**

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Abstract

Neoliberalism will not die naturally, it must be killed through relentless criticism. However, as criticism of neoliberalism expands, scholars must not reify the term. Scholars must begin to disentangle the historical antecedents that comprise neoliberalism in order to expose it for the sham that it is. Perhaps the biggest sham of neoliberalism is its call for individual freedom. Specifically, by paying attention to the more revolutionary conceptions of individualism contained in some strands of Eighteenth century liberalism, the contradictions of neoliberalism can be exposed. If education, and society in general, is to move past neoliberalism, neoliberalism cannot simply be discarded or wished away, rather, it must be dialectically negated by superseding its unjust elements and retaining and transforming any of its more revolutionary elements to lay a new foundation for education in a post-neoliberal world. Drawing off this dialectical negation of neoliberalism, this paper argues for a new conception of individualism called dialectical individualism. This is not a return to some idealized form of liberalism however, but a new phase in human history with a new conception of individualism. The dialectical movement should not be seen as the product of some otherworldly force, but rather, it should be viewed as centered in the individual and driven by volunteerism in the context of the historical situation. Students can be taught to be dialectical in their actual school work, by writing challenging papers, by writing vision statements, and by partaking in collaborative assignments, and through their understanding of history and the present.

Keywords: neoliberalism, political economy, policy analysis, critical theory/pedagogy, historical analysis

Liberalism and Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism will not die naturally. It must be killed through a relentless criticism. As criticism of neoliberalism expands however, scholars must be wary not to reify the term. Peck (2010) cautioned that neoliberalism is not a universal notion which operates in the same way in all places. Rather, neoliberalism is more of a general framework, enacted and applied in distinct areas according to local customs and norms. Thus, neoliberalism should be seen as a series of local “projects” which operates according to the various conditions in specific areas. Peck’s (2010) assertion calls attention to the fluidity and uniqueness of neoliberalism. Extending Peck’s (2010) ideas further, in this article I argue that neoliberalism should not only be viewed as particular and distinct, rather scholars must begin to disentangle the historical antecedents that comprise neoliberalism. Neoliberalism should not be viewed as a superficial ideology, but as a rich and complex theory with roots in the liberalism of the eighteenth century. By disentangling the different threads that comprise neoliberalism, scholars can mount ever more effective defenses against it. More than this, scholars can actually begin to develop defenses against

neoliberalism by actually drawing on ideas contained in neoliberalism. This article, however, does not call for a return to some idealized liberal state. Rather, it calls for a dialectical supersession of the present state of affairs, to a higher and more just state, specifically for education. Dialectical movement entails the simultaneous destruction or negation of what is unjust and the preservation of what is just, in a present state of affairs (Forester, 1993). If education is to move past neoliberalism, it cannot simply be discarded. Rather, it must be *negated*, by superseding its unjust elements and retaining and transforming its more just elements and using these transformed elements as part of a new foundation of education.

This new, just foundation incorporates and retains ideas from neoliberalism's namesake: liberalism. Certain (but by no means all) strands of liberalism, as they developed in the late eighteenth century, saw the individual not simply as a consumer (as in neoliberalism), but as a creative entity which should be free of all unnecessary oppression to truly prosper (Sheehan, 1989). This paper develops this conception of the individual, uses it against the prevailing atomistic conception of neoliberalism, and specifically applies this new vision to education. Perhaps the most important aspect of neoliberalism, however distorted it has been by policymakers and corporate lobbyists for the sake of avoiding paying taxes, is the notion of individual freedom and the subsequent freedom from oppression.

Like liberalism, neoliberalism is primarily rooted in negative freedom (Plant, 2010). Negative freedom is usually read as a "freedom from," a freedom to be left alone, freedom from oppression. In contrast, positive freedom is a freedom that consists of a goal or *teleos*. Positive freedom is usually characterized as "freedom to". Some common conceptions of positive freedoms are "freedom to work" and "freedom to employment." In the most extreme sense, positive freedoms can usually entail the negation of certain negative freedoms in furthering of a goal, such as a just society. Yet, Berlin (1969) notes that the line between positive and negative freedom was never clear cut. Both conceptions are necessary to create a truly just society. Where neoliberals go astray is that they glorify negative freedom and hold negative freedom as an end, not a means. Justice in neoliberalism is the freedom to be left alone. Yet, when all individuals have negative freedoms, some can and do obtain power to oppress others. The negative freedom of neoliberalism is necessary, but only to a point and only in conjunction with positive freedoms of justice. Once this point is exceeded, as neoliberalism has done, the individual which neoliberals seek to exalt and protect is isolated and oppressed further.

This paper argues for a new conception of individualism which dialectically supersedes that of the narrow and dogmatic conception of the individual as it is currently expounded by neoliberalism and rooted in negative freedom. The dialectical movement should not be seen as the product of some otherworldly force; but rather, it should be viewed as centered in the individual and is driven by volunteerism in the context of the historical situation. Students can be taught to be dialectical, by fostering vision and hope, through their understanding of history and the present, and through their school assignments. Teachers and educators can promote this new type of dialectical individualism because they are knowledge disseminators and public servants. They can be the gravediggers of neoliberalism, but only if they choose to be.

Understanding the Dialectic

The dialectic is an extremely abstract notion which different thinkers have treated differently. It found its greatest expression in early nineteenth century Germany, with Hegel and Marx. While both thinkers treated the dialectic in different ways, Hegel saw it more as a conceptual movement whereas Marx saw it more as a historical and concrete phenomenon, some

basic commonalities can be ascertained. Essentially, dialectical movement can be described as a societal movement of opposites (Jay, 1996). One phase of history engenders its own contradiction which gives birth to a new phase. There are specific moments in history when contradictions in the social order become too egregious, where a system or idea no longer works, where it becomes contrary to reason. The power to negate is the cornerstone of the dialectic. Negation is criticism of the irrational.

Yet negation does not just entail destruction, rather, it entails a simultaneous preservation and abolition- preservation of what is rational, and an abolition of what is not rational (Forester, 1993). Rational however is not just rational in a logical-analytical sense, rational also means what is conducive to human growth and happiness (Jay, 1996). When something becomes contradictory, it is irrational to human betterment, yet there are still elements of it that might be rational. In a dialectical movement, these rational elements are retained but modified in the new phase (Forester, 1993). Once that phase becomes irrational, contradictory or contrary to reason, it undergoes dialectical change and is preserved and abolished. Hegel called this simultaneous preservation and abolition *aufgehoben*, a German term with no English equivalent.

Adorno (1973), writing after the horror of holocaust and the Gulags, called for dialectical thinking with no pre-determined end, this was his vision of negative dialectics. Of course, Adorno sometimes drifted off into cynicism and prefigured some of the more defeatist postmodern arguments. Nevertheless, Adorno's ideas of a dialectic which was not pre-determined can prove useful. Adorno (1973) argued that dialectical thinking could no longer work toward a predetermined goal, as it had previously under Marxism. Rather, it is unrest and uncertainty, specifically the uncertainty of non-identity and the inability of humanity to comprehend the whole within the evolving constellation, what we cannot name, that drives dialectical thinking forward. And it is in this perpetual state of non-identity where hope can be found because there are no predetermined solutions (Adorno, 1973). With no pre-determinism, there is hope.

Marx envisioned the dialectic as a movement with an end goal, that of the communist society and the classes society. Of course Marx did not try to predict exactly what this society would look like, yet he believed that history was inexorably leading to this phase. In the twenty-first century however, scholars are much more reticent about positing any grand utopias or teleological goals of history, and rightfully so. Genocides and holocausts, many in the name of communism itself, have made us wary. Zizek (2009), specifically writing after the Wall Street Crash and the onset of the Great Recession, argued that there is no historical savior waiting at the end of the dialectic, and to believe so only leads to catastrophe. There is only us, human action and volunteerism. We must save ourselves.

Some, many of the postmodernist ilk, have abandoned social change (Allan, 2008). Others fight for peripheral issues, such as LGBT rights or gay marriage. But where does that leave us who are fighting for large scale social change? Specifically, what role do educators play in dialectical movement? The contention in this article is that teachers and students can actually become dialectical, and they can take hold of the dialectic and drive it in new direction. A hardcore Marxist may balk at that contention however. Marx himself, and more recent Marxist education researchers such as Bowles and Gintis (1976), argued that the key to changing the education system was to change the surrounding larger environmental context that education finds itself in. Only a total social change, and specifically a redistribution of wealth and power in larger society, can truly change public education. Although Bowles and Gintis (1976), and even Marx himself, did recognize that education was a powerful instrument in social change,

they generally believed that societies must change before schools can. I agree in part. Educational institutions cannot magically change themselves by teaching differently. This belief would be naïve. Yet, where does this assertion leave teacher and student agency? Is public education and higher education simply an adjunct to social change? What is the role of education in social change?

I think the answers to these questions may be extremely nuanced and need to be thoroughly explored. Part of the answer lies in dialectical thinking. If the dialectic is cast not as a predetermined movement toward some supposed utopia, but rather, following Adorno (1973), as a phenomena which can help humanity understand the ineffability of the world, it may prove more useful. Specifically, the dialectic can help inform the role of pedagogy in social change. This article argues that dialectic movement can be used as a tool to pursue justice, and pedagogy is a part of this movement. Justice, while a multifarious term, entails hard moral questions and determinations, it entails among other things equal treatment under the law, wealth redistribution, environmental concerns, an absence of discrimination, participatory democracy and the relentless exposing of social ills (Pogge, 2008; Sandel, 2010). Examining neoliberalism and pedagogy in a dialectical sense may help to frame these notions in the larger constellation of social change.

The Dialect and Critical Pedagogy

A teacher's role in social change, specifically social change that will bring about the end of neoliberalism, is complex, but teachers are not mere adjuncts or handmaidens to change. Teachers in schools in America and across the world are in the prime position of training the next generation, and in the eyes of capitalists and the ruling classes, training the next generation of the labor force (Hill, 2012). This view also holds true for college professors and students. Students at all levels are largely seen as workers for the global economy. The language of recent educational policies for higher education and K-12 education are a blatant illustration of this sentiment (Letizia, 2015). Students at all levels are treated as workers, they are stripped of their critical capabilities. In traditional Marxism, teachers were seen largely as adjuncts and enforcers of the capitalist system. Yet, it is teachers who must carry out the will of policymakers. What if they refuse? In order to garner compliance, policymakers and neoliberals have led an assault on teacher's rights, created untenable accountability systems and vilified teachers unions. A similar pattern has ensued in higher education. As long as teachers and professors carry out the will of the policymakers, domination and suppression of critical education can ensue. But the whole enterprise rests on teacher agency. Even Bowles and Gintis (1976) admitted that many great teacher's existed, and that educational sites had become grounds of contestation. However, the power and impact of critical pedagogy may be more powerful than imagined by Bowles and Gintis (1976).

Critical pedagogy is the act of teaching students critical thinking, teaching students how to question the status quo. Critical pedagogy, along with other neo-Marxists traditions, sought to overcome the narrow focus on class and economics derived from traditional Marxism. Critical pedagogy seeks to uncover the power in schooling and create a space for critique (Steinberg, 2007). As Giroux (2007) notes, critical pedagogy seeks to connect education to the creation of a better world by giving knowledge a sense of direction. Bluntly stated, Giroux (2007) argued that critical pedagogy was the cornerstone of democracy. McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) argued that critical pedagogy was collective, in the sense that it requires the ideas of many people, critical, in the sense that it locates and exposes exploration, systematic, in that it looks for patterns and long range solutions, participative, in that it encourages action, and creativity.

Pedagogy then is not simply the adjunct or the puppet of the capitalist system. Within pedagogy itself, there exists tremendous potential to resist neoliberal domination, overcome it, and bring about new society.

Of course, structural changes in society, specifically the redistribution of wealth and power is not denied as being a prime driver of educational change. However, this does not preclude the power of teachers, students and critical pedagogy to effect and augment that change. In fact, the change which teachers, students, and critical pedagogy can make may be just as important as the structural changes because the teachers and students have the power to humanize those structural changes. It is one thing to break the power of the ruling classes, but another thing to create a power structure which is truly just. As Zizek (2009) noted, a revolution should not be measured by its popular moments, but rather, how those events change society on the daily, everyday level, on “the day after the insurrection” (Zizek, 2009, p. 154). In this article, I specifically sought to refashion the critical capabilities of critical pedagogy and make critical pedagogy dialectical. Dialectical movement occurs when people begin to understand the injustice in their society (Anyon, 2015). Yet, we cannot expect this to happen by itself. Rather, teachers can take a proactive role and help their students see this injustice. The human centered dialect I propose is rooted not only in abstract theories, but more importantly, in teacher and student agency, specifically in the everyday interactions between teachers and student-- lessons, class activities and discussions. Yet, before we can discuss how teachers, professors and students can drive the dialectic, first we must historically analyze the situation we find ourselves in, and how neoliberalism came to dominate educational policymaking. Only from this historical understanding can we progress past it.

The Dialectic of Liberalism: A Historical Review

Liberalism emerged as a semi-coherent doctrine of thought in the seventeenth century, but its antecedents lie in the Renaissance and in some instances, even earlier. Liberalism arose in Western Europe as a response to mercantilism. By the eighteenth century, the nation state and their monarchies were the dominant political unit in Western Europe. The massive royal apparatuses of these nation states, with their bureaucratic arms, regulated free trade and commerce. Many merchants, who became known as bourgeoisie or liberals, as they grew more powerful in number, began to resent, and then resist the intrusion of royal power in their earnings and livelihood. Yet, the rise of liberalism was so much more than an economic movement. A concomitant philosophical movement also underpinned the rise of liberalism (Breckman, 1999; Hobsbawm, 1962).

Since the 12th century, a growing notion of individualism had emerged in Western Europe, to the chagrin of the Catholic Church (Cantor, 1993). Rising literacy rates, more stable economies and overall better health and longer life expectancy rates all helped to contribute to this new view of the individual. Renaissance poets and painters began depicting individuals like they had not been seen since the Renaissance. Essentially, life was worth living and people celebrated life and their own individual accomplishments.

During the seventeenth century, philosophers such as Locke and Hobbes, and then later in the eighteenth century, philosophers such as Rousseau and Kant, elaborated and expounded on this notion of individualism. Liberalism was the celebration of the individual, but not just his economic capabilities but all an individual’s potential, form his political abilities, his potential for self-government, and his creativity (Hobsbawm, 1962; Sheehan, 1989). Many merchants and bourgeoisie saw in this celebration a way to give meaning to their work, to express their yearning

to be free from control, and ultimately to revolt. In many respects, liberalism culminated in the French Revolution (Hobsbawm, 1962). Some of the greatest and most profound expression of equality and personal freedom were created.

Of course, liberalism was not synonymous with egalitarianism, although many liberals did push for a more egalitarian society. Hobsbawm (1962) noted that liberals believed largely in a social order dominated by atomistic individuals who came together when necessary. Inequality was tolerated, and even encouraged, so long as it resulted from an equal starting point. Liberals did usually believe in some fetters on freedom, those were necessary to peace, and were hammered out in politics. Despite the more atomistic leanings of liberalism and its tendency toward inequality, French society, and ultimately the world, was changed irrevocably by the language of liberalism and its dedication to the awesome potential of the individual. Marx, the great critique of bourgeoisie culture, admitted that the achievements of the bourgeoisie were evidence of man's power over nature and of man's power in general. Railroads, factories, steam engines etc., were all evidence of this (Jones, 2002).

Again, it must be stressed that liberalism is a varied doctrine and that the revolutionary strand was one of many. Seventeenth century liberalism, especially the thinking that derived from Locke, took on a much more aristocratic flavor. The point here is that certain strands of liberalism were a powerful expression of revolution against a stagnant order, and that the source of this change was thought to be rooted in the individual's creative capabilities, not simply his ability to make a profit (Hobsbawm, 1962). Of course it cannot be denied that the economic impulse and the merchants desire to be free from royal control was central to liberalism. Many liberal bourgeoisie during the Eighteenth century saw the ideas of liberalism as a means to profit. Yet, liberalism as a whole was much more than crude accumulation of profit. Hobsbawm (1962) noted that for many bourgeoisie, the economic impulses of liberalism helped to give expression to man's freedom and awesome potential, and were not the end goal of freedom.

It is important to note that liberalism is not, and never was a coherent school thought. There are many fracture lines (Sheehan, 1989). Yet, one constant of any liberal theory (especially prior to the French Revolution) is the powers and capabilities of the individual (Hobsbawm, 1962). Liberal individualism was part of the larger Enlightenment project. While varied, one common thread among the most prominent Enlightenment thinkers was that humanity could build a better society through reason (Beiser, 1987; Breckman, 1999). An individual's capacity to exercise reason, judgment and critical thinking were central to this project. Perhaps the notion of liberalism individualism was most powerful as an antidote to medieval notions of natural inequality (as opposed to inequality that resulted from man's talents). Liberalism defied this order of kings, nobles and peasants, and in theory, argued that all men were equal and should be judged on their own merit, not their birth (Hobsbawm, 1962; Sheehan, 1989). Perhaps this is the essence of liberalism as a revolutionary doctrine and its most powerful articulation. Liberalism in America was less violent, but the results were similar. Liberals largely supported the American Revolution, and the American Revolution, like the French Revolution, produced some of the most revolutionary language and sentiments about liberty and equality.

As bourgeoisie liberals in France, Germany and other places in Western Europe, mainly composed of the middle class, gained political power and financial wealth, they become more reactionary. By the 1870s, liberalism was a hollow shell of its former self. In America, as in Europe, liberals by and large turned reactionary and conservative to safeguard their gains over the past century. The more radical elements of liberalism transformed into democratic socialistic

and communistic doctrines and were largely driven underground (Hobsbawm, 1962; Jones, 2002). The emaciation of liberalism continued as capitalism became global and as the factory system took hold (Jones, 2002). The gilded age saw the massive disparities of wealth and the first glimpse of environmental degradation. From the late 1870s, through the First World War and until the 1920s, capitalism had little restraint. The ideas of Adam Smith formed the foundation of capitalism and free trade. Smith (1998) sought to fuse the private and public sphere with the theory of the invisible hand. This theory holds that if all citizens were left to their own devices to protect their own self-interest through commerce and trade, their various efforts would keep each other in check and create relative harmony (Smith, 1998). Smith (1998) famously declared that private vice of individuals, when taken together, would lead to public virtue better than any deliberate efforts by governments or other societal entities (Plant, 2010). At the same time, Darwin's ideas of survival of the fittest were grafted onto Smithian liberalism and capitalism into an orgy of greed, excess and pillage. Finally, by 1929, with the onset of the depression, this orgy came to an end, or at least was put on hold for a few decades.

From the 1930s until the 1970s, in America and Western Europe, governments enacted many regulations on capitalism and business. The welfare state was created, with social safety nets (Peet, 2009). Businesses reluctantly agreed because they had no choice, they were facing a social revolution (Harvey, 2005). Yet, as the welfare state was constructed, many began to argue these states, with their high taxes, social safety nets and government planning, were beginning to look like socialism (Harvey, 2005).

It was during this time that the movement of neoliberalism began to form in Europe and America (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberals, who drew their inspiration from Eighteenth century liberals, namely Adam Smith's (1998) notion of the invisible hand, argued that the social welfare legislation of the 1930s and 1940s as detrimental to the market and global business. As their eighteenth century predecessors, neoliberals, or new-liberals, saw the market as the key to social harmony and functioning. If the market were simply allowed to function, it would guarantee happiness and justice for all (Harvey, 2005; Plant, 2010). This is the "invisible hand" (Smith, 1998, p. 7). However, the rising tide of government intervention in the 1940s and 1950s (which was necessitated by the collapse of capitalism in the preceding decades) threatened the functioning of markets worldwide. Yet, neoliberals largely reduced liberalism to a means to profit and selfishness, whereas the liberalism of the eighteenth century reversed this, and saw profit and man's productive capabilities as means to human progress and advancement.

In 1944, one of the founders of the neoliberal movement, Austrian economist F. A. Hayek, wrote his seminal text: *The Road to Serfdom*. In it, he argued that modern governments in America and Europe were moving their countries down the roads to serfdom because of increased government intervention and the emasculation of the individual (Plant, 2010; Reder, 1982). In 1947, a group of economists, philosophers and thinkers met at the Mt. Perlin hotel in France and penned the Mt. Perlin Declaration, which essentially outlined the doctrines of neoliberalism: dedication to the free market, empowerment of the individual, and resistance to government intervention (Harvey, 2005).

The key to this analysis is that neoliberalism was born from the old carcass of revolutionary liberalism. The onset of the Recession in the 1970s gave neoliberals, who had operated on the fringes in the American and European political sphere for decades, their window (Harvey, 2005; Peet, 2009). Neoliberals used the language of liberalism, particularly its notion of individual freedom, as a hammer to beat back the welfare state and government regulation of the economy. The strand of negative liberty that had always been present in liberalism was now

freed from any positive obligations. Under neoliberalism, negative freedom is taken to its extreme. There is nothing to restrain the individual, there is no public, no society. This of course serves the richest and most powerful individuals well. There are no more fetters to their actions and they are free to legally exploit whomever they want with impunity, all under the cloak of liberty. Of course as Sen (1999) notes, this is a partisan and ideological reading of Smith and classic liberalism. While liberalism did have in-egalitarian and atomistic tendencies regarding the individual, Sen argues that the extreme atomism and governmental aversion of neoliberals is not warranted by liberalism.

Neoliberals also found a marriage of convenience with conservatives. Since neoliberals see an unimpeded free market as the best method to achieve social harmony and efficiency, neoliberals make common cause with neoconservatives who emerged in reaction to the supposed turmoil of the 1960s protests. Nothing which has the potential to harm the functioning of the market can be tolerated, and so, usually in complete contradiction to most neoliberal theory, government intervention is actually needed to enforce market rules or to create markets where none exist (Harvey, 2005; Marginson, 2006). The neoconservatives who railed against what they saw as the permissive and liberal attitudes of the 1960s, which condoned promiscuity, rampant drug use, and a disregard for traditional morals, sought to corral the power of higher education, which they viewed as one of the fomenters of rebellion (Newfield, 2008). Neoconservatives saw the market as the guarantor of harmony, because it allowed for individual choice, and the markets must be maintained (Marginson, 2006). Neoliberals utilized the repressive aspect of neoconservatism to ensure that market forces remain unimpeded (Harvey, 2005; Stanley, 2007).

Horkheimer and Adorno (1969) perfectly encapsulated what the individualism of liberalism has become under capitalism. They noted that the capitalism of the twentieth century, while paying lip-service to individual, has actually reduced the individual to a universal or pseudo-individual. The individual of liberalism, with his creative capabilities and capacities for critical reflection, was replaced by the notion of the consumer in late capitalism. The individual is not real, but a convenient (and profitable fiction). This consumer driven vision of individualism is all too present in schools today (Giroux, 2011). Giroux (2011) argued that the Bush years accelerated this vision of an atomistic individual and made it the forefront of policymaking and American social life. Negative freedom was seen as a moral endeavor.

By resurrecting the true meaning of liberalism from neoliberalism, and refashioning it in light of the criticisms of neoliberalism, educationalists may be able to create a new foundation for schooling. Essentially, schools cannot simply cast individuals as consumers or cogs in the global market, nor can schools focus on the public good at the detriment of the individual. Neoliberalism, as perverted and disillusioned as it is, may contain certain seeds which must be extracted, nurtured and employed in a wholly different fashion by educational entities. Students must be seen as creative and spontaneous individuals, who should be free of all undue oversight, but always with recognition of the individuals place in the social context.

The Dialectical Supersession of Neoliberalism

Now, liberalism has come full circle. From its origins as a revolutionary doctrine and power lever of social change, to its reactionary slide into conservatism and finally into its reanimation as a gross caricature of its former self, liberalism has now underpinned one of the most repressive regimes in history, a global regime of neoliberal genocide. This is not a “traditional” genocide, rather it is much more ubiquitous. As Pogge (2008) noted, from the end

of the Cold War in 1991 until 2005 there were over 250 million deaths due to poverty related causes. Almost 800 million live on the brink of starvation, among which 34,000 children die daily of starvation. Over 700 million adults cannot read and millions still practice open defecation (Pogge, 2008). The 250 million figure is more than double all the genocides of the 20th century. Starvation, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, and the lack of access to sanitation abound in a world that is supposed to have solved these issues. Capitalism, and neoliberalism in particular, was supposed to save the world from communism and raise the standard of living for all, yet, neoliberalism has impoverished (most of) the world further. Engels' phrase "starving in the midst of plenty" seems more apt now than in the gilded age when he first uttered it.

And while clear lines cannot be drawn directly from one person's or organization's actions to the deplorable ills noted above, the gross accumulation of wealth has led to staggering inequality across the world which helps to perpetuate them. A January 2014 Oxfam report highlighted some of the statistics on global inequities. The growing inequities are tearing the fabric of societies (Castells, 2000; Fuentes-Nieva & Galasso, 2014; Woods, 1999). Almost half of the world's wealth is now owned by just 1% of the population. The wealth of the bottom half of the world's population, some 3.5 billion people, is equal to the richest 85 people in the world. In the United States, a country that long espoused that all are equal, the wealthiest 1% captured 95% of the post-recession growth since 2009 (Fuentes-Nieva & Galasso, 2014). Economic inequality turns political systems from representative organs to vehicles for the rich to capture the lowest tax rates, the best educational opportunities, and the best health care (Fuentes-Nieva & Galasso, 2014; Scherrer, 2014). As evidenced above, the situation is acute in developing countries. However, even in the United States, the effects of poverty are not far off, there are over 34 million starving children in the United States alone.

The staggering statistics above hinge on the notion of the individual. Hans Blumenberg (1983), German historian and philosopher, argued that generations do not inherit ideas but rather questions. Following this line of reasoning, it can be argued that dialectical movement perhaps renders questions for future generations to answer. If this view of dialectical change is taken, then the question for our age pertains to the individual. What exactly is the individual? Is the individual a solitary entity with no moral responsibility for the greater good? An entity with unlimited negative freedom, bound by no values or morals or other individuals? This is the individual of neoliberalism. While negative freedom is essential to individualism, it can only be a starting point. Berlin (1969), who was a proponent of negative freedom, argued that negative and positive freedom are necessary, in varying amounts. An individual needs negative freedom to express herself, to create and think. Yet, as Fromm (1959) noted over half a century ago, total freedom is alienating and in the most extreme sense can drive an individual (who has been stripped of communal ties) into the arms of a Nazi-like regime.

So, neoliberals are right to stress the importance of negative freedom, yet what good is negative freedom if individuals have no community to contribute to? No society to be part of, no place to put their talents to good use? Neoliberalism has eviscerated individualism of liberalism to a skeleton. Yet, that conception, derived from liberalism, perverted by neoliberalism, still holds value today. The individual of liberalism can be a creative, revolutionary entity, not simply the isolated individual of neoliberalism. (Again, the atomistic tendencies of classic liberalism cannot be denied, yet, classic liberalism, especially in the late Eighteenth and very early nineteenth century, did have a revolutionary component). Positive freedom, in the form of freedom to learn, freedom to have adequate schooling, freedom to work, freedom to be safe is integral to individualism, as well as negative freedom.

Teachers can help answer the question of our age pertaining to individualism, and more importantly, help their students answer this question, by helping to promote a new vision of individualism, dialectical individualism. A dialectical individual is a new vision of individualism centered in negative freedom and positive freedom. However, negative freedom is not just a ruse to shirk responsibilities or gain profit, rather, negative freedom is rooted in creativity and expression. Of course, when negative freedom begins to take on specific characteristics it could be said that it moves closer to positive freedom. Yet, in dialectical individualism, negative and positive freedoms are not at odds with each other, but feed off each other. There is not a stark dividing line between an individual's positive and negative freedom, rather the boundary is fluid. Horkheimer and Adorno (1969), like Marx before them, argued that in an ideal society, the individual would have personal freedom, economic security as well as obligations to the community. Dialectical individualism is a continuation of this simple desire, the desire to protect individual freedom, promote individual industriousness and happiness all within a communal context. Yet, dialectical individuals are not stagnant, but proactive. Dialectical individuals are the motors of the dialectical movement. This article will conclude by offering practical suggestions for promoting dialectical individualism in classrooms.

Vision, Hope, and Writing

Viewing education as a site of hope and vision is by no means a new idea. Beginning with Paulo Friere (2000), and continuing through the works of McLaren, Giroux, Hill, Malott and others (Malott, Hill, & Banfield, 2013; Malott, 2014), true education is cast as hope. Hicks (2010) has argued that education must help students to envision a better and more just future. Giroux has similarly argued that true education must inspire imagination and creativity for us to imagine a world without capitalism. Giroux (2011), McLaren (2007) and Hicks (2010) argue that this sense of creativity, hope, imagination, and vision is desperately needed as neoliberalism eviscerates any semblance of true democratic participation and the surveillance state compliments this evisceration. McLaren (2007) argues that educators must take action and create situations for students to become critical agents. I will draw off of the above theories of criticism, hope, and imagination, but cast them as dialectical tools which can help answer the question of individualism in our age, and in the widest sense, advance a new era in human history.

One technique is to have students write a vision statement for society, and then brainstorm ways it could be possibly achieved. Vision statements may sound trite or be viewed as a formality, and many times, this is correct (Bryson, 2004). But a well-crafted vision statement, if done earnestly, can be a powerful thing. What is a vision? Kouzes and Posner (2008) argue that a vision is a conceptual idea which can serve to focus the energies of individuals toward an ideal situation. In short, a vision statement is a destination. True visions are not just what is probable or based on some statistical calculation, rather a true vision is what *possible* (Kouzes & Posner, 2008).

Yet, in a wider sense, a vision can be the link between past, present, and future. Kouzes and Posner (2008) argue that visions are created by drawing on experience and knowledge of the past, utilizing this information in the present, and using it to build the future. In a wider sense then, visions can be dialectical. Visions are not solitary endeavors, although they can begin this way. Rather, visions are the work of groups and organizations. A vision is not just for the near future either. Visions can take lifetimes, centuries, or generations to actualize. The people who

labor for a truly revolutionary vision may never see that vision materialize in their lifetime. As Kouzes and Posner (2008) state: “It may take a decade to build a company, a century to grow a forest, and generations to set people free” (p. 130).

Teachers can encourage their students to create a vision for society. Here, teachers can discuss the many issues in society as they relate to the teachers discipline. Yet, this should not just be a five minute busy work exercise. A truly powerful vision can take an entire school year to develop. This can be in the form of a project, or paper, or alternate assignment and should be tailored differently to different age groups. Teachers in a variety of disciplines can have students draw on disciplinary content to create visions for the future. For instance, history teachers can show students how to truly analyze historical events, and draw on the past to help create a vision for the future. This vision could be local, regional or global. What events can inform the future and how? What connections can be made from the past to the present?

This can work in any discipline. Vision is especially important for the hard sciences. Students in the hard sciences can create visions for the future where science and technology (STEM) are used in ways which are just and which aid humanity, not just as ways to make a profit. Here, issues of fracking, loss of habitat etc., could be fruitful issues of discussion. Yet, the most powerful visions will be interdisciplinary. Human knowledge is an ever growing tapestry of ideas, yet as it grows, it becomes specialized. Specialization is crucial to the growth of knowledge, but it can lead to fragmentation (Jay, 1996; Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Teachers must be the bridge between disciplines and help their students use not only the power of disciplines, but the power of interdisciplinary knowledge to form new visions of justice for the future. This is crucial because students should be made to understand that the knowledge they learn in school is not just for test taking and credentialing. So, how can fracking be handled from a scientific and policy perspective (this could incorporate chemistry, earth science and government as subjects). The knowledge they learn, even in its truncated form, is perhaps humanities greatest work of art (even if it has led to atrocities) and it must be the main source of visions for the future.

Some may question if these lofty assignments can even be pursued in the climate of high stakes testing. Teachers’ time and actions are now largely dictated by testing regimes. More than this, teachers may not want to take the risk of teaching materials that are not written in the curriculum. Yet, as many studies have demonstrated, teaching above the curriculum actually raises test scores (Stoddard, 2014). Moreover, teachers must be careful, but they may also have a higher moral responsibility to not only teach to the test. Writing vision statements can and should be done alongside of test preparation. Most curriculums do contain essential knowledge, just not all the knowledge that students need to know. The knowledge of curriculums, which is tested by standardized tests, is also only represented in the simplest ways (usually memorization and understanding, which are the lower levels on Bloom’s taxonomy). Vision statements enhance and transform the bare curriculum knowledge into something much more relevant and useful.

A vision can be a powerful dialectical tool because it situates individual agency in the larger context of social and historical movement. And this is the crucial point, how visions can be used to inspire a new view of individualism. This is dialectical individualism; it comprises the creativity of negative freedom with values and ideals of positive freedom. Dialectical individualism is the nexus between the individual and larger society. If students are positioned to see what is possible, and more importantly to take active roles in actualizing the possible future, teachers and students can be ready to draw on that forgotten and dormant strand of

revolutionary action hidden deeply in liberalism, and even neoliberalism.

Visions however cannot be fantasies. A vision without a plan is worthless. It is one thing to have a vision, but quite another thing to actually have sustainable pathways toward that vision. Here, teachers can look to the research on hope. Synder (2000) and Lopez (2014) argue that hope can be taught, that it is a rational process. Hope is not an airy emotion, but rather, hope consists of a realistic goal, pathways to achieve that goal, motivations to achieve that goal, and obstacles in achieving that goal (Lopez, 2014; Synder, 2000). Visions are similar to goals. When helping students to craft visions, teacher can help students understand feasible pathways to their visions, the motivation required, and how to deal with possible setbacks. By using the language of hope, teachers can help students create more realistic visions. Visions can get students thinking about society and their place in it. Teachers must show students, or better yet, allow students to discover how their visions can be achieved. Following the language of hope, a realistic goal must be established. Again, this does not, and should not be a probable goal, but a possible one. For instance, a student may want to live in a world where there is less wealth disparity, or where education is not seen simply as an adjunct to the market. While these visions probably will not happen in the near future, they are possible. Through the process of vision statement writing, students can begin to understand their role in creating a more just world.

This effort should not remain in the classroom either. Rather, students should be encouraged to carry their ideas into their own communities. Even if the students create global visions, which seem to be intangible in the time-being, teachers can help nurture a local component. Teachers can take students to town meetings and help them understand the political process. Could students become active in town meetings? Could they become active in the community in other ways? Action is worthless if it only stays in the ivory tower. Here, McLaren (2007) speaks of a war of position, which is a struggle to unify diverse social movements to resist global capitalism, and a war of maneuver, which is an effort to challenge and transform the state. Following these ideas, teachers can help students actualize their visions. Where are students best positioned to carry out their visions? Who should students contact, who should they organize in order to best promote their vision? With an eye to position and maneuver, teachers and students together can help position students to achieve their visions and effect change.

Of course, the theories of hope are primarily psychological and largely devoid of critical or social leanings (Diener, 2009). As Giroux (2011) and Hicks (2010) noted, hope cannot just be an individual endeavor, rather, it must be a collective one shared by other members in the society. In essence, hope is the ability to see past the present and create a better society together. As Giroux (2011) stated: “Hope offers the belief that a different future is possible” (p. 122). More so, this ability should be harnessed to become dialectical and foster truly just social movement. The same holds true for vision. Visions, buttressed with the language of hope (and not just individual or atomistic hope, but hope rooted in collective action) can be a first step to negating the atomism of neoliberalism and working toward dialectical individualism and the future.

Another important step in this process of vision actualization, and one in which a teacher can play a truly revolutionary role, is through student writing. If visions are destinations, academic writing is the means of transportation. Too many times academic writing is seen as a pedantic exercise (Monte-Sano, 2008). Giroux (2014) argued that even in the university, writing has become “safe”. Doctoral candidates churn out dissertations that will not hurt or offend anyone, but which will not inspire anyone either. Yet, as Giroux (2014) emphatically stated,

students must not be acquiescing but challenging the established order, especially one that is rife with injustice and suffering. Teachers must elicit the same type of revolutionary writing from their students. Yet, with that said, the writing should not simply be emotional tirades or fantasies. Rather, teachers can ground the writing techniques of visions in critical pedagogy itself.

One specific way writing can be linked to vision is by focusing on the thesis. The thesis is the foundation of academic writing (Booth, Colomb & Williams, 2008). It is the thesis which states the claim of the paper, the argument of the paper (Booth, Colomb & Williams, 2008). In an earlier work, I outlined a framework which linked a student's thesis to specific levels of Robert Kegan's (1994) notion of self-authorship and William Perry's (1968) ideas of cognitive understanding. The framework is not meant to grade critical thinking but rather guide and foster it. In the framework, there are three levels of theses. At level one, thesis is simply a restatement of an existing argument, it is the most basic and usually what a student produces to satisfy a requirement. These are necessary theses many times for students to grapple with information and to for students to simply understand an argument. This type of thesis correlates with Kegan's (1994) notion of the socialized mind and Perry's (1968) idea of dualistic knowing. The socialized mind is a state where an individual establishes their understanding of the world by reference to external formulas, such as religious or political doctrines (Kegan, 1994). Similarly, Perry's (1968) dualistic knowing is when individuals assume that knowledge is dualistic, that there are right and wrong answers, and that authority figures, such as church leaders or political figures, or teachers, have the right answer. A level two thesis aligns with Kegan's (1994) idea of a holding environment, where individuals begin to question the external formulas that they once held as infallible. Finally, a level three thesis aligns with Kegan's (1994) notion of self-authorship, where an individual can question external formulas and judge the merits of each for herself. Similarly, the third level of Perry's (1968) scheme is known as relativistic thinking, and it is where individuals can pick one of the multiple answers to a problem and defend that answers against the others. A third level thesis can be an act of originality and creation, an act of synthesis, where the individuals no longer relies on the arguments of others, but uses those arguments to create something new.

Vision writing can incorporate the same elements of the above framework to foster self-authorship and relativistic thinking, but toward dialectical change. A level one vision may be a common vision of the future, such as ending world hunger. A level two vision may be more critical, or nuanced, it may be more argumentative. It may be an example of a holding environment, where a student is beginning to question what they formerly believed were infallible ideas (or even solutions, such as just increasing welfare), or at least just become more critical of all elements of society. Whereas a level three vision may be a combination of other elements, or ideas, it can be original. A student can truly take ownership of a level three vision. It also may be more specific or tailored to local or regional conditions, and more achievable. Writing, as the architecture of vision, can become a dialectical practice because it can allow students to come into contact with the injustices of their society and create methods to rectify these injustices and create a better world from the foundation of their own world.

Thesis writing can also be linked with newer pedagogical methods, such as wikis (Suaronta & Vaden, 2007). A teacher can have a class or groups within a class, write a collaborative vision together using a wiki. A wiki is a collaborative online document that all students have access to, on which all students can write, contribute, and edit. Here, knowledge is democratic because all can contribute. The teacher, and class or groups, can decide on some

prompt or theme. Individual contributions could be guided using the framework above, where teachers try to foster self-authorship and relativistic thinking. At the end, the wiki could become a truly collaborative revolutionary vision in which all students partake, and all students have ownership. Revolutionary writing can foster dialectical individualism, because it can be the method by which individuals begin to insert themselves into the historical and social movement of their age and truly become agents of change.

Conclusion

This paper argued that deep within neoliberalism, lies a dormant strand of revolutionary liberalism. From this, critical pedagogy can help to lead a dialectical supersession of neoliberalism, one where individuals are no longer just seen as consumers, but as truly creative entities which can help to transform the existing social order. This is known as dialectical individualism. Specifically, teachers can help students to create their own visions of the future and harness academic writing to achieve these vision statements and become agents of change to finally negate neoliberalism and progress to a higher stage of humanity.

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