Perspectives and Imperatives
CURRICULUM THEORY, TEXTUAL AUTHORITY,
AND THE ROLE OF TEACHERS
AS PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

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During the last two decades, educational critics have made important
gains in developing a critical theory of curriculum and education. In particular,
critical theorists have made significant inroads in providing a language of
critique for analyzing and demystifying the role that schools play as agencies
of moral and political regulation, they have also begun to provide a program-
matic language for understanding schools as sites of critical learning and social
empowerment.

Central to this project is the more recent work of theorizing curriculum
as a form of cultural politics. In this view, the relationship between knowledge
and power is analyzed as part of a wider effort to define schools as places
where a sense of identity, worth, and possibility is organized through the
interaction among teachers, students, and texts. Accordingly, schools are
analyzed as places where students are introduced to particular ways of life,
where subjectivities are produced, and where needs are constructed and
legitimized. The more recent work in critical theories of curriculum has
focused on two general modes of inquiry.

In the first and most dominant mode of inquiry, radical theorists have
analyzed the various ways knowledge and power come together to give a
particular ideological bent to the form and content of curriculum knowledge.
Much of this work is concerned with uncovering the ideological interests at
work in the content of the curriculum, in revealing how racist, sexist, and
class-specific messages work to construct particular ideological representa-
tions and images. Equally important, but to a lesser degree, critical theorists
within this perspective have attempted to analyze the structuring principles of
curriculum texts to more fully understand how these coding structures con-
tribute to the ways knowledge is produced, mediated, consumed, and trans-
formed as part of the overall pedagogical process.1 In the second mode of

1See, for example, Michael W. Apple, Ideology and Curriculum (Boston: Routledge & Kegan
Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture, ed. Leslie G. Roman, Linda K. Christian-
Inquiry, critical theorists have focused on the historical and cultural practices of subordinate groups and the ways these practices give rise to particular relations of oppression and resistance in schools. In this perspective, much attention falls on analyzing how school as a cultural and social terrain organizes, legitimates, sustains, and refuses particular forms of student experience. In some cases, attempts within this perspective have developed the rudiments of a curriculum theory and critical pedagogy based on an effort to legitimate and incorporate the everyday experiences, languages, histories, and values of subordinate groups into the school curriculums. Central to this perspective is the need to view schools as both instructional and cultural sites, as places where knowledge and learning are deeply related to the different social and cultural forms that shape how students understand and respond to classroom work.

Despite the importance of this approach, it has not integrated in a dialectical fashion attempts to develop theoretically and politically useful school knowledge with a similar concern for developing a critical pedagogy. On the contrary, theorists who focus on developing "ideologically correct" school knowledge often assume that questions of pedagogy can be treated as an afterthought. They often believe that if teachers present the "right knowledge" to students, the students will automatically learn something. In this case, the ideological correctness of one's position appears to be the primary determining factor in assessing the knowledge produced and exchanged between students and teachers. At best, questions of pedagogy are reduced to a technical consideration over whether one might use a seminar, lecture, or multimedia format. On the other hand, theorists struggling with the difficult task of creating the broader outlines of what constitutes a critical theory of curriculum seem impervious to the issue of how knowledge is actually produced and authority legitimated in the encounter between particular forms of curriculum and the social relations of the classroom.

Curriculum theory solely needs a theory of textual authority that allows teachers and students to reference how knowledge and classroom social relations are constructed in ways that may either silence or empower. Textual authority, in this approach, is developed as part of a wider analysis of the struggle over culture fought out at the levels of curriculum knowledge, pedagogy, and the exercise of institutional power. In addition, we must develop a politics and pedagogy of voice as part of a theory of curriculum that

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opens up texts to a wider range of meanings and interpretations, while constructing student experience as part of a broader discourse of critical citizenship and democracy. We must view teaching as part of a larger curriculum project related to constructing political subjects and forming schools as democratic public spheres. Administrators and teachers need to rethink their roles as public intellectuals and thus must reject the cult of knowledge, expertise, and disembodied rationality that permeates the discourse of curriculum theory. Educators need to take up the task of redefining educational leadership through forms of social criticism, civic courage, and public engagement that allow them to expand oppositional spaces both within and outside of schools, these spaces increasingly challenge the ideological representations and relations of power undermining democratic public life.\(^3\)

**BEYOND CURRICULUM AND THE DISCOURSE OF SIMPLICITY**

Curriculum theory has never existed as a monolithic discourse. On the contrary, it has always constituted a site of struggle, a site defined by the imperative to organize knowledge, values, and social relations to legitimate and reproduce particular ways of life. As an introduction to particular ways of life, the various discourses of curriculum theory are neither ideologically innocent nor politically neutral. Deeply entrenched in the world of politics, curriculum as a discourse and organized structure of social relations represents both an expression and an enforcer of particular relations of power.

In spite of the gains that alternative views of curriculum have made in the last decade, the field has fallen on hard times. In many advanced industrial democracies, public school curriculums have come under heavy attack from various elements on the Right. In some cases, school curriculums have been fashioned in the interest of an industrial psychology that attempts to reduce schools and learning to strictly economic and corporate concerns. Thus, in many countries, we are witnessing the development of school-business partnerships. Corporate institutions adopt schools and organize their curriculums to provide the skills necessary for domestic production and expanding capital. Under the euphemism of "investing in our children," major corporations are underwriting school curriculums that link teaching basic skills with good work habits. In other cases, curriculums are being developed around the cultural imperatives of a selected version of the so-called Western civilization. In this view, schools take on a decidedly different role; rather than being defined as vehicles for economic reform, schools become sites of cultural production.

\(^3\)This theme is taken up in Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Education under Siege* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1985); and in Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Postmodern Education. Politics, Culture, and Social Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).
and their purpose is redefined through the imperatives of providing students with the language, knowledge, and values necessary to preserve the essential traditions of Western culture.

In the language of curriculum reform advocated by the Right, democracy loses its once dynamic nature and is reduced to a set of inherited principles and institutional arrangements that teach students how to adapt rather than question the basic precepts of society. In these views, students rarely find themselves introduced to modes of knowledge that celebrate democratic forms of public life or that provide them with the knowledge and skills they will need to critically examine the society in which they live and work.

The political and strategic inadequacy of much critical and radical curriculum theory is largely evident in its overall refusal to engage the theoretical gains that now characterize literary studies, feminist theory, post-structuralism, post-modernism, and democratic theory. Theoretically isolated from the many innovations taking place in the larger world of social theory, many curriculum theorists have removed themselves from critically engaging the limitations of the political projects implicit in their own work and have resorted instead to teaching the importance of the language of simplicity and the privileging of practice over theory. The call to writing in a curriculum language that is touted as clear and accessible has become the political and ideological equivalent of a moral and political vision that increasingly collapses under the weight of its own anti-intellectualism. Similarly, curriculum theory is increasingly dissolved into practice under the vote-catching call for a focus on the concrete as the all-embracing sphere of educational strategy and relevance.

My argument against these practices is not meant as a clever exercise of merely reversing the categories so that theory is valued over practice or abstract language over the language of popcorn imagery. Nor am I merely suggesting that critical educators mount an equally reductionist argument against the use of clear language or the importance of practice. At issue here is the need to both question and reject the reductionism and exclusions that characterize the binary opposition informing these overly pragmatic sentiments. Let me pose an alternative argument.

Every new paradigm creates its own language because the old paradigms or curriculum theories produce through their use of language particular forms of knowledge and social relations that legitimate specific relations of power. Oppositional paradigms offer new languages by attempting to reconstruct and challenge dominant relations of power and knowledge legitimated through traditional forms of discourse. This opposition often reflects major changes in thinking that are mediated and produced through related shifts in new ways of speaking and writing. Oppositional languages are generally unfamiliar, provoking questions and pointing to social relations that will often appear alien and strange to many educators. At stake here is not the issue of "bad" writing, as if writing that is difficult to grapple with has nothing important to say. Rather, the most important point for educators and curriculum theorists
to address is not clarity but whether this writing offers a vision and practice for deepening the possible relations between the discourse of curriculum and the imperatives of a radical democracy.

But another issue also seems ignored in the current debate about language and clarity, particularly the relationship between language and the notion of domination. Those who call themselves progressive educators, whether feminists, Marxists, or otherwise, who make the call for clear writing synonymous with an attack on critical educators, have missed the role that the "language of clarity" plays in a dominant culture that cleverly and powerfully uses "clear" and "simplistic" language to systematically undermine and prevent the conditions arising for a mass culture to engage in rudimentary forms of complex and critical thinking. In effect, missing in this analysis is the homogenization and standardization of language in the mass media and the schools that point to how language and power often combine to offer the general public and students subject positions cleansed of a complex thought or insight. That progressive educators have largely ignored this issue when taking up the question of language makes suspect not only their own claims to clarity but also the limits of their own political judgments.

A related issue needs to be addressed in this argument. Many critical educators often assume a theoretically simplistic and politically incorrect notion of audience. It is theoretically simplistic because it assumes that there is one public sphere rather than a number of public spheres characterized by diverse levels of intelligibility and sophistication. Moreover, by suggesting that there is only one audience or public sphere to whom critical educators speak, there is no way to connect discourse with audiences marked by differences in histories, languages, cultures, or everyday experiences. This position flattens the relationship between language and audience and cancels out the author's need to consider an audience's historical, political, and cultural specificity. The politics of this position either leads us into the terrain of elitism and vanguardism or into the political dead end of cynicism and despair.

Language is always constructed with respect to the specificity of the audience it addresses and should be judged not only in pragmatic terms but also with regard to the theoretical and political viability of the project it articulates. The complexity of language is not at issue here, rather the viability of the theoretical framework it constitutes and promotes. Moreover, the relationship between theory and practice is multifaceted and complex. Theory in some instances directly informs practice, but in others practice restructures theory as a primary force for change. In some cases, theory (in the more limited sense of the practice of producing narrative and rhetoric) also provides a refuge to think beyond current forms of practice to envision what is "not yet."

Privileging practice without due consideration of the complex interactions that mark the totality of theory-practice and language-meaning relationships is not simply reductionistic but is also a form of theoretical tyranny.
Theory, in this sense, becomes a form of practice that ignores the political value of "theoretical discourse" within a specific historical conjuncture. Rather than examining the language of curriculum theory as part of a wider historical moment of self-examination, the language and politics of theory are merely reduced to an unproblematic concern with clarity rather than with making certainty itself problematic. The intimacy of the dialectic between theory and practice is reduced to an opposition between theory and complexity on the one hand, and practice and clarity on the other. This reduction is the mark of a vapid, pragmatic, anti-intellectualism whose leveling tendency occludes the role of language in constructing theory as a historically specific practice that makes politics and praxis possible as we engage the particular problems of a given time and place.

During this period of conservative leadership and authority in many industrialized countries, with its appeal to universality, its totalitarian view of history, its ethnocentric embrace of culture, and its celebration of greed and individualism, educators need to ask important questions on the counter-hegemonic role that a discourse of curriculum might assume. We can begin by specifically addressing the need to develop forms of theoretical practice capable of retrieving history as the discourse of the other, reclaiming democracy as a site of struggle within a wider public vision, and developing a radical ethic that rejects finality and certainty for the voice of difference and dialogue. Curriculum theory offers the opportunity for developing a cultural politics whose identity and ethical value can be understood only in particular circumstances, informed by the historical conjuncture that gives it meaning. The real debate over theory is about both the specific ideological content of various theoretical discourses and the conditions that give these ideas their limits and their power.

At issue here is whether the language of curriculum theory works in the interest of making the familiar strange, acknowledging difference as the basis for a public philosophy that rejects totalizing theories that view the other as a deficit and providing the basis for asking questions the dominant culture finds too dangerous to raise. Many educators often forget that the importance of language as a theoretical practice derives from its power as a critical and subversive discourse. To judge curriculum theory next to the simple yardstick of clarity does not offer a serious challenge to curriculum discourses that cover their ideological interests through an appeal to objectivity or universality, nor does it provide the basis for understanding how language has become complicitous with an anti-intellectualism that undermines administrators' and teachers' ability to think in critical and oppositional terms. Moreover, the ideological construction of clarity as a political issue more often than not represents a specific theoretical discourse incapable of reflecting on its own practice within the present historical conjuncture; a practice that has more to do with a defense of the status quo than it does with developing a viable politics of theory, language, and schooling.
Curriculum theory as a form of practice points to the need for constructing a critical discourse to constitute and reorder the nature of our experiences and the objects of our concerns so we can both enhance and further empower the ideological and institutional conditions for a radical democracy. The theoretical framework presented here makes no claim to certainty; it is an unfinished discourse that may help to illuminate the specifics of oppression and the possibilities for democratic struggle and renewal for educators who believe that we can change schools and society and that their individual and collective actions can make a difference.

The appeal to language cannot justify a universal or absolute claim to either truth or meaning. Language does not have a fixed and unchanging correspondence with reality; on the contrary, as Belsey points out, it is constituted "through a system of signs which signify by means of their relationship to each other":

Meaning is public and conventional, the result not of individual intention but of inter-individual intelligibility. In other words, meaning is socially constructed, and the social construction of the signifying system is intimately related, therefore, to the social formation itself.¹

Therefore, ideologies inscribed in language govern the construction of meaning, authority, and subjectivity; these ideologies offer different possibilities for people to construct their relationships to themselves, others, and the larger reality. The group controlling the economic and cultural apparatuses of a given society largely determine what meanings are considered the most important, what experiences are deemed the most legitimate, and what forms of writing and reading matter. We must view knowledge in the context of power, and consequently, we need to understand the relationship among writers, readers, and texts as sites where different readings, meanings, and forms of cultural production take place. In this case, reading and writing are productive categories, or forms of discourse, that configure practices of dialogue, struggle, and contestation. This position strongly challenges the dominant view of literacy that reduces reading and writing to essentially descriptive categories tacitly supporting forms of pedagogy that emphasize individual mastery and the passive consumption of knowledge and skills.²

By challenging the commonsense assumptions inscribed in the dominant ideology of discourse and power, administrators and teachers can reconstruct their own theoretical frameworks by adding new categories of analysis and by rethinking the actual purpose of their teaching. Interrogating the connection between language and power is crucial for understanding how educational workers might view curriculum theory as a form of textual authority that legitimates a particular form of discursive practice. Understanding curriculum as part of a broader struggle between dominant and subordinate discourses has critical implications for how educators produce and "read" curriculums, engage the notion of student experience, and redefine critically their own role as engaged, public intellectuals. The emphasis on language and power provides a theoretical framework for pedagogy that reconceptualizes the ways historically specific relations of power and textual authority combine to produce, organize, and legitimate particular forms of knowledge, values, and community within the English curriculum.

Brodkey captures the spirit of this position in arguing that "theories of textuality are inevitably . . . [about] theories of reading. . . . In this society the authority that teachers are empowered to grant to or withhold from student texts derives from the theory of textuality governing their reading." In somewhat abstract terms, the issue of textual authority raises serious questions about how schools function as forms of social and moral regulation. Furthermore, textual authority has important implications for developing a theory of voice and student experience as a central component in a theory of curriculum and critical pedagogy. Most important, textual authority is about the struggle over culture fought out at the level of ideological representations and the exercise of institutional power.

Next, to analyze how these issues have been either ignored or rejected, I explore traditional curriculum approaches to teaching writing and literature.

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8I am not suggesting in developing the notion of textual authority that this authority embodies merely a negative notion of power. On the contrary, I am arguing that we must understand textual authority in terms of the power relations that sanction it as a disciplinary form of legitimation. The issue here is not abandoning forms of textual authority as much as it is developing a concept of textual authority that challenges dominating forms of power and references itself through an appeal to reclaiming and reconstructing democratic public spheres and empowering democratic social relations. I take up the relationship between authority and power in Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
Traditionally, the notion of literacy defined in the larger sense of learning how to read and write has been tied to pedagogical practices that primarily define the student as a passive consumer and that reduce the teacher to a dispenser of information parading as timeless truths. Such pedagogical and ideological practices are evident in the approaches to reading and writing arguing that a text's meaning is manifested in the author's intentions or is revealed in codes that exclusively govern the text itself.\(^9\)

In both instances, the question of pedagogy is reduced less to a dialogue, much less a dialectic, between teachers and students, than it is to a form of pedagogical training in which teachers provide the learning conditions for students to discover the "truth" of the texts in question. Lost from this position is any notion of how textual authority both produces and constitutes particular forms of political, ethical, and social interests. Nor is there any sense of how the ideologies that inform textual authority, with its particular view of knowledge and curriculum on the one hand and teaching and learning on the other, legitimate and introduce students to particular ways of life and corresponding forms of cultural capital. For example, dominant approaches to teaching curriculum and literacy fail to understand how a pedagogy stressing mastery, procedure, and certainty excludes the voices, histories, and experience of subordinate groups from the ideologies, practices, and normative orderings that constitute the symbolic hierarchies of the dominant school curriculum.\(^10\)

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Here, I argue first that dominant approaches to curriculum and teaching employing textual authority are forms of social and political discourse that bear significantly on the ways knowledge and classroom social practices are constructed in the interest of relations of domination and oppression. Second, I argue for a politics and pedagogy of voice for redefining textual authority as part of a project of possibility that opens up texts to a wider range of meanings and subject positions while organizing and constructing student experience as part of the broader discourse of critical citizenship and democracy. In this case, the notion of learning incorporates the voices, histories, and discourses of students as part of the wider pedagogical imperative to reconstruct and reclaim forms of self- and social determination that enhance and deepen the possibility of radical democracy and human survival.

In developing these positions, I emphasize teaching literature and writing as part of a larger curriculum project related to constructing political subjects and to forming schools as democratic public spheres. I also develop the position that student experience constitutes an important, though not unproblematic, condition for producing knowledge in classroom teaching. Third, I conclude by briefly analyzing the role that administrators and teachers might play as engaged and public intellectuals whose social function is defined by their commitment to a public philosophy dedicated to forming democratic public spheres and critical citizens.

**CURRICULUM AS A SOCIAL DISCOURSE**

Dominant forms of curriculum theory generally perceive learning as either a body of content to be transmitted or associate learning with a body of skills to be mastered. In the first instance, curriculum is usually synonymous with acquiring the cultural capital associated with the “Great Books.” This discourse sees schools as cultural fronts responsible for advancing the knowledge and values necessary to reproduce the historical virtues of Western culture. In the second instance, the emphasis is on what Pratt calls “knowledge as technique or method.” Contrary to what academic critics often claim, lost from both approaches is the notion of a critical education. Rather than becoming a viable activity for students, one that enables them to refigure and reread the social and political context in which knowledge, texts, and subjectivities are constructed, criticism within the dominant approaches to teaching has been denuded of its value as a subversive force. Reading critically is reduced to appropriating so-called legitimate cultural capital, decoding texts,

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or authorizing the voice of the "masters." As Merod points out, this criticism is without vision or hope and is one particularly suited to the social function of schooling and higher education in the age of big business:

As it stands now, criticism is a grossly academic enterprise that has no real vision of its relationship to and responsibilities within the corporate structure of North American (for that matter, international) life. It is simply a way of doing business with texts. It is in fact a series of ways, a multiplicity of methods that vie for attention and prestige within the semipublic, semiprivate professional critical domain.13

Dominant approaches to curriculum theory as manifested in various U.S. schools exercise forms of textual authority that not only legitimate a particular version of Western civilization and an elitist notion of the canon but also exclude all those other discourses, whether from the new social movements or from other sources of opposition, that attempt to establish different grounds for producing and organizing knowledge. In effect, we cannot understand the struggle over curriculum in the United States and many other countries as simply a defense of what constitutes a legitimate academic canon, instead, the struggle is part of a broader struggle over textual authority.

At stake in the struggle over curriculum and textual authority is the control of the grounds on which knowledge is produced and legitimated. This issue is both political and pedagogical. It is political because the curriculum, along with its representative courses, texts, and social relations, is never value-free or objective. By its nature, the curriculum is a social and historical construction that links knowledge and power in specific ways.

To illuminate this point, I focus in particular terms on the constructing of English curriculums in higher education, though the principles at work here apply to public schools as well. The curriculum used in English departments always represents a particular ordering and rendering of knowledge selected from the wider society. Moreover, the curriculum embodies a hierarchy of forms of knowledge, to which access is socially distributed.14 This point becomes clear in the preference for courses that valorize the "Great Books" at the expense of courses organized around different writers, whether feminists, African-Americans, Latin Americans, or any other writers labeled others.

The normative and political nature of the English curriculum is also clear in its division between courses on literature and those that focus on writing; teaching writing is devalued because it is falsely defined as a pedagogy of skill acquisition rather than a "creative and genuine" form of cultural production.

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Similarly, the racially, gendered, class-specific nature of the curriculum is evident in the ways it privileges the voices of dominant groups as the bearers of knowledge and the shapers of history. The curriculum does not merely offer courses and skills; it functions to name and privilege particular histories, experiences, and ways of life at the expense of others, and in doing so marginalizes or silences the voices of subordinate groups.

Contrary to expectation, the English curriculum is seen as a site of struggle that generates different subject positions for students around the issue of what it means to be a critical rather than a good citizen. The distinction is central to whether we educate students to adapt to existing relations of power or to learn how to read society differently to apply the principles of radical democracy to the creation of new and radical forms of community. In this case, teaching English is a form of citizenship education that reclaims the notions of struggle, solidarity, and hope around forms of social action that expand rather than restrict the possibilities of democratic public life. Mouffe rightly argues that this notion of citizenship and democratic public life is not concerned with individual questions of morality but with our obligations as fellow members of a political community; it is the ethics of the political that is at stake. The definition of citizenship must become inseparable from a project of radical plural democracy, from the extension of the democratic principle of liberty and equality to the widest possible set of social relations.¹⁵

In more concrete terms, the English curriculum is someone's story, one that is never innocent, and consequently, it has to be interrogated for its social and political functions. Thus, we must examine what the curriculum, and its legitimating textual authority, includes; we must also examine its "articulated silences," the forms of knowledge, stories, and ideologies that it refuses to acknowledge or represent. Not only does this strategy allow us to understand that knowledge is not sacred, but it also allows teachers and students to use their own knowledge to read texts productively and critically rather than passively. In this case, students can question and challenge texts through the experiences they use to give meaning to the world, and the production of knowledge itself can become part of the process of reading and rereading a text. At stake in this notion of curriculum is the question of how power is inscribed in the symbolic categories that actively construct not only different disciplines and subjects but also student subjectivities. How is power used to legitimate the production and organization of knowledge, and what range of subject positions do the discourses and social relations of the dominant curriculum offer to students?

VOICE, TEXTS, AND READING FORMATIONS

Within dominant forms of curriculum theory, texts become objects to be read independently of the reader's context. Either the author has already defined the meaning of a text, and students have only to recover these faithful representations, or the meaning of the text inheres in its fixed properties, which we can understand only by analyzing how the text functions formally to mobilize a particular interpretation. In both cases, though the terms vary considerably, the meaning of the text appears to exist outside of the dominant and oppositional reading formations in which the text could possibly be mobilized and engaged. The category of reading formation is crucial to understanding textual authority as a socially constructed concept that challenges the dominant view of reading and pedagogy. Bennet develops this concept:

By a reading formation, I mean a set of discursive and inter-textual determinations which organise and animate the practice of reading, connecting texts and readers in specific relations to one another in constituting readers as reading subjects of particular types and texts as objects-to-be-read in particular ways. This entails arguing that texts have and can have no existence independently of such reading formations, that there is no place independent of, anterior to, or above the varying reading formations through which their historical life is variably modulated, within which texts can be constituted as objects of knowledge. Texts exist only as always-already organised or activated to be read in certain ways just as readers exist as always-already activated to read in certain ways. Neither can be granted a virtual identity that is separable from the determinate ways in which they are gridded onto one another from within different reading formations.  

Textual authority in the dominant curriculum discourses inscribes in the reading process classroom social relations that limit the possibilities for students to mobilize their own voices in relation to particular texts. Similarly, literacy in this view often becomes a matter of mastering technical skills, information, or an elite notion of the high status of knowledge. This form of literacy is buttressed by a refusal to engage the voices and experiences that students might produce to give meaning to the relationship between their own lives and school knowledge. This approach to reading and writing in the English classroom is eminently political and has little to do with a pedagogy of empowerment and possibility and much to do with producing students who learn quickly how to conform rather than challenge the established culture of power and authority. Morton and Zavarzadeh have argued that the dominant approach to reading and writing actually silences students and constructs them as willing subjects of the state:

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The unsaid of such a view of "reading" as receiving (to be distinguished from "producing") meaning is the sharp separation of "reading" from "writing." The writer is always the creative producer, while the reader is the passive consumer. The political value of such a theory of reading for the dominant class is that in the name of "reading" the reader is taught how to "obey" "authority"—how, in other words, to "follow" the instructions of the writer, who stands for authority and controls meaning. 17

Brodkey further argues that dominant approaches to literacy, and by implication curriculum theory, are more concerned with initiating students into an existing culture than educating them to change it. According to her, these approaches lack an adequate understanding of how schools can foster a democratic community by giving students the opportunity to express their voices and interests and to address the wider relations of domination and hegemony that, in part, construct who they are and how they live their lives.

[Teachers] are energetic and inventive practitioners committed to universal education. In their writing, however, that commitment manifests itself in an approach to teaching and learning that many educators share in this country, a view that insists that the classroom is a separate world of its own, in which teachers and students relate to one another undistracted by the classism, racism, and sexism that rage outside the classroom. Discursive hegemony of teachers over students is usually posed and justified in developmental terms—as cognitive deficits, emotional or intellectual immaturity, ignorance, and most recently, cultural literacy—any one of which would legitimate asymmetrical relationships between its knowing subjects, teachers, and its unknowing subjects, students. 18

These authors link teaching literature and writing to two forms of silencing. For Morton and Zavarzadeh, students are silenced in the interest of a dominant culture that wants to reproduce citizens who are passive rather than critical and actively engaged in reconstructing society. For Brodkey, students are silenced by being denied the opportunity to engage texts within a context that affirms the histories, experiences, and meanings making up the conditions through which students exercise their own voices. Both positions are important for the ways they suggest that the dominant curriculum approaches to reading and writing police language, reproduce a dominant cultural capital, and deny the contradictory and often complex voices that inform how students produce and challenge the meanings forming their subjectivities.

I extend this criticism by developing a theory of voice as part of a critical discourse of curriculum and critical pedagogy that emphasizes how we can use the category productively to reclaim the language of citizenship, critical democracy, and learning for empowerment. In this case, I further develop a pedagogy of textual authority that provides the basis for students to develop their individual and collective voices within a discourse affirming the impor-

tance of democratic community by engaging questions of difference, equality, and social justice. This goal demands developing a pedagogy organized around a language of critique and possibility, one that offers teachers the opportunity to reconstruct their own teaching practices and to create pedagogical practices that take up the radical responsibility of ethics in helping students to confront evil and imagine a more just society. In part, critical pedagogy means creating the opportunity for students to engage the conditions that legitimate particular forms of textual authority as immutable and to critically assess how the manifestations of authority in various texts and cultural practices construct and constitute readers in particular ways.

THE POLITICS AND PEDAGOGY OF VOICE

The concept of voice represents forms of self- and social representation that mediate and produce wider structures of meaning, experience, and history. Voice refers to the ways students produce meaning through the various subject positions available to them in the wider society. In effect, voice is organized through the cultural resources and codes that anchor and organize experience and subjectivity. Students do not have a singular voice, suggesting a static notion of identity and subjectivity. On the contrary, student voices are constituted in multilayered, complex, and often contradictory discourses.

The concept of voice, in the most radical sense, points to the ways one's voice as an elaboration of location, experience, and history constitutes forms of subjectivity that are multilayered, mobile, complex, and shifting. The category of voice can only be constituted in differences, and in and through these multiple layers of meaning, students are positioned and position themselves to be the subject rather than merely the object of history. A radical theory of voice represents neither a unitary subject position unrelated to wider social formations nor the unique expression of the creative and unfettered bourgeois subject. Both positions remove voice from the arena of power, difference, and struggle. A radical theory of voice signifies the social and political formations providing students with the experiences, language, histories, and stories that construct the subject positions they use to give meaning to their lives. As part of a power-sensitive discourse, voice draws attention to the ideological and cultural dynamics that enable people to define themselves and speak as part of a wider social and cultural formation.

To speak of voice is to address the wider issue of how people become either subjects who are agents in the process of making history or how they function as subjects oppressed and exploited within the various discursive and

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institutional boundaries that produce dominant and subordinate cultures in any given society. In this case, voice provides a critical referent for analyzing how people are made voiceless in particular settings by not being allowed to speak, or by being allowed to say what already has been spoken, and how they learn to silence themselves. At the same time, voices forged in opposition and struggle provide the crucial conditions by which subordinate individuals and groups reclaim their own memories, stories, and histories as part of an ongoing attempt to challenge the power structures that attempt to silence them. The notion of textual authority can silence students by denying their voice, by refusing to allow them to speak from their own histories, experiences, and social positions. Or textual authority can enable them to speak by being attentive to how different voices can be constituted within specific pedagogical relations to engage their histories and experiences in both an affirmative and critical way. Of course, in actual classrooms, dominant and subordinate voices constantly interact to qualify and modify each other, though this process occurs within relations of power that are, for the most part, asymmetrical.

Although the process is more dialectical than I am suggesting, it is never simply pluralistic in the liberal sense described by Graff, Rorty, and others. Difference in this sense is a category that is sensitive to the ways dominant forms of power circulate to refuse, silence, and oppress and that does not merely function to register plurality outside of the relations of history and class, race, and gender struggles. To speak of voice within the discourse of difference as struggle and opposition is to raise questions about how textual authority can validate student experiences and give students the opportunity to read and write culture differently within a variety of meanings and subject positions that empower rather than disempower them.

TEXTUAL AUTHORITY AND THE PEDAGOGY OF THE TEXT

If school administrators, curriculum theorists, and teachers are going to give student experience a central place in school curriculums and classroom practices, we will have to redefine curriculum not as a warehouse of knowledge merely to be passed on to waiting consumers but, more important, as a configuration of knowledge, social relations, and values that introduces and legitimates a particular form of textual authority. We must view textual author-

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ity as a politically informed referent that presupposes a specific vision of subjectivity, community, and the future. We must analyze this concept for how it enables particular forms of empowerment, as well as for how it excludes the particular voices, histories, and experiences of specific groups because of their class, race, ethnicity, and gender. At the least, we must recognize that textual authority, or how teachers use power to sanction reading and writing particular stories, needs to be interrogated for the partiality of its own narratives and understood in terms that make clear what its interests and purpose might be in constructing student voices and subject positions.

Educators need to provide students with an understanding of how knowledge and power come together in reading and writing texts. Thus, administrators and teachers need to understand schools as places where learning is about producing, writing, and rewriting texts to enable students to develop a sense of place, worth, and value. Voice refers to the discursive means whereby "teachers and students attempt to make themselves present and to define themselves as active authors of their own world." Central to this notion is the need for a theory of textual authority that employs a language of both critique and possibility. In the first instance, educational workers need to develop a critical language to identify and eliminate pedagogical practices that make some students voiceless, that risk reducing teachers to mere technicians, and that function to subvert the ethical force and possibilities of educational leadership and learning. A language of critique rereads "narratives by exposing them as historical and social constructions and then reformulates them in politically different terms." The language attempts to read the world differently, to open up texts and discourses that suppress the constructed nature of their own historical and social categories. Similarly, a language of critique must be able to place its own ideologies in context and to make problematic its own normative underpinnings. This ability is important if the language is to refuse exercising monolithic forms of analysis that function to close down the texts it helps students to read in a specifically political way.

As part of the project of possibility, teachers need to make spaces in their classrooms so that their own voices, along with those of their students, can be heard as part of the wider dialogue and critical encounter with the knowledge forms and social relations that structure the classroom and articulate with forms of social and political authority at work in the dominant society.

Crucial to this argument is the recognition that teachers must do more than merely dignify the grounds on which students learn to speak, imagine,

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and give meaning to their world. Developing a pedagogy that takes the notion of student voice seriously means developing a critically affirmative language that works both with and on the experiences students bring to the classroom. We must take seriously and confirm the language forms, modes of reasoning, dispositions, and histories that give students an active voice in defining the world, and we must work on students' experiences so they can examine their strengths and weaknesses. Students need to recover their own voices so they can retell their own histories and thus doing "check and criticize the history [they] are told against the one [they] have lived." This practice is not merely a pedagogical practice in which voice becomes a referent for a politics of identity that brackets out the larger social reality in favor of a search for the humanistic "self." On the contrary, in this pedagogical practice the issue of ethics and politics becomes central to the process of learning. Merod argues that teachers can address this pedagogical issue by focusing more deliberately on the political and social functions of education. In part, he suggests that teachers must be concerned with the interrelationship of text and language as a form of cultural politics that opens up the notion of reading and writing to the study of wider considerations of institutional power and the struggle for social and economic justice. In effect, Merod points to using texts that validate the experiences and voices that students bring to the classroom, as well as enhance their understanding of themselves as public actors and critical citizens.

The object of such pedagogical renovation would be to activate the critical skills of students currently trained to professionalize their intellects. For critics this "new way" means a much greater role for the intricate demands of instructing. It goes considerably beyond the traditional task of teaching students to read and write. It implies, in sum, the need for group efforts to change institutional processes of creating, implementing, and evaluating courses so that students may be put on the troubling path of learning how to imagine society as a structure of contradictory and competing elements. Institutions, political forces, economic relations, ideologies, historical conjunctures, transitional moments can be named even as students and teachers grapple with the complexities of argumentation and representation, which divide varying accounts of the issues at stake and of the social ensemble itself. The least realized and possibly most necessary job within that effort is the clarification, both historical and theoretical, of social reality as an institutional whole without final shape or outcome: a network of institutional relationships held together by traditions and practices objectified (made available, authoritative, and rational) by institutional means.

Next, I take up this distinctly Freirian question by suggesting how to construct a pedagogy that enables students to read differences differently, to understand how texts take on particular readings as a result of the historical and social reading formations that struggle over them as sites of meaning and possibility. Texts are sites of pedagogical and political struggle. Politically, the presentation and study of texts raise important questions about the ideological

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interests at work in forms of textual authority that foster particular reading practices. How are readers' choices defined and limited by the range of readings made available through particular forms of textual authority? How does power and authority articulate between the wider society and the classroom to create the conditions at work in constructing particular discourses in reading particular texts? This issue specifically connects power to textual authority because it raises questions about how texts are constructed and read within relations of power that offer and legitimate specific subject positions and voices for students to inhabit. For women, minority groups, and other subordinate groups, schools rarely offer reading positions that allow texts to be read in ways that disrupt "the prevailing array of discourses through which [dominant] subject positions are formed." At issue here is the argument that texts are never fixed and that how they are read is always constructed through a circulation of power that intimately produces meaning out of the determinations mediating the relations between reader, texts, and contexts.

Pedagogically, the study of texts should be engaged as a form of writing. Students should be allowed to make the "text mean differently by reorganizing the systems of inter-textual, ideological and cultural reference, the reading formations, within which they are constituted as objects to be read." Belsey offers some general pedagogical principles that provide a starting point for developing a pedagogy of the text informed by an emancipatory notion of textual power. She argues that students must be given the opportunity to analyze the plurality of meanings in text and to challenge the obvious ones. In addition, students should make the text a new object of intelligibility; they should read the text from the position of their own experiences while examining how the text is constructed within dominant social relations.

Similarly, Green argues that English teaching must be linked to the notions of production and praxis and hence to writing. Students must make something happen in studying school subjects, and that something means taking up a critical attitude toward texts by reading them critically through written critical analyses. Thus, reading texts becomes a concrete form of cultural production open to dialogue and argument. In this view, teachers do

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not teach subjects; they exercise textual power by allowing students to write texts out of their own reading formations.

Scholes provides an illuminating analysis of how to organize a critical pedagogy around the notion of textual power. Instead of simply imparting information to students, Scholes argues that teachers should replace teaching texts with _textuality_, a process of textual study identified in three forms of practice—reading, interpretation, and criticism, which roughly correspond to what Scholes calls reading within, upon, and against a text. In brief, as Barthes has also recognized, reading within a text means identifying the cultural codes that structure an author's work. But reading within also has the pedagogical value of further illuminating how the codes function as part of students' own attempt "to produce written texts that are 'within' the world constructed by their reading." This point is particularly important in giving students the opportunity to "retell the story, to summarize it, and to expand it." Interpretation means reading a text along with a variety of diverse interpretations that represent a second commentary on the text. At issue here is the pedagogical task of helping students to analyze texts within "a network of relations with other texts and institutional practices" to make available to students "the whole intertextual system of relations that connects one text to others—a system that will finally include the student's own writing."

The first two stages of Scholes's pedagogical practice are important because they demonstrate students' need to sufficiently engage and disrupt the text. He wants students to read the text in terms that the author might have intended so that the text does not merely become a mirror image of students' own subjective positions. At the same time, however, he wants students to open the text up to a wide variety of readings so it can be "sufficiently other for us to interpret it and, especially, to criticize it." Finally, Scholes wants students to explode the text's cultural codes through their own assertions of their textual power, to analyze the text in terms of its absences, to free "ourselves from [the] text [by] finding a position outside the assumptions upon which the text is based." Scholes wants, on one hand, to engage texts as semiotic objects, but on the other hand, he wants to employ a modernist concern for history by arguing that the point of the interrogation is to "liberate us from the empirical object—whether institution, even, or individual work—by displacing our attention to its constitution as an object and its relationship to the other objects constituted." Implicit in this concern is the recognition

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 62.
38 Ibid., p. 84.
that texts be construed as not merely literary objects but also as any historical and social construction that moves within various circuits of power and signification. In effect, texts are both written objects and the texts that produce, mediate, and construct social relationships themselves.  

I have argued that teachers can draw on the cultural resources that students bring to the class to understand the categories they use to construct meaning and to locate themselves in history. By analyzing texts in the light of their diverse readings and by interrogating the readings to allow students to bring their own experiences to bear on the engagements, English teachers can better understand the histories and communities of meaning that give their students a sense of voice and multilayered identity. We must teach students forms of literacy that engage their own communities and the discourse of the dominant culture, and we must teach students how to critically appropriate the codes and vocabularies of different cultural experiences to get the skills they will need to define and shape, rather than simply serve in, the modern world. Students need to understand the richness and strengths of other cultural traditions, other voices, particularly as they point to forms of self- and social empowerment. We must take seriously educating students to learn how to govern critically and ethically in the broad political sense. In addition, students need to address how representations and practices that name, accept as marginal, and define difference as the devalued other are actively learned, internalized, challenged, or transformed. At stake here is the need for administrators and teachers to address how to use an understanding of these differences to change the prevailing relations of power that sustain them.  

Educational workers must also take seriously articulating a morality that posits a language of public life, emancipatory community, and individual and social commitment. Students need to be introduced to a language of morality that allows them to think about how community life should be constructed. Our conception of humanity and human capacities and our recognition of the ideological and material constraints that restrict human possibilities, especially those that function to improve the quality of human life for all, are most important here. A discourse of morality points to the need to educate students to fight and struggle to advance the discourse and principles of a critical democracy, and it provides a referent against which students can decide what forms of life and conduct are most appropriate morally amid the welter of knowledge claims and interests they confront in making choices in a world of competing and diverse ideologies.  

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TEACHERS AS PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

If teachers are to take an active role in raising serious questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and the larger goals they are striving for, they must take a more critical and political role in defining the nature of their work, as well as in shaping their working conditions. Teachers need to view themselves as public intellectuals who combine conception and implementation, thinking and practice, with a political project grounded in the struggle for a culture of liberation and justice. The category of public intellectual is important here for analyzing teachers' particular practices. First, the category provides a referent for criticizing the pedagogies that treat knowledge as fixed and deny students the opportunity to interrogate their own histories and voices. Second, the notion of public intellectual accentuates the theoretical and political basis for teachers to engage in a critical dialogue among themselves and students to fight for the conditions necessary for them to reflect, read, and share their work with others in the interest of not merely improving the life of the mind but engaging and transforming oppressive discursive and institutional boundaries. Third, the category signifies the need for teachers to redefine their role as educational leaders so they can create programs that allow them and their students to undertake the language of social criticism, to display moral courage, and to connect rather than distance themselves from the most pressing problems and opportunities of the times.

Teachers need to provide models of leadership that promise to reform schools as part of a wider revitalization of public life. Central to this notion of leadership are questions about the relationship between power and knowledge, learning and empowerment, and authority and human dignity. We need to examine these questions as part of a political discourse on textual authority and citizenship that organizes the energies of a moral vision to discuss how teachers and students can work for "the reconstruction of social imagination in the service of human freedom." Teachers need the opportunity to engage more critically what they know and how they come to know in a way that

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enables them to presuppose a pedagogy of democratic life that is worth struggling for.

Therefore, we must understand the limits of our own language, as well as the implications of the social practices we construct on the basis of the language we use to exercise authority and power. We must develop a language that can question public forms, address social injustices, and break the tyranny of the present. Finally, teachers need a language of imagination, one that insists and enables them to consider the critical means for developing the aspects of public life that point to its best and as yet unrealized possibilities. We must struggle for a language of democratic possibilities not yet realized.

Critical educators will have to move away from the mechanical, one-dimensional, interest-ridden politics that appear to be on the rise again among some factions of left-wing and progressive educators. As public intellectuals, educators need to recognize the partiality of their own discourse, remain open to engaging other positions as part of a wider dialogue and struggle over reconstructing public life, and recognize what forces are truly responsible for undermining public education in the age of Reagan and Bush. At stake here is developing a curriculum theory forged in a political project that is open to criticism, that views difference as more than a cultural marker for asserting antagonistic relations, and that relates educational reform to the broader categories of democratic community, citizenship, and social justice.

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ASCD's 1990 Yearbook stresses how staff development programs can change school culture. The authors include Madeline Hunter, Michael Fullan, David Hopkins, Kenneth Leithwood, Albert Shanker, Sam Yarger, Richard Arends, Ray Bolam, John Owen, Richard Wallace, Robert DeVries, Betty Dillon-Peterson, Bill and Carol Mell, and Bruce Joyce. The topics include new research, international and U.S. case studies, and analyses of stakeholder roles.