

This is the second chapter in the following book: Carr, Paul R. (2011). *Does your vote count? Critical pedagogy and democracy*. New York: Peter Lang. It is included herein order to stimulate discussion on what a critical pedagogy of democracy might look like, some of the concerns, problems and pitfalls related to re-thinking democracy, and also as a humble effort at proposing reforms, knowing that such proposals, in isolation and with context and the required resources, can be problematic.

Chapter 14

Conclusion: Some thoughts on, and options for, a critical pedagogy of democracy

In order for the oppressed to unite, they must first cut the umbilical cord of magic and myth which binds them to the world of oppression; the unity which links them to each other must be of a different nature. To achieve this indispensable unity the revolutionary process must be, from the beginning, *cultural action*. The methods used to achieve the unity of the oppressed will depend on the latter's historical and existential experience within the social structure. (Freire, 1973/2005: p. 175)

Introduction

What can be done, or, as suggested in the previous chapter, “what can I do?”, to contribute to democracy? Clearly, there is no one answer, especially not an easy or simplistic one. This book has argued that education must be part of the equation. But, one must ask, what kind of education? Part of the formulation of a response comes in the form of how we choose to elucidate what we mean by democracy. As argued throughout this book, my interpretation surpasses the electoral politics (representative) model, embracing a *thicker* version of inclusion, participation, dialog, interrogation and critical engagement, which is underpinned by a vigorously and humbly formulated critical pedagogy. This form of democratic education seeks to embrace the experiences and perspectives of diverse peoples, including those traditionally marginalized from the national narratives that have enshrined a partisan allegiance to patriotism, which often included and accepted military conquest as a normative value, and, conversely, often excluded and rejected those groups and actions that run counter to hegemonic reasoning. It is problematic, therefore, to consider democracy in exclusion of a meaningful analysis of inequitable power relations.

Consistent with the theme of this book, I caution that there is no one thing, menu or recipe that can be produced to inculcate a democratic state, government, citizen and/or education system. Indeed, even addressing an amalgam of concerns is no guarantee of reinforcing democracy. However, the desire for a more meaningful, just, decent form of democracy is something that requires, borrowing from the contemporary vernacular within mainstream politics, a certain measure of *hope*. One must remain confident and strident to improve the current situation because to simply endorse it uncritically is to further entrench vast swaths of the landscape, figuratively and literally, to a permanently deceptive existence in which the quest for human rights becomes a mere fictional, legal maneuver, reserved largely for those with their hands firmly on the economic levers of power.

Ultimately, seeking a more democratic society in and through education is tantamount to seeking the truth. Never comfortable, nor easily achieved, such a proposition requires a multitude of measures as well as the belief that people can, ultimately, function together without self-destruction. War is not *the* answer, nor is violence. Corruption and greed are also areas that can be addressed, provided that the will of the people is respected. Racism, sexism and poverty are not virtues; they are man/woman-made, and can be addressed. Cycles of disenfranchisement do not mesh well with the oft-repeated mantra of American “greatness” and the superiority of a highly-developed, advanced nation, one often invoked as being blessed by God. Rather than reducing inequities, society is actually (according to all of the standard measures used to demonstrate development and superiority) becoming less united, less equal, less resolutely inclusive, and, ultimately, I would argue, less democratic. The space provided for elections has usurped the place of education in many regards.

One hundred proposals that could contribute to democracy through education

Building on the content and arguments made throughout this book, at the risk of being criticized for including some ideas that may not mesh with a democratic education focus, or others that seem to be superfluous to the debate or may not seem too original or innovative, below is a list of one hundred proposals that could contribute to a *thicker* democratic education. As articulated throughout the book, these proposals should be considered as an ensemble, not disparate, individual efforts at reform.

1. Make education a *societal* responsibility, removing the false narrative of it somehow being only a *local* responsibility. The (nation-)state should undertake a public education campaign to acknowledge and promote public education as the engine behind societal growth, development, harmony and ingenuity.
2. Democratic *conscientization* should be integrated into educational planning, and political, media and critical forms of literacy should become mandatory aspects of teaching and learning.
3. Eradicate from the mainstream representation of education as being neutral, devoid of politics. Emphasize that education can lead to change, and that regressive forms of education can lead to docile, compliant citizens, the antithesis of *thick* democracy.
4. Re-define the notion of accountability in education to more centrally focus on ethics, *bone fide* diversity, social justice and *thick* democracy. Just because NCLB declares that there is greater accountability does not necessarily mean that this is true.
5. The state should only fund public education, and charters, vouchers, private schools and other offshoots should be discouraged, and not receive public support. Public education is a public good, benefitting all of society, and it should be viewed as a collective, global responsibility.
6. End the ranking of schools and school boards. They are divisive, punish the marginalized, are not appropriately contextualized, and serve to disintegrate rather integrate, diminishing the possibility to enhance the public good and the notion of education being a fundamental pillar to solidifying the *thicker* and more humane elements of a democracy.
7. Do not let high *cultural capital* areas—those with high property values and other advantages—graduate their high schools without having them work closely with schools in their areas that are facing serious challenges. The notion here is that all schools will see that they are part of a common struggle, existence and society, not simply, within the neo-liberal mindset, individuals demonstrating how hard they work as opposed to others who are supposedly not committed.
8. All subject-areas of the curriculum should explicitly diagnose how power works as well as the meaning of social justice. This should include a critical pedagogical analysis of Whiteness, racial, gender and class inequities, and other forms of marginalization, discrimination and disenfranchisement. It may be considered impolite to discuss such matters but to avoid them is to only further entrench and ingratiate harm, damage and the antithesis of democracy.
9. The educational program and curriculum should specifically address indigenous knowledge and peoples. To celebrate the arrival of White Europeans to the United States some five hundred years ago without critically interrogating the relationship with Aboriginal peoples, who had occupied this land for 10,000-20,000 years, is extremely problematic.
10. Focus education on the critical journey of constructing knowledge, in addition to learning knowledge.
11. Education-systems and educators should embrace the following saying: "*The more I know, the less I know*". If education is to sincerely be about life-long learning, then it should involve an endless process of critical interrogation, lived experiences, and dialectical questioning and dialog, which far over-shadows the notion of standards, high-stakes testing, and a prescriptive curriculum.
12. Men and women of all origins, races, ethnicities, and backgrounds should be involved in teaching and education. Some elementary schools lack male teachers, and some schools have no racial minorities or no females in leadership positions, which can further lead to false stereotypes about leadership, role-models and learning.
13. Educational policymaking and curriculum development should involve more consultation and collaboration with diverse groups and interests, and the decision-making process should necessarily

become more transparent. Educators, parents, students and the broader community should be able to understand how decisions are made and why, and they should be involved in these processes that will, ultimately, have an effect on all of society.

14. As with the previous point, people of all origins need to be involved in developing education policy and curriculum. The reaction to formal education by some ethno-cultural and racial groups that formal education is largely meant to benefit Whites must be addressed.
15. All schools should be twinned within local areas (for example, an urban school could be twinned with a suburban school, and a suburban school twinned with a rural school, or schools from different demographic areas could be twinned in the same area). This twinning would involve *bone fide* academic and curriculum work in addition to cultural exchange. No student should be allowed to say that they do not know, understand or experience diversity because “everyone in their school is White,” which does not sufficiently encapsulate a *thicker* version of critical thinking and engagement with pluralism.
16. School boards should use technology to twin classrooms in the US with those around the world to exchange language and culture with colleagues in other countries. The Government should provide seed-funding to schools that require it to in order to undertake this program.
17. *No Child Left Behind* should be replaced by a more meaningful and qualitatively responsive framework as suggested by some of the models presented in this book. Decreeing that 2014 will be the end of illiteracy and under-achievement needs to be replaced with questioning related to why there are such vast inequities in the most “developed” country in the world.
18. If there must be standards in education, there should be standards for democratic education, citizenship education, peace education, media literacy and social justice. Standards should be focused on building a more decent society, not on testing basic skills that are pre-defined largely because of cultural capital. Consideration should be given to the *Social justice accountability framework* presented in this book.
19. Teachers should not be remunerated on how well their students do. Teachers’ salaries should be increased, and other measures of acknowledgement for their contribution should be pursued. The objective should not be to diminish those working in more challenging situations or those whose students have lower levels of cultural capital. The role of the teacher has to be understood in a broader societal context, not simply related to mercantilist outcomes.
20. The curriculum should be significantly revamped. Freire’s generative themes and Dewey’s constructivism should be incorporated within classrooms at all levels, instilling values of respect, critical interrogation, engagement, and appreciation of how power works.
21. All subject-areas should systematically encourage critical enquiry, dialog and debate. Mathematicians, musicians and biologists all need to be able to communicate, to understand others, and to advance social justice as much as social scientists, and everyone involved in education should appropriate the re-defining of a progressive, socially-just, democratic educational experience.
22. All schools should emphasize deliberative democracy, and young people should learn how to listen, articulate, debate, and diagnose difference. Significantly, students should learn how to respectfully seek to construct further knowledge in a peaceful way. Condemning those with critical opinions needs to be stopped as *group-think* can lead to societal paralysis and a nefarious form of patriotism.
23. Rather than protecting students from controversial subject-matter, they should be encouraged to critically understand not only the *what* but also the *how* and *why* behind significant events, issues and concerns. The mythology that politics is about Democrats and Republicans needs to be rectified, and students need to learn that critical reflection can lead to more appropriate and effective resolutions of systemic problems and conflicts than the use of force, whether it be wars, racial profiling or the neglect of impoverished groups.
24. Howard Zinn’s *A people’s history of the United States* should be studied in every school in the nation. Taking up some of the cultural forms of seeking historical knowledge through the stories of average or non-elite and military figures should be encouraged.
25. When teaching about historical as well as contemporary issues and problems, students should be presented with a broad, *thicker* representation of events, far out-stripping the military and patriotic

version of reality. The connection between national and international events should be explored, as well as military interventions, genocides and present-day racial, environmental and social problems in connection to our individual and collective responsibilities.

26. Peace and peace education should become center-pieces to the educational project. If peace is not a fundamental part of education, what then is its purpose?
27. A *thicker* interpretation of the environment and environmental education should be taught throughout the educational program. The effects of war and military conflict on the environment, for example, should be interrogated.
28. Parks with green spaces, accessible, safe equipment, and a welcoming environment should be constructed at every school, and be open to school communities year-round. Sporting venues, including basketball courts, baseball diamonds, football/soccer fields, and general playing spaces, should be included in these parks. Serious efforts should be made to ensure that the parks are used for the purpose of leisure, sportsmanlike conduct, and positive intercultural and inter-generational contact. Poorer areas should not be punished because of wealth concentration, and everyone should be able to enjoy the outdoors without cost.
29. Sports, in general, should be de-emphasized within the educational system. Large, elaborate football programs, alongside mediocre academic programs, must be problematized. The reality of numerous coaches, vast sports complexes, and Friday-night televised high school football games must be re-evaluated in relation to the values that are advanced. Accessible, fair-play, sportsmanlike values should be re-asserted in place of a win-at-all-costs mission and the drive for notoriety and the supremacy of money.
30. Sports-scholarships and the sports industry at the college level must be re-thought. Why is tuition so high when college-level sports programs supposedly generate so much revenue? The reality that few working-class students benefit from sports scholarships must be re-examined. Why do college football coaches make substantially more than college Presidents and faculty?
31. Building football stadiums at high schools should not be the responsibility of local communities. The state should be charged with the responsibility of developing a comprehensive plan for athletics, documenting how much money is allocated for which services, and substantiating how athletics can be made accessible to all students as well as how they benefit the academic environment and the health of local communities.
32. All students should be introduced to critical service learning. The experiences should be accompanied by courses and de-briefings on why societal problems exist. To do a service-learning placement without some socio-political contextualization may only reinforce the opposite of what is sought through the actual experience.
33. Governments and school boards should clearly articulate the framework for critical service learning, including budgets, measures and the connection to a *thicker* democratic experience in education.
34. Contracts for Superintendents of education and principals should contain a clause that they will be evaluated on how well they inculcate democratic education, political literacy and social justice. Their renewal should hinge, in part, on how well they address these matters within their educational institutions.
35. There should be no place in schools for military recruitment, especially not in schools in poorer areas. All students should be afforded the possibility of higher education, not just those with higher levels of cultural capital, and the message should not be transmitted, either explicitly or implicitly, that poor people have no other option than to join the army.
36. All American students should learn at least one foreign language starting in First Grade, and then be introduced to a second language in high school. The notion that English will get Americans everywhere they wish to go at all times, and will lead to inter-cultural development, not to mention the visible concern of achieving peace and good relations with the world, must be re-cast in a more holistic and democratic form of education.
37. All states and school boards should publicize the socio-linguistic research on learning languages so as to de-mystify and rehabilitate the mythology within mainstream society about the danger of learning

more than one language. Quite simply, speaking more languages than English will not harm one's capacity to speak English.

38. The enticement to enter into contracts with for-profit enterprises as a way of funding schools should be eliminated. Communities should be made aware of economic situations that pressure and coerce some localities more than others, and should also be invited to critique the role of marketing, advertising, and the drive to capture market-share. Educational policymaking should also address this area.
39. Programs such as Chanel One, as per the preceding point, should be prohibited from schools. They are not benevolent services; moreover, they come with strings attached, and are not problematized.
40. The differentiated experiences of schools that have a larger wealth-base, as compared to poorer districts, should be addressed. The research on this reality, including the social context, should be concisely and critically presented to parents, students, educators and the broader community. The approach should not be to illustrate blame, pity, guilt or incompetence but, rather, to seek to underscore systemic problems, resource allocation, and ineffectual curriculum and policy development.
41. Citizens should be presented with a clear analysis on the costs of not investing in education early on, especially in relation to incarceration, re-training, illiteracy, welfare, etc., and also be presented with research on the benefits of investing in early childhood education. This should not simply be the posting of charts and graphs on a website but, rather, a vigorous, sustained, open dialog between all sectors of society.
42. The limited accessibility to trips to museums, cultural events, and even foreign countries only serves to further increase the educational, cultural and political gap between Americans. Governments should provide an appropriate level of funding so that all schools can benefit from such indispensable activities.
43. Parents should be required, except in extraordinary circumstances, to provide one-half day of service per month to their children's schools. The objective is to make all parents knowledgeable of what happens at school, to create support for progressive activities, and to provide a vehicle to discuss education and democracy. Legislation should be passed to ensure that no parent would be penalized for participating in such a program. School principals should be supported in finding the appropriate ways to liaise with parents.
44. Teacher-education programs should focus on qualitative teaching and learning experiences, and develop assessment schemes that monitor and support innovation, engagement, collaboration, and critical pedagogical work that emphasizes learning and the construction of knowledge over the acquisition of knowledge.
45. Teacher-education programs should forge meaningful relationships with local school boards. All education faculty should have some form of a formal relationship with schools.
46. Accreditation for teacher-education programs should not be predicated on quantitative measures and rubrics but on critical engagement among the faculty and students. Before embarking on accreditation, all interested parties should collectively determine if the educational system will benefit from the accreditation process (in other words, if we were to construct an effective education system, would we consecrate the time, energy and focus on the present (neo-liberal) accreditation process, or some other process?).
47. All schools should implement a guest program whereby a range of professionals, academics, and people with diverse experiences could liaise with students. The access to a diversity of guests should be distributed equally throughout all schools, and no schools should be without some form of a regular, regimented and engaging program in place. Special attention should be paid to diversity and the public good (i.e., high cultural capital schools should not be the only ones exposed to leading business and political figures; conversely, critical alternative movements and grass-roots figures should not be invited only to working-class schools).
48. Public officials, including politicians, diplomats and mainstream media, should be invited into schools to dialog with students, all the while being open to critical questions about social justice, bias, patriotism, propaganda and why systemic issues exist in addition to the traditional reasons that such

figures visit schools (e.g., to extol the virtues of democracy, to sell support for a particular platform, career choices, being a good citizen, etc.).

49. All schools should embark on a range of community projects, which could count for credit toward graduation. These projects could involve service-learning, undertaking research, writing narratives and ethnographies, and making presentations on how social problems might be addressed.
50. When students are required to work part-time jobs in order to sustain themselves, special provisions should be made in order for them to critically analyze their experiences and also receive credit for the related academic projects that they construct.
51. State Departments of Education, overseen by a board of professionals and activists, should gather data on inputs and outputs of the education system, and report on how diversity, social justice, media literacy, democracy and other program areas are relevant. These reports should be available online, free of cost, through the Department of Education's website.
52. When elections are discussed in schools, every effort possible should be made to clarify how many people do not vote and why as well as explicating the problematic nature of there being only two mainstream parties. Students should critically interrogate the role of money, polling, media manipulation and political parties in enhancing or constraining democracy. Students should also be made aware of, and study, comparative (international) models and systems of democracy.
53. The study of democracy and/or elections should not be concentrated within a single course (often labelled as a Civics or Government course). Democracy must be demonstrated, acted upon, and lived, not ghettoized to a course that focuses on encouraging voting.
54. Require school boards and schools to implement participatory budgeting in an inclusive and meaningful fashion, involving diverse interests in determining the allocation of funds for education.
55. The state, overseen by an advisory board of non-political appointees, should review and make recommendations on the textbooks, and other education matters, to be used in schools. Monopoly practices for textbooks that exclude inclusive, critical thinking should be addressed.
56. Prohibit fundraising within schools, and have educators focus exclusively on critical teaching, learning and engagement. If schools are not concerned with raising funds, they will then be able to freely target the best interests of the students, and also not be beholden to any outside interests.
57. Schools should focus on the prevention of bullying and violence, and work with communities, families and students at various levels to establish a conducive environment for learning, and, at the same time, seek to avoid the nefarious *zero tolerance*, criminalization route.
58. Schools should undertake community violence and criminality projects, examining the form, substance and degree of violence and criminality in their localities. The data-collection and analysis should include White-collar crime, corruption, racial profiling and un- and under-documented crimes, including abuse against women, gang activities and police misconduct. The results, which form part of a process of critical interrogation, could be publicly presented on an ongoing basis in order to lead to a more rigorous understanding of how and why criminal activities and violence take place, and, moreover, what is done about it.
59. Similar to the point about, schools should undertake community health projects to determine the types of diseases, infections and illnesses that exist in local communities with a view to undertaking critical comparative analysis. Are poorer people more a risk, do they live shorter lives, do they have access to adequate health care, do they contribute equally to the formulation of health policy, etc? The ongoing results of the research should be exposed, and acted upon.
60. In order to undertake critical democratic projects, such as those highlighted above, teachers will need professional development that responds to their needs, cultivates critical epistemological reflection, and allows for a dialectical teaching and learning experience. This will not decrease educational achievement and outcomes; arguably, it will make the educational experience more meaningful, authentic, engaging, critical and relevant.
61. Incorporating social workers and community activists in a meaningful way can be effective in detecting problems and concerns, and should be interwoven into educational programming.
62. Have teachers construct two one-week school experiences that can complement the formal curriculum. Formal education need not be top-down, and teachers can offer insight, expertise,

strategies and enthusiasm to de-center neo-liberal education. Teachers could have students work together in multi-grade or multi-group assignments with a view to inculcating cooperative learning, mediation, anti-racism education, etc.. Students could present their work at the end of the week, seeking input into how to respond to societal needs.

63. Students should be invited, as per Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development model, to determine some of the rules, guidelines and conditions of their school experience. Students should not be uniquely the recipients of the formal education experience but should also be full participants in shaping their knowledge and reality.
64. Media literacy should be a mandatory part of the educational experience, and critical media activities should be part of the curriculum at every grade level.
65. Professional development for educators should focus on how knowledge is constructed as well as critical thinking and engagement. Educators should be able to understand the direction of educational reforms, and also be able to have a say in how they should be shaped, especially since they will be called upon to implement them. As research indicates that these reforms can only be considered effective if educators understand, appropriate and are permitted to question the shape, form and dimension of implementation, politically-expedient neo-liberal reforms should be open to dialog with, and suggested change on the part of, educators.
66. Schools, educators and students should problematize and critique what is meant by "the United States is the greatest nation". Repeating this mantra uncritically can lead to a delusory sentiment of superiority, which could culminate in indifference, ignorance and antagonism toward the world. No country, people, race, culture, ethnic group, religion or nationality is superior, nor should there be the generalized belief that that is the case.
67. When studying economics, an explicit area of discussion should be inequities that exist and have existed emanating from the prevailing political and economic system. The supposed benefits of the free-market system should be contextualized and challenged in a critical fashion.
68. Alternative visions of democracy and comparative analysis of international systems, problems and issues should be part of the formal curriculum. We should not be able to discard that which we do not know.
69. Diverse methods, examples, processes and approaches to mediation, peace and reconciliation should be taught within the formal educational experience. Acceptance of war, torture, state-sanctioned executions, and other forms of violence should be critically diagnosed.
70. Teachers should be consulted on the planning of the courses, scheduling and the configuration of classes. Staid, neo-liberal school planning should be open to innovative proposals on the part of teachers.
71. Teachers, in the primary grades, should stay with cohorts for a three-year period.
72. As per the previous point, groups of 2-3 teachers should work together with each cohort in order to provide stability and coherence in relation to the teaching and learning experience.
73. The school year need not be artificially structured around the agricultural calendar of the early twentieth century, and should be expanded so as to offer fluid, constructive learning opportunities.
74. Class sizes, especially in the primary grades, should be limited to 15-20 students.
75. Gifted classes should be eliminated, and all students should be considered to have exceptional interests, talents, skills and abilities. For students with advanced academic standing, teachers should be attuned to differentiated learning needs and styles but should not separate those who excel more easily. All students can and should learn individually as well as collectively.
76. No child should be placed in special education without a full determination of the socio-economic context, thus diminishing the possibility of marginalized and racialized communities being disproportionately streamed into these programs. Despite formal procedures outlined in present processes, there is still wide-spread concern about the types of children directed to special education.
77. All universities and colleges should be involved in research, professional development and policy support with schools and school boards. A committee should be formed in each higher education institution to act as a clearing-house to assist school boards.

78. Make humility a virtue for teaching and learning, and downgrade the emphasis placed on economic gain accrued by business leaders, actors and professional athletes.
79. Provide teachers every seven years, when they have exhibited engaged and exemplary educational practices, and when they have a plan for learning, followed by a contribution to the school upon their return, a one-semester sabbatical to further enhance their abilities, approaches, pedagogies and critical engagement.
80. All schools should have a garden that produces fruits and vegetables. While working 1-2 hours a week on the garden, students will also learn, and have opportunities to make concrete curricular connections to the environment, agriculture, nutrition, the economics of food, and globalization. The fruits and vegetables produced could also be consumed by the students.
81. A national education strategy should be formulated, taking into account the social justice framework, the *thin versus thick* typology, and other components of a critical pedagogy of democracy.
82. Civic society and alternative groups and movements, such as women's, environmental, peace, anti-racism, anti-poverty, and immigrant groups, should be accorded a formal place at the decision-making table alongside the traditional power-brokers (bankers, the military, the wealthy, business CEOs, etc.).
83. All schools should have music, arts and physical education programs. Funding and wealth should not be an impediment to children having access to a broad liberal arts education.
84. Schools should be open in the evening for communities to be able to access them, without paying, in order to play sports, practice music and dance, and undertake scholarly and/or other activities.
85. The education sector should make a clear distinction between technology as a tool to assist in learning versus technology as the goal of education. Technology does not replace the brain, nor does it create social justice. Similarly, technology does not create political literacy, nor does it make for a more media literate populace, as exemplified in earlier chapters. Educators should clearly contextualize how technology might be beneficial while focusing on the fundamental aspects of critical democratic *conscientization*.
86. Students should construct critical ethnographies of their lives, building on a corpus of reflective and analytical work each year, which could serve to challenge epistemological intransigence. By seeing the evolution and transformation of their thinking over time, and in relation to various events, personalities and experiences, students can start to make critical observations about their identities, societies and the way that knowledge is constructed. Toward the end of each year, students could review their analysis from the previous years, and then add to it by commenting on their previous thoughts as well as elaborating on changes in their thinking.
87. Make schools and society safer by eliminating fire-arms and weapons from the public domain. Gun control should be enforced, and carrying guns should be made a punishable offence.
88. Tuition to postsecondary education should be eliminated.
89. A war tax of 20% should be applied to all spending on the military and militarization, and the resultant funding should be applied to education. In present times, with approximately \$1 trillion being spent annually on the military in the US, the government would be obliged to allocate an additional \$200 billion to the education section. Education should not be used to subsidize war, nor should poorer people be forced into fighting *other people's battles*.
90. The federal government should organize an annual Education Summit, in which diverse civil society, educational and *alter-mondialiste* organizations could contribute to a debate around formal measures, data, policies, resources and goals of public education. This Education Summit could be considered as an *accountability* forum for governments and education authorities. The Summit would generate a detailed annual report and plan, which would be reviewed the following year.
91. At the broader political level, politicians and political parties should be prohibited from fundraising, especially while in office, and from buying advertising and the dissemination of promotional materials, including environmental-unfriendly campaign signs.
92. Election campaigns should be restricted to an enforced four-week period. There is no legitimate reason for having two-year campaigns, and they have not proven to increase voter-turnout, nor

democratic engagement. Moreover, they seem to monopolize the mainstream media cycle, which further marginalizes critical debate and analysis on a plethora of other relevant news items.

93. All political announcements, debates and arguments should be presented, without cost, through the mainstream, community, and alternative media. Candidates and parties should use websites to publicize their platforms. The focus should be on engagement, ideas, interaction with the plurality of society, and on eliminating money from the political system, which is surely at odds from what democracy was intended to be.
94. The political and economic configuration of the society should be openly critiqued and debated, and the fundamental question of inequitable power relations should be problematized. If change is (supposedly) inevitable, why then is there still unacceptably high levels of poverty and marginalization, and, moreover, why is the gap between rich and poor increasing, not decreasing?
95. For a country as diverse as the United States, any elections with only two parties should be cancelled. The Republicans and Democrats should not be permitted to monopolize elected, representative decision-making. Elections should be about people, and the collusion of the media, the military and the two corporate-centrist parties will only further disenfranchise the population. Elections should be open to all peoples, not only those capable of raising untold millions, and even billions, of dollars.
96. Privilege of all kinds should be examined critically before, during and after elections. Systemic inequities need to be contextualized, and made evident, rather than propagating the myth that simple hard work will lead to success.
97. Any elections should necessarily be required to involve schools and the education-sector in meaningful meetings at educational sites, with explications on how the macro-level economy, foreign policy, military ventures and social policy are related to education, including the potential effects, outcomes and costs and benefits.
98. Freedom of speech should include uncomfortable (and, using Al Gore's language, inconvenient) truths, without retribution. If so many people in education are uncomfortable, for example, with NCLB, they should be able to enunciate their concerns without fear of being marginalized.
99. Humility should be emphasized over nationalism and patriotism.
100. *Radical love* should be the starting-point for the conceptualization of education.

Whether or not the above proposals appear to be realistic is not the critical question to be asked. The reality that there are diverse proposals, movements, interests and people seeking a different kind of democracy should be kept in mind.

A democratic education planning model

This democratic education planning model (Figure 33) can assist in mapping what individuals, schools and communities are thinking and experiencing in relation to democracy and democratic engagement. Schools could document the context, the content, the experiences and the outcomes of what takes place within the realm of education. There are many ways of promoting constructive collaboration, and I would encourage critical, dialectical and harmonious efforts aimed at understanding and constructing more meaningful experiences, not imposing haphazard, incongruent and inauthentic ones. For this model, schools could work with diverse interests, or stakeholders in public policy jargon, who are not, using the neo-liberal terminology, "clients". Involving teachers, parents, students, members of the community and others, and being cognizant of differential power relations, may facilitate some important synergetic planning as well as the formulation of proposals. This approach is inspired by the participatory budget planning process (Gandin & Apple, 2005), established in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in which the community comes together to consider how portions of the budget will be spent. Using a critical pedagogical analysis, participants in the democratic education planning model should be highly sensitized to systemic and institutional barriers to change, and should also consider the *lived* experiences of individuals and groups, being vigilant to grasp the nuanced existence of marginalized interests.

Figure 33 – Democratic education planning model

	Context	Content	Experiences	Outcomes
Individual				
School				
Community				

The model does not seek the typical (supposed) accountability report that is skewed toward illustrating the virtue of the funder or the institutional interest. Rather, the focus should be on *bone fide*, tangible critical engagement, questioning why policies and programs have been developed, in whose interest, and to what end. For example, how do individuals, the school and the community contribute to the democratic foundation, growth and tension of what takes place locally within an educational site?

One way to use this model would be to chart out the context for democratic education, to define it, to highlight the historic and contemporary achievement, issues and challenges, and to address such fundamental concerns as those related to patriotism, socio-economic development, and political participation in an inclusive and *thick* way. The notion is not to draft volumes here but, rather, to attempt to link the epistemological and philosophical underpinning to what we know and how we know and believe it to our actions (Kincheloe, 2008b). Often education policies seem to drop from the sky, disconnected from the lived realities of students, and inconsistent with scientific research (although NCLB specifically prescribes that reforms be based on scientific research but can educational leaders enumerate the literature that has informed their philosophies?)(Gordon, Smyth & Diehl, 2008).

Returning to democratic literacy and critical pedagogy

Can we have democracy without democratic literacy? Without democratic engagement? Is critical pedagogy an appropriate means for achieving democratic literacy and democratic engagement? Relying, in large part, on the critical pedagogical foundation of Paulo Freire, it is helpful here to highlight the epistemological salience of Freire's work, which Au (2007) argues is steeped in the Marxist tradition. Epistemological interrogation is a necessary function to the quest for transformational change in education. Although the terminology may change from context to context, Freire's *conscientization* has meaning across diverse milieus and environments. Achieving meaningful experiences in and through education, cognizant of differential power relations, is the core of a critical pedagogical democratic education. Whether or not a critical Marxist perspective is germane in nurturing democratic education should not obfuscate the reality that critical pedagogy can lead to the process of personal and collective transformation.

Brosio (2003), in citing Michael Parenti, a leading radical political philosopher, highlights that normative neo-liberal, capitalistic structures have, and continue to have, a significant effect on people and societal development.

What we need is a 180 degree shift away from unilateral global domination and toward equitable and sustainable development among the peoples of the world. This means US leaders would have to stop acting like self-willed unaccountable rulers of the planet. They must stop supporting despots, and stop opposing those democratic movements and governments that challenge the status quo. The struggle is between those who believe that the land, labor, capital, technology, markets, and natural resources of society should be used as expendable resources for transnational profit accumulation, and those who believe that such things should be used for the mutual benefit of the populace. What we need is to move away from liberal complaints about how bad things are and toward a radical analysis that explains *why* [the current writer's emphasis] they are so, away from treating every situation as a perfectly new and befuddling happening unrelated to broader politico-economic interests and class power structures. What we need is a global anti-imperialist movement that can challenge the dominant paradigm with an alternative one that circumvents the monopoly ideological control of officialdom and corporate America.

Bellamy Foster, Holleman and McChesney (2008) support this perspective, arguing for a more comprehensive, critical and global analysis of American empire, suggesting that the degree to which US society is controlled by militarization is only poorly understood by the population, which then leads to far-reaching potential to dominate, marginalize and diminish the vibrancy of vast swaths of society. Willinsky (1998) further addresses the need to critique empire as a necessary step to bringing forth the prospect for change, which relates to Freire's (1973/2005) oppressor-oppressed dichotomy. Anti-colonial education should, therefore, not be uniquely a discussion reserved for the archives as the historical is intertwined with

the present, and appreciating how current problems and issues have a relationship with previous actions is pivotal to avoiding simplistic, essentialized education responses.

Taking account of the dialectical relationship between hegemony and ideology (Fishman & McLaren, 2005) is a fundamental part of the critical pedagogical equation. As highlighted in the first section of the book, critical epistemological interrogation is fundamental to the dissection and unravelling of how power is infused in and through (supposed) democratic processes. The relevance for education, therefore, is clear.

Critical pedagogy problematizes the relationship between education and politics, between socio-political relations and pedagogical practices, between the reproduction of dependent hierarchies of power and privilege in the domain of everyday social life and that of the classroom and institutions. In doing so, it advances an agenda for educational transformation by encouraging educators to understand the socio-political contexts of educative acts and the importance of radically democratizing both educational and larger social formations. In such processes, educators take on intellectual roles by adapting to, resisting, and challenging curriculum, school policy, educational philosophies, and pedagogical traditions. (Fishman & McLaren, 2005, p. 425)

A critical pedagogy of democracy can cultivate a vigorous and meaningful interrogation of the various strands underpinning power-structures, including the functioning of the military, limited but populism-laden visions of politics, and the infusion of right-wing Christian fundamentalist religious infiltration into decision-making (Giroux, 2005; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2009). Giroux and Giroux (2006) provide a thoughtful synthesis of critical democratic pedagogy:

The democratic character of critical pedagogy is defined largely through a set of basic assumptions, which holds that power, values, and institutions must be made available to critical scrutiny, be understood as a product of human labor (as opposed to God-given), and evaluated in terms of how they might open up or close down democratic practices and experiences. Yet, critical pedagogy is about more than simply holding authority accountable through the close reading of texts, the creation of radical classroom practices, or the promotion of critical literacy. It is also about linking learning to social change, education to democracy, and knowledge to acts of intervention in public life. Critical pedagogy encourages students to learn to register dissent, as well as to take risks in creating the conditions for forms of individual and social agency that are conducive to a substantive democracy. (p. 28)

Challenging neo-liberalism is a central feature to this project, shining a light on nefarious practices, marginalization, and conservative interpretations of success that serve to blame the victim rather than critique the trappings and inner-working of power (Giroux & Giroux, 2006). De-coding signals, omissions, directives, and the meaning of rhetoric is a key component to the critical pedagogy of democracy (Engels, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007; Macedo & Steinberg, 2007). State authority is not obliged to be oppressive, and ingratiating students with a critical pedagogy of democracy can lead to *thicker* experiences and interpretations of democracy.

A radical democratic pedagogy, as outlined by Denzin (2009), speaks to hope: “Hope is ethical. Hope is moral. Hope is peaceful and nonviolent. Hope seeks truth of life’s sufferings. Hope gives meaning to the struggles to change the world. Hope is grounded in concrete performative practices, in struggles and interventions that espouse sacred values of love, care, community, trust, and well-being”. (p. 385)

Compelling arguments can be made for a more deliberately conscious, engaged and loving connection to others (Darder & Miron, 2006). Freire spoke of radical love, and the inescapable prospect of indignation, which need not be considered weakness, cynicism or hopelessness (Freire, 2004). The capacity, and necessity, to love is enraptured in the very essence of the human condition. Accepting human and humane interactions and relations, without exploitation and discrimination, is a fundamental consideration for a critical pedagogy of democracy. Darder and Miron (2006) emphasize that our experiences are not disconnected from the broader politico-economic context but, as Brosio (2003, 2004) maintains, are interwoven in a socially constructed narrative.

[c]apitalism disembodies and alienates our daily existence. As our consciousness becomes more and more abstracted, we become more and more detached from our bodies. For this reason, it is absolutely imperative that critical educators and scholars acknowledge that the origin of emancipator possibility and human solidarity resides in our body. (p. 16)

As Darder and Miron (2006) argue, and as was advanced in the previous chapter, everyone is capable of contesting, resisting and challenging nefarious neo-liberal policies and manifestations: “If we, as citizens of the Empire, do not use every opportunity to voice our dissent, we shamefully leave the great task of dissent to our brothers and sisters around the world who daily suffer greater conditions of social, political, and economic impoverishment and uncertainty than we will ever know. For how long will our teaching and politics fail to address the relevant and concrete issues that affect people’s daily lives?”. (p. 18) Not every action or gesture need be representative of a grandiose, sweepingly transformative manifestation. As alluded to earlier in this book, individuals can make their voices heard, they can resist imperialism, hegemony and patriotic oppression, and, importantly, they can choose love over hate, peace over war, and humanity over inhumanity.

Concluding thoughts

While focusing on democracy throughout this book, is it clear that a *thicker*, more critical version of democracy, outside of representative, electoral politics, necessarily involves an inter-disciplinary approach (sociology, history, philosophy, political science, economics, education, cultural studies and the social sciences, in general) with close consideration to a number of directly related subjects/issues (peace studies, media literacy, environmental education, intercultural relations, etc.). There is no set answer, list or menu to the question of how to *do* democracy, or how to create a *thicker* democracy. Rather, as suggested in the cluster of what might be done above, an amalgam of thinking, interrogation, critical analysis, experience and humility may lead to a more meaningful and sustainable democracy, one that seeks to engage and cultivate critical engagement of all people and interests. A more radical determination toward a more radical democracy requires thinking well outside of constricted, hegemonic boundaries, and must address how power works (Hill & Boxley, 2007).

Neither Paulo Freire, nor Joe Kincheloe, nor other well-known critical pedagogues, I believe, would want students, educators and others to simply replicate what they’ve done, or to believe simply that what they’ve experienced and developed in theory and in praxis is the penultimate answer. The quest for critical humility and radical love encourages all of us to seek new, innovative and reflective thoughts and actions in the quest for a more decent society. What Freire, Kincheloe and others offer us, however, is an enormous wealth, and insightful archive of, *constructed* knowledge, something that is, I would argue, of tremendous value to those wishing to have a more *conscious* connection to what society was, is and is evolving into. The critical pedagogy of democracy is not about counting votes but relates more fundamentally to an unending critical interrogation of the human experience, focused on humane encounters, social justice, peace, a more equitable and respectful distribution of resources, a more dignified and just recognition of indigenous cultures, and an acknowledgement that hegemonic forces that marginalize peoples at home and abroad.

Does your vote count? It could... but there are a multitude of other factors that are most likely more germane, not to mention that voting, in and of itself, does not make a democracy. As argued throughout this book, any definition of democracy that omits a central place for a meaningful, engaged, critical education is problematic. People construct a democracy, not political parties and institutions, albeit they are relevant, and, therefore, people must construct their political, economic, social, cultural and philosophic destinies. The people are the ones who define their circumstances, values, affiliations, inter-personal relations and essence to live. Yet, as per the central hypothesis of this book, the people must also be vigilant and suspicious of how power affects their daily lives, their abilities, their relations, and their connection to the world. Education is the key intersecting vehicle that can reinforce or, conversely, interrupt patriotic bondage, racialized marginalization, essentialized visions of poverty and impoverishment, and an uncritical assessment of how power works. Freire and Kincheloe offer much inspiration for this journey, and their willingness to question and accept questions provides for a vibrant, dynamic and engaged democracy within the spirit of critical pedagogy. Alongside the mantra of the *alter-mondialiste* movement that *another world is possible*, I would like to conclude by suggesting that... *another democracy is possible*.

