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Critical Pedagogy in an Age of Standards

In our penultimate chapter we revisit the conclusions from the case studies to consider the interrelation between critical pedagogy in urban education and the debates over standards that currently plague the nation. We begin by acknowledging the current moment in education as important, albeit misguided. Although standards and standardized tests have been used largely to label and to constrain curricula and pedagogies, members of the public have a right to expect that educators and the educational establishment will adequately educate their children. When we fail to do so, and when we lose the public trust, politicians are able to push through legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The public has recently reconsidered its endorsement of this legislation, and it behooves us as critical educators to separate the legitimate reasons for their critique from our legitimate critiques of the nature of standards discourse and the harmful outcomes for teaching and learning associated with the culture (or, better yet, regime) of testing that has followed in the wake of NCLB.

We want to state explicitly that this is not a chapter about standardized tests, which we generally find indefensible in the ways that they have taken over the public discourse about educational attainment and the ways in which they have invaded school curricula and actually changed how many teachers approach the profession (McNeil, 2000). Students are being tested with increased frequency, and the tests are being given greater weight than ever before, even though what they actually purport to assess is very limited (Kohn, 2000). Members of the public and politicians seem fixated with the idea of objectified tests, even though the tests, given the biases of the creators and the idiosyncrasies of the students and the conditions, are not objective measures. Standardized tests are to be interrogated and critiqued, not accepted unquestioningly, and even though students are stuck with them for the present moment, we do not have to acquiesce quietly; compliance doesn't have to be complicity. If students are to be tested and judged on the basis of their performance on tests, we remain constant in our assertions that critical pedagogy is the best approach to test preparation in that students are developing important skills that will allow them to perform on the tests as they also develop the language to critique the structure and nature of the tests that they must take if they are to make it successfully through the K-12 system.

That being said, we also endeavor to make important distinctions between standardized tests and disciplinary standards, which oftentimes do

have a logic for educators. Disciplinary standards are not unproblematic; the movement toward standardization can limit individuality, cultural diversity, and creativity for students and teachers and run counter to our goals of providing access to an authentic citizenship education (Meier, 2000). These standards, however, do have at least some basis in the learning and demonstration of discipline-specific tasks and, at their best, describe processes for information consumption and production that are important for young people to acquire. We do, for instance, want our youth to understand culture, time, and geography. We want our future parents, leaders, and professionals to be exposed to a wide range of literature, and we want them to be able to write across multiple genres. We want activist citizens who are able to reason mathematically and problem solve. In the remaining sections of this chapter we show how a critical pedagogy of urban education helps to meet many of the legitimate standards across disciplines, paying particular attention to the frameworks provided by organizations in English/language arts, social studies, and mathematics. We conclude by considering how a critical pedagogy of education may help us to re-think the language we employ to talk about standards and the measures we use to evaluate student learning.

The Standards Question

Everyone, from both the left and the right, is talking about standards these days. Although they cannot agree on anything else in education, it seems that both sides can agree on the need for standards. Their reasons for the convergence are varied, but it is important to acknowledge them all. For one, there is a fundamental disappointment with public education and a pervasive belief that schools are not doing what they should to educate the population of the future. This belief is held by rich and poor alike. If the participants in education feel as though they are getting a raw deal, it behooves educators to listen. The public grows weary with teachers' unions calling for strikes when the students attend dilapidated schools with outdated textbooks, if any. Voting members of the public strike back at requests for tax increases and bonds when they perceive their money is going down the tube. This end of the public, worried about future pensions, qualified workers, or even the economic prospects for their descendants, look at standards and tests as checks on a dysfunctional system, a way of holding the adults in the system accountable for educating children. Without them, they feel, school personnel would

be comfortable with the same mediocre results. How can we blame a large segment of our public for feeling this way?

There is another segment of the public that views the schools as hotbeds of liberalism and liberal discourse. They see schools as unloading a liberal dogma on unsuspecting youth rather than teaching the three Rs. These people claim that schools are supposed to be politically neutral places that teach students skills, not ideologies. And to the extent that schools teach ideologies, they should be pro-American. Many members of the voting public view schools as anti-religion, anti-white, anti-Republican, or even anti-American. They openly lament the fact that the National Education Association endorses Democratic presidents and they cry foul when studies show that the overwhelming majority of professors in postsecondary education self-identify as liberals. They also see the political education as detracting from the mission at hand, which is to teach the students the academic skills they need to contribute to the global marketplace. These members of the public envision standards as a way to keep liberal educators in line, to ensure that they leave their politics at home and stick to the business of educating children.

Regardless of how we might counter either of these viewpoints, it is important to acknowledge the large consensus on the need for standards. While the public may be growing weary with an over-dependence on standardized tests, the call for externally imposed guidelines on the practice of teaching and the measurement of learning is undeniable. As educators, the notion that the public feels that they are more interested in student achievement than we are should trouble us. This bears acknowledging, even if we fail to agree with the public assessment of urban public education. The external conversations about standards are a testament both to the increasing importance of public education and to the public's waning faith in that public education system. And while we may offer our own critiques of their critiques, we owe it to those we educate to pause and ask ourselves whether we are doing all we can to educate all children. In addition, we need to seek out ways to demonstrate student learning to the students themselves and to larger publics in ways that restore confidence among both populations. And, of course, we feel strongly that critical pedagogy should not be seen as antithetical to these goals; rather, we see the outcomes associated with critical pedagogy as consonant with our vision of the educated citizen.

This chapter, then, is not a diatribe against standards and their proponents, nor is it a blind stamp for the status quo. It is a reflection, using critical theory and critical pedagogy, on the past, present, and possible future of

standards and measures of student learning and achievement. Regardless of how we feel about current standards, we need to understand how important they are to important constituents in education, the most important of whom are the students themselves. They do not have the leisure of deciding whether they agree with education standards, because they are evaluated against them for better or worse. The standards are the gatekeeper that stands between them and their future. Most of these students adopt a pragmatic approach to the standards; they figure out what is asked of them and they attempt to do it or head for the door. Unless they navigate the standards, though, they cannot successfully navigate the K–12 educational system, nor can they access higher education in any meaningful way. For this reason, they need to be understood by critical pedagogues working within urban education. Unfortunately, critical pedagogy has been extremely silent on the pragmatic end of the standards question. This chapter aims to break that silence. We also aim to contribute to conversations about finding alternative ways to measure student performance that are consistent with our visions of critical education.

Critical Pedagogy and Academic Standards

We began this book by acknowledging the myriad ways that schools serving low-income students fail to provide them with an adequate education. We then proposed that a critical approach to education would allow educators to engage students academically, intellectually, and socially. We would be remiss, then, to evade the issue of standards in education. Our entire approach has been one that puts forth critical pedagogy as the backbone of educational interventions that go above and beyond the standards. In the preceding five chapters, we outlined projects that challenged students to read the word and the world and to use their intellectual capabilities to act upon the world in empowering ways. In Chapter 3, for instance, students applied critical lenses to analyze literature, and they became writers of expository texts and poems. In Chapter 4 members of a women's basketball team used their interest in athletics to learn academic concepts and to struggle for social justice in their schools and communities. In Chapter 5, a college access program apprenticed students of color as scholars and activists and provided a context for a civic education that included academic rigor and social action. In Chapter 6, a summer seminar challenged students to read social theory, to develop mixed-method research projects, to write research reports, and to present

their findings to a public audience that included experts and community leaders. And, in Chapter 7, students became public historians and created their own counter-narratives of the experiences of youth of color in the city schools in the half-century following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Each of these interventions focused explicitly on developing the core academic competencies and the confidence and motivation needed to navigate educational standards successfully. We accessed the disciplinary standards of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) to demonstrate how the projects we describe intersect with the disciplinary goals of these three organizations.

National Council for the Social Studies

The NCSS (<http://www.socialstudies.org>) identifies ten thematic strands that should form the basis of any social studies standards (Table 8.1). A close analysis of these strands shows that a critical pedagogical framework closely parallels the goals that social studies educators have for students. For example, strand 1 requires that social studies programs include experiences that provide for the study of culture and diversity. In each of the summer seminars, in the Futures project, and in the sociology course at Northeast Community High School, students studied cultural practices in their local experiences. These students were also able to understand the relationships between culture and power, and they were also able to make recommendations for how educators could utilize non-school cultural practices in homes and communities to make connections with academic content. Through this process of studying culture in local contexts, students acquired skills as ethnographers and engaged in high levels of reading and writing. The students collected quantitative data that revealed the demographics of the community; they also collected interview data, field notes, digital photographs, and digital video footage.

Strand 2 requires that social studies programs include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves over time. Our 2003 summer seminar required students to collect the viewpoints of participants in city schools over a fifty-year period. These students also studied census data that revealed changing population patterns in the city over this same period. By engaging in critical work aimed at educational equity and justice, these students gained a sophisticated historical understanding of life in Los Angeles for young people of color in the last half of the twentieth

century. We could go on, but it is obvious how critical work can prepare students to study culture, history, society, and change while also helping them see themselves as informed intellectuals and agents of change. Finally, critical projects can help young people to develop as readers, writers, and speakers as they collect, analyze, and present information to multiple audiences through multiple genres. We say more about the reading and writing development of our students when we examine the curriculum frameworks for the English language arts.

1. *Culture*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.
2. *Time, Continuity, and Change*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.
3. *People, Places, and Environments*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.
4. *Individual Development and Identity*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.
5. *Individuals, Groups, and Institutions*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.
6. *Power, Authority, and Governance*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
7. *Production, Distribution, and Consumption*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.
8. *Science, Technology, and Society*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.
9. *Global Connections*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.
10. *Civic Ideals and Practices*. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

Table 8.1. NCSS Thematic Strands

Source: <http://www.socialstudies.org>

National Council of Teachers of English

In a similar vein, the NCTE offers a dozen standards that should form the core of K–12 English/language arts programs (Table 8.2). We paid attention to these standards as we developed our curricula in our East Bay High School English class and in our various interventions across the Futures project, the summer seminar, and the sociology course at Northeast City High School. Like Freire, we believed that any reading of the word would be informed and strengthened by a reading of the world. We also believed that an ability to re-write the world was essential to true revolutionary praxis in our information age. Furthermore, we understood that students needed strong literacy skills to navigate the world of secondary and post-secondary education effectively. For all of these purposes, we wanted to be able to articulate the numerous overlaps between the practice of critical pedagogy and the development of disciplinary proficiency in the English language arts.

We discuss briefly a few intersections that become obvious from an overview of the standards. Standards 1 and 2 require students to read a wide range of print and non-print texts to come to an understanding of the human experience and to respond to the needs and demands of society. In the process of acquiring a critical perspective on the development of Western society, our English students read classical texts such as Homer's *Odyssey* and Shakespeare's *Othello*, in addition to contemporary texts such as *Native Son* and popular texts such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* films. In preparing to become critical sociologists, our seminar students read graduate-level texts in the sociology of education.

Standards 5, 11, and 12 deal with students as writers for public consumption and as members of a variety of literate communities. In all of our interventions, there were ample opportunities for students to write across a variety of genres for multiple private and public purposes. In the context of critical analyses, community-based research, and advocacy for social justice, students wrote journal entries, field notes, lecture notes, reading notes, essays, poems, interview protocols, surveys, PowerPoint slides, and research reports, to name a few. Students took many of these public documents through multiple stages of the writing process from brainstorming to revision, and many of these documents were published in legitimate outlets ranging from online archives, to newspapers, to poetry anthologies, to peer-reviewed academic journals and book chapters. In addition, students used their new

media skills to create digital documentaries that have been aired on numerous Web sites and in public presentations.

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and non-fiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Table 8.2. NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts

Source: <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

Although much of our early work focused on the correlations between critical pedagogy and academic literacy development, our work in schools alerted us to the abysmal performance of students of color in mathematics (U.S. De-

partment of Education, 2005). We knew it was important to begin to explore connections between critical pedagogy and the development of mathematical competencies. At the same time, our own research interests convinced us of the importance of critical quantitative work to the goals of educational equity and access. Given this convergence of interests and desires, we made a concerted effort to include mathematical reasoning and quantitative research in the work of the seminars. Students began to incorporate survey research, census data, educational attainment data, and GIS programming, which required them to plot data into regional and neighborhood maps. A study performed by an educational psychologist (Rogers, Morrell, & Enyedy, 2007) revealed that the GIS mapping increased the students' ability to reason mathematically.

In addition, the quantitative and statistical database research offered opportunities for the students to develop their problem-solving and processing abilities (Tables 8.3 and 8.4). When we were researching educational attainment in Los Angeles schools, for instance, students developed many questions that required them to increase their mathematical proficiency. Students became interested in dropout rates, in test scores, and in correlations between income levels and educational outcomes in local neighborhoods. Moreover, students wanted to ascertain their peers' opinions on a variety of educational issues, so they created annual surveys that they distributed to high school students around the city. The data from the surveys (usually in the neighborhood of 500 sets) were inputted, and the students were given reports that they could manipulate for their research ends. Students presented analyses from the surveys and statistical databases via maps, charts, tables, and graphs that facilitated communication of their findings to a number of different audiences.

- Instructional programs from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 should enable all students to:
- Build new mathematical knowledge through problem solving;
 - Solve problems that arise in mathematics and in other contexts;
 - Apply and adapt a variety of appropriate strategies to solve problems;
 - Monitor and reflect on the process of mathematical problem solving.

Table 8.3. Problem-Solving Standards for Grades 9–12

Source: <http://standards.nctm.org/document/chapter7/prob.htm>

Standards in Context

Although we have endeavored to make a pragmatic argument in this chapter that critical pedagogy can contribute to the achievement of disciplinary standards, we do not want to excuse the circumstances within which students are educated, nor do we want to adhere blindly to the logic of the standards in the core disciplines. As critical educators, we must remain vigilant against the inherent racism embedded within the standards as well as the structural conditions that limit the opportunities of certain students, who are still held accountable for the same standards. Students who attend schools without adequate facilities, without credentialed teachers or rigorous courses, are still held to the same scrutiny as students who have received everything that money can buy. We also need to remain vigilant against the institutional racism prevalent in schools that contributes to a sense of alienation as well as outcomes such as the stereotype threat, where students who have been marginalized within a system underperform on high-stakes assignments out of fear of how they will be perceived by those in power. These are real issues that require real solutions. The bottom line, however, is that if critical pedagogy provided urban students with better skills and greater confidence, as well as a sense of humanity, they would perform better than they do on educational standards and standardized assessments.

Rethinking Standards in an Age of Critical Pedagogy

Critical educators involved in the current educational system must often play the role of radical pragmatists. Much of what needs to be done requires us to wear the pragmatic hat. It is not possible, for instance, to ignore the practical realities associated with the culture of testing and standards. For this reason, we have devoted a significant portion of this chapter to the myriad ways that critical pedagogy may help to improve students' abilities to meet disciplinary standards and perform on standardized tests. We showed how students' reading and writing fit into disciplinary conversations, and we also showed how work that explicitly seeks to develop culturally affirmed identities would help students as they prepare for standardized exams.

However, we cannot close this chapter without returning to more radical endeavors. Even as we prepare students for the educational system that is, we have a responsibility to work to make the educational system what it could be. Part of that transformation, we argue, includes radically rethinking the ways that we "test" students and the ways that we allow them to demonstrate

Problem Solving. Solving problems is not only a goal of learning mathematics but also a major means of doing so. It is an integral part of mathematics, not an isolated piece of the mathematics program. Students require frequent opportunities to formulate, grapple with, and solve complex problems that involve a significant amount of effort. They are to be encouraged to reflect on their thinking during the problem-solving process so that they can apply and adapt the strategies they develop to other problems and in other contexts. By solving mathematical problems, students acquire ways of thinking, habits of persistence and curiosity, and confidence in unfamiliar situations that serve them well outside the mathematics classroom.

Reasoning and Proof. Mathematical reasoning and proof offer powerful ways of developing and expressing insights about a wide range of phenomena. People who reason and think analytically tend to note patterns, structure, or regularities in both real-world and mathematical situations. They ask if those patterns are accidental or if they occur for a reason. They make and investigate mathematical conjectures. They develop and evaluate mathematical arguments and proofs, which are formal ways of expressing particular kinds of reasoning and justification. By exploring phenomena, justifying results, and using mathematical conjectures in all content areas and—with different expectations of sophistication at all grade levels, students should see and expect that mathematics makes sense.

Communication. Mathematical communication is a way of sharing ideas and clarifying understanding. Through communication, ideas become objects of reflection, refinement, discussion, and amendment. When students are challenged to communicate the results of their thinking to others orally or in writing, they learn to be clear, convincing, and precise in their use of mathematical language. Explanations should include mathematical arguments and rationales, not just procedural descriptions or summaries. Listening to others' explanations gives students opportunities to develop their own understandings. Conversations in which mathematical ideas are explored from multiple perspectives help the participants sharpen their thinking and make connections.

Connections. Mathematics is not a collection of separate strands or standards, even though it is often partitioned and presented in this manner. Rather, mathematics is an integrated field of study. When students connect mathematical ideas, their understanding is deeper and more lasting, and they come to view mathematics as a coherent whole. They see mathematical connections in the rich interplay among mathematical topics, in contexts that relate mathematics to other subjects, and in their own interests and experience. Through instruction that emphasizes the interrelatedness of mathematical ideas, students learn not only mathematics but also about the utility of mathematics.

Representations. Mathematical ideas can be represented in a variety of ways: pictures, concrete materials, tables, graphs, number and letter symbols, spreadsheet displays, and so on. The ways in which mathematical ideas are represented is fundamental to how people understand and use those ideas. Many of the representations we now take for granted are the result of a process of cultural refinement that took place over many years. When students gain access to mathematical representations and the ideas they express and when they can create representations to capture mathematical concepts or relationships, they acquire a set of tools that significantly expand their capacity to model and interpret physical, social, and mathematical phenomena.

Table 8.4. NCTM Process Standards

Source: http://www.nctm.org/uploadedFiles/Math_Standards/12752_exec_pssm.pdf

relevant knowledge. Even further, critical educators need to wear their radical hats as they enter into conversations about what that relevant knowledge should be. How, for instance, do we insert forms of knowledge that cannot be easily quantified, such as humanity, or tolerance, or knowledge of self, or are we satisfied if students possess the requisite literacy and numeracy skills even if they are selfish, racist, sexist, and close-minded or frightened, insecure, and ashamed of everything that defines them when they leave campus? If we are not satisfied with the prospect that we may be educating skilled, yet fragmented, human beings, then we need to find ways to transform our guidelines and our measures.

How, then, can critical educators help the larger public to rethink the discourse of standards? First, we need to ask a set of questions that will allow us to be explicit about what we want from our students. After involving our students in critical pedagogical interventions, what do we want them to know? How would we expect these students to be able to demonstrate what they know? What do we want our schools to accomplish? To what ends? At what costs? Answering these questions may reveal some inconsistencies between what we claim to want for our schools and our children and the practices we advocate through the standards we accede to. Even for those who support a completely corporate logic, one that propounds the idea of schools being training grounds for the workplace, we would have to ask ourselves what kinds of skills one needs to be an effective worker in today's marketplace. What we are seeing now is the need for workers who are creative, who are able to think for themselves, who are able to adapt to new situations, and who are able to work with diverse teams to accomplish collective ends. At present, very few of these skills and dispositions are even valued in the standards as they are laid out. What we care about now is what we can measure best, discrete skills and the accrual of discrete facts.

A critical pedagogy of urban education would tend toward narrative and formative assessments in lieu of so much attention being paid only to standardized summative assessments. Assessments are most valuable when they are informal and immediate and when they allow the students opportunities for revision and improvement. Assessments that are final prognoses, sent months later in the form of a percentile, do little to help students to learn.

A critical pedagogy of urban education would also lead to more emphasis on critical inquiry over discrete knowledge of facts and would encourage the development of processes associated with intellectual activity. This debate is

as old as Deweyan progressivism and the beginning of public education. Dewey (1990) and his supporters believed that the entire curriculum could be centered on following students' inquiry into the natural world. Rather than have them learn science from a textbook, kids could "do science." Rather than look for history in a book, they could perform historical research. Rather than read only existing plays, they could write, produce, and perform their own plays (or even screenplays). A critical pedagogy of urban education would push us toward fundamentally changing the ethos of K-12 education from one of knowledge consumption to one of knowledge production. We would argue that students would be positioned to learn all of the important skills they need within the context of exploring things that are important to them in their community and within the larger society. There would be room for the study of classical and historical texts within this framework, but there would also be room for educational praxis.

Production, Performance, Service

In rethinking standards and measures, we can turn to the real world for models that may be helpful. How, for instance, do we expect people in the real world to demonstrate knowledge and competence? Although tests play some role in the world of work, most people do not demonstrate their knowledge or competency via paper-and-pencil tests. Most people are asked to do something authentic, or else they have their work evaluated by those knowledgeable enough to make a decision as to the relative merits of the work. The summer seminar model fits nicely within this real-world application, as the student-participants had their work informed at every level by practicing sociologists who were able to provide expert feedback and guidance. The students demonstrated their knowledge through presentations and papers that were very much like those that professional social science researchers produce for their own conferences and journals.

When we consider the overuse of standardized tests in schools in the context of how people are evaluated in their life after school, it does not make a whole lot of sense. Think, for instance, about how tests would work in determining a quality filmmaker or dancer? What test could Gandhi, Ella Baker, or Martin Luther King Jr. have taken to demonstrate that they were revolutionary leaders? Better we draw from these real-world examples to think about production, performance, and service as measures of student achievement. The human population thrived for millennia before the advent

of the standardized test, and we'll do fine after these tests have gone. In the interim, we can work together to develop "acceptable" standards of production, performance, and service across the disciplines and grade levels in ways that fit with the goals of critical pedagogy and the demands of the public. What parent wouldn't be proud to know that their daughter had created a literacy program for young children? Who wouldn't be convinced of scientific knowledge after attending a student-run conference on environmental pollution in major metropolitan cities?

Students should be writing books, plays, poems, research reports, and investigative journalism. They should be gathering historical data and conducting and scoring surveys. They should be accessing census data and other large statistical databases. They should be designing cars and homes that run on cleaner fuel. They should be developing computer software; they should be creating advertisement campaigns for drug awareness, for environmental conservation, for anti-racism, and for peace on earth. Students should start this work in the early elementary grades, and it should continue from school into the world of work and citizenship. And we, as educators and researchers, need to be ready to show how the students are learning everything they need to in the context of undertaking meaningful, life-affirming work. All of this could be accomplished, we believe, without the use of most of the standardized tests that currently occupy so much of our thinking.

Toward a Grounded Theory of Praxis

The final chapter in a book of this length customarily wraps up the arguments made in earlier chapters, but concluding an argument on a subject as loaded as critical pedagogy is no small task. At the outset, we stated our charge as one that would move from theory to practice and return to theory. We have not engaged in a definitive study of critical pedagogy in urban education. Rather, we have provided several examples of practices with urban youth (successful practices, we think) that built on our interpretations of the critical pedagogy theories to which we have been exposed. In the process, we feel as though we have generated some core principles of a grounded theory of critical pedagogy with urban youth that we hope will inform policy, practice, teacher development, and future research in critical pedagogy.

We now highlight several key principles that have emerged during our extensive work. We have alluded to some of these principles in earlier chapters, and they all relate to ideas in the work of others, but they bear repeating here in our concluding chapter. From the core principles we shift our discussion to the implications of this latest instantiation of our approach to critical pedagogy for the development of educational policy, educational practice, and future urban educators. We conclude the chapter by situating the work of critical pedagogy within a larger context of social movements. One cannot examine and become intimate with the problems of urban schools across our country without also becoming aware that the answers are much broader than simply improving the academic achievement of a subset of students. Simply put, we will not be able to solve our serious social ills without some sort of major social transformation. That said, urban schools exist as important sites of intervention, and the work of urban educators can certainly contribute to these larger movements. It is with these considerations that we hope to leave our readers.

Informing Practice: Core Principles of the Art of Critical Pedagogy

To implement critical pedagogy in urban contexts, it is vital that educators identify and articulate to students the vehicle for delivering critical pedagogy (critical research, critical media literacy, etc.). This vehicle must be intriguing enough to generate student engagement and relevant enough to warrant student investment. In short, educators must be able to explain to students, in a compelling way, why they should invest in the project. This explanation should answer the common student question, Why is this important to me in

this moment and in my future life and the future life of my community? Vehicles for implementing critical pedagogy should draw from culturally relevant material that builds on students' existing knowledge base (i.e., popular culture, language, culture, history). These efforts should foreground and value student knowledge as legitimate and intellectual. From there, critical pedagogues can and should build bridges into other forms of knowledge that will give students access to the codes that allow them to crack into, extract resources from, and change dominant institutions.

After identifying the vehicle, educators should create a critical counter-culture in their classrooms and programs. This should be a culture that mounts a deliberate attack on any and all forms of low expectations and social, political, and economic exploitation, replacing them with a culture of excellence and justice. These efforts should begin by confronting the immediate material conditions of the community where the teaching is taking place. However, the developing counter-culture should also work to connect the local struggle for freedom to larger state, national, and global struggles over similar issues.

Critical pedagogues should also create opportunities for students to use what they are learning in ways that directly impact their lives. Such efforts should also prepare students to develop common goals and ready them to work collectively toward them. This means developing a curriculum and pedagogy that address the material concerns of students and their communities (education, housing, justice, jobs, etc.) and that permit and encourage students to use what they are learning to act upon those concerns.

In addition, critical pedagogy should offer opportunities for students to reflect on what they have learned, to evaluate their work, and to move forward with their work on the basis of the knowledge gained from that reflection. This requires educators to use individualized assessment programs that evaluate student efforts on the basis of their own growth, such as the learning assessment and growth program suggested by Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development" (see description in Chapter 4). Such a program requires educators to connect smaller projects to larger ones, so that students feel that each project builds on the others and that the skills and knowledge they are developing are creating an intellectual momentum that will allow them to get stronger by drawing on what they have already learned.

Implications for Policy

Policymakers must find the courage to commit resources to addressing the challenges facing urban schools. Everyone knows that school funding policies are unequal and inadequate in every state in the country. If our society did not have this social compact around unequal funding, then people would not make entire life choices on the basis of access to school districts, and realtors would not be able to use public schools as selling points. An equal-opportunity society would provide every child with the exact same opportunity. That would require us to provide more to children who have fewer resources, which would mean that schools serving poor children would receive substantially more than schools serving wealthy children. Some will argue that this already happens because urban schools receive additional funding (i.e., Title 1). But any honest examination of school funding reveals that wealthy parents more than make up for that funding gap with the social and economic capital that they provide to their local schools. We do not believe that families should be punished for contributing to the education of their children. However, we do believe that it is dishonest to allow that to happen and then call the system equal. If we want an equal system, then every school should be provided with equal resources, no matter where those resources come from.

A policy for truly equal funding would be step in the right direction. However, we do not believe that the ultimate goal is an equal education for all. Instead, as we argued in our opening chapter, to be a truly great society we must have an equitable educational system. The importance of the distinction between equal and equitable warrants repeating here. An equal education system believes that everyone should get the same education—we are a far cry from even this seemingly simple principle. An equitable education believes that people should receive an education specific to their needs, as defined by their circumstances. If we were to reach the point where we had an equal education system, we would certainly have to admit that people of privilege (economic, racial, political, social) will, more often than not, provide their children with advantages beyond the institution of school that cannot be matched by those without privilege. Although we would be in a better place as a society if schools were at least equal, the inequalities of this system would still provide a moral challenge to our society.

An equitable school system would partially address this moral challenge. In such a school system, the institution would provide service on the basis of

the specific needs (social, economic, linguistic, political) of the people being served. This would not mean less or more, but different, such that the resources and the pedagogy would match the specific needs of the community. This is equity, the heartbeat of critical pedagogy. It is a movement away from educational practices that primarily measure student achievement on the basis of assimilation into white middle-class norms. Let us be clear. The ability of a student to read, write, and do arithmetic at the highest levels is *not* what we are referring to as white middle-class norms. We are referring to the fact that our current educational system uses curriculum, pedagogy, and measurements of these skills that center around white middle-class epistemologies. Thus, the path to acquiring those skills is associated with the belief that they must be applied in the service of the existing power structure (economic, social, and political). There are always a few students who see the trade-off as worthwhile and even fewer who see the system for what it is and consciously maintain a critical double-consciousness (see Chapter 2). But, for most, our existing system translates into poor students of color choosing between two distinct cultural worlds: that of their family and community and that of the existing power structure. No educational system in a multi-cultural democratic society should force large portions of its children to make such a choice. An equitable education system would nurture students' own cultural identities and promote the use of their school success in the service of their communities.

Policymakers will not resolve this dilemma simply by committing more resources to schools. They also need to develop policy that addresses the need for more effective school evaluation tools if they are to support schools to meet the specific needs of the students and communities they serve. Any successful organization recognizes that its potential to improve begins with its ability to self-evaluate honestly and accurately. In the case of schools, such an assessment tool must give all service providers an evaluation of their performance on the basis of three primary measures: feedback from clients (students, parents, community), quantifiable growth (assessment scores, grades, attendance, qualifications), and feedback from colleagues (teachers, administrators, support staff). Many schools and districts have attempted to create evaluation tools that they call "school report cards." The failure of these report cards to provide meaningful feedback for school improvement is due to the fact that they do not give teachers and school leaders qualitative feedback. They provide copious amounts of quantitative data (test scores, suspen-

sion rates, teacher credentials, etc.), which can be used to identify problem areas. But without systematic input from clients, efforts to address those problem areas are equivalent to throwing darts in the dark. Any organization worth its weight knows that it must invest heavily in self-evaluation that prioritizes honest feedback from the clients it serves. We can theorize a variety of reasons for why schools do not do this, and we can also find numerous schools that do have systems for feedback. We also know that the schools least likely to have such a system are schools that serve poor children of color and that the schools most likely to have such a system are schools that serve children from wealthy families. The fact of the matter is that policymakers rarely make a concerted effort to create opportunities for poor communities to contribute to the dialogue about how they can best be served by public institutions. A meaningful urban school improvement policy must address this need for a more meaningful evaluation tool.

The problem facing policymakers is that policy often results in the implementation of a one-size-fits-all program. This approach will inevitably be ineffectual for the majority of schools. What policymakers should be thinking about are dynamic policies, such that each school can apply the policy to evaluate and react to its own needs. Such policies would allow for school report cards that solicit evaluations of all elements of a school (teacher quality, school climate and discipline, facilities, health and nutrition, student achievement, parent involvement, programs) from the clients and the participants (support staff, teachers, and administrators) themselves. That evaluation tool would give teachers and school leaders direct feedback from students and families so that they would know what they need to work on to address the gaps revealed by test scores. It would also give school leaders direct feedback from their staff on areas that would improve the adult culture (an area of school improvement that is largely ignored). Schools could use such information to give classroom teachers targeted support in the areas where they are struggling the most, rather than pursuing school-wide professional development that will meet the needs of only a few. It would also give site administrators feedback about necessary improvements to the physical condition of the school, school culture, and school staffing, which would allow leaders to make informed decisions based on the needs of the clients and staff.

We are adamant that policymakers should work to dramatically increase the resources allotted to schools. However, in the absence of policy that supports a comprehensive school evaluation tool, the allocation of those re-

sources will not meet the needs of many students and families. This absence of tools for self-reflection, the most basic tenet of critical pedagogy, prevents schools from improving. It is important to recognize that a more effective evaluation tool is not out of reach. In fact, the template for such a tool is in place with the existing school report cards. However, until those report cards provide meaningful feedback to individual service providers, such that they are aware of the specific likes, needs, and desires of the clients they are serving, school improvement efforts will almost certainly fail to enhance significantly the quality of education that is provided.

In addition, policymakers should be pursuing strategic models that incorporate research and development around quality instruction specific to urban schools. Policy should support major investments into research that explores the work of teachers who are effective in schools where most of their colleagues are failing. There is not enough support for the work of effective urban teachers, and there is even less research aimed at understanding the core principles behind their effectiveness. This dearth of research into effective urban teaching leads to a vicious cycle of poorly informed recruitment, credential program training, and professional development for urban teachers.

Implications for Urban Teacher Preparation and Development

Teacher education programs have long been under siege as weak interventions that do little to change the pre-existing beliefs that teachers bring with them from their own experiences as students. Furthermore, programs have been attacked for being soft, for admitting under-qualified students, for not demanding enough from pre-service teachers, and for making the credentialing process essentially pro forma. In 2004, Congress lambasted teacher education programs for not being able to measure their own effectiveness. A lack of systematic research on the impacts of teacher education programs on the performance of teachers adds fuel to the conservative congressional fire.

Conservative outsiders, however, are not the only ones attacking teacher education. A recent report published by Arthur Levine, *Educating School Teachers* (2006), claims that more than half of the teachers who graduate from teacher education programs feel as though they have not been adequately prepared. In urban contexts the situation is even more dire; top universities have committed to creating teacher education programs that focus on the preparation of teachers for urban contexts, but even after several years

of such programs no noticeable changes in academic performance can be identified (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

All of this talk about the failure of teacher education is happening at a time when we are clinging more tightly than ever to a culture of standards and standardized tests. Schools that are unable to demonstrate gains in achievement or adequately yearly progress run the risk of being closed or taken over by the state. In a sense, with all of the rigid external requirements via mandatory testing and scripted curricula, these schools already have been taken over. Our experience while visiting many schools and working with pre-service teachers at several universities reveals a sense of apathy, defeat, and cynicism that enters into the conversations of teachers before they even set foot into urban classrooms.

Given these tremendous challenges, one may wonder whether there is any hope at all for a focus on critical pedagogy in teacher development. When all of the focus is on rigor and achievement, critical pedagogy may seem like a hard sell to pre-service and practicing teachers and to the universities and districts that regulate teacher development. We argue the contrary. Given the tremendous challenges and alienation from the process of policy decision making, and even curriculum, teachers now, more than at any other time, need something to believe in. They need to feel empowered as agents of change inside and outside of schools. Current regimes of power dismiss and de-intellectualize teaching populations, at least in part because the beliefs of teachers often run counter to the interests of those in power. Urban parents, students, and community members are distrustful of teachers in the aggregate because they are associated with institutions that have not proven willing or able to educate youth adequately. While teachers may never be able to convince those in power of their worth or their intellect, they can ally with students and members of communities to demand educational reform. Such allegiances can begin mending bridges that have been broken for far too long.

We would argue that the current political climate has unwittingly created ideal conditions for teachers in urban schools to reposition themselves as critical pedagogues and to develop practices that are empowering of themselves and their students. When coercion is public, encompassing, and dehumanizing at once, it creates conditions for radical social change, and conditions could not be more amenable to fomenting this change than they are right now. Teachers are angry, they are hurt, and they are ready to resist policies that they know hurt the children they interact with on a daily basis.

Arguing that the conditions exist for preparing urban teachers to become critical pedagogues is important, but it does not move us closer to preparing a generation of teachers for this undertaking. As a field of professionals, our faith has wavered in our ability to affect the dispositions and practices of the teachers that we, as university educators, are charged to prepare. Whole volumes of literature speak to the challenges: the social class and race of pre-service teachers, the lack of sufficient time to prepare these teachers, the power of their own socialization into classroom life, antagonistic and dysfunctional environments in the schools where they will work, and the limitations of scripted curricula. Each of these has been offered to us as teacher educators as an advance explanation for why the teachers we teach will not be effective once they set foot in the classrooms. We cannot afford to believe this any longer. If we continue to articulate reasons for our ineffectiveness, we will lose the right, as teacher educators, to influence the next generation of (a few million) teachers. It behooves us, then, to think for a moment about the implications of our teaching and research for the preparation of the next generation of teachers in urban schools.

Teaching Teachers about Critical Pedagogy

Teacher educators must pay closer attention to the pedagogy we use to prepare students to be critical pedagogues. We are finding that a growing number of new teachers have been exposed to critical pedagogy in their teacher training programs and that many of them find it valuable. Sadly, most people who use critical pedagogy to train teachers, particularly Freire's version, do little to help new teachers interpret its relevance for urban K-12 classrooms in this country. Many teacher educators fail to mention the fact that Freire's analysis emerged primarily from his experience working with adults. It seems critically important to us that teachers understand Freire's pedagogical recommendations, particularly his critique of the banking model of education, as an analysis of work he did with adults. He was working with students who chose to come to his classroom. We are working with students who are mandated, under threat of legal repercussions, to come. He was working with students who had the wisdom that comes from surviving and subsisting into adulthood in a society that marginalized them. We are working with children who, like any children, have not had the lived experience of adults to guide their decision making and therefore need a more deliberately structured and disciplined environment.

Sadly, the result of this de-contextualized teaching of critical pedagogy is often two more forms of oppressive pedagogy that we must battle. The first of these is a pedagogy guided by fear. Many teachers are so afraid of being labeled as oppressive (read racist) that they shy away from their responsibility as the adult and educational leader in the classroom. They shirk their duty to exercise authority for fear of being authoritarian, which results in classrooms that lack structure and discipline under the guise of being non-oppressive and democratic. As teachers, they are exactly like the parents Freire describes in the first letter of *Pedagogy of Indignation*, complacent authorities who think of themselves as champions of freedom but find themselves vexed by the "tyranny of freedom." Far too many of these teachers, who may consider themselves to be well meaning, use democratic sensibilities and social justice leanings to defer to students on decisions that are the responsibility of the teacher. In so doing, they fail to establish themselves as a legitimate adult authority with a clear plan for the direction of their students. Inevitably, when the class has spiraled out of control and the teacher decides to hold the young people to some random rule of discipline, the requisite respect of the students is gone. The two most common results of this situation are equally bad. Either students refuse to recognize the authority of the teacher to the point that the teacher gives up on the class or the teacher shifts to the role of uncompromising dictator, regains some semblance of control, and then interprets the authoritarian approach to be the most effective one with urban youth.

Of course, it is usually students and families who get blamed for this, and the archetype of the unruly ghetto child unable or unwilling to stake a claim to her or his education is reified. Insert into this scenario the culture of poverty "experts" who situate the problems with students and their families. Their solution is a "pedagogy of poverty" (Haberman, 2006): "back to basics" drill-and-kill scripted literacy, social studies, and mathematics lessons; zero-tolerance discipline policies; high-stakes testing; one-size-fits-all standards-based instruction; and phenomenally expensive all-inclusive in-service programs for teachers. The latter are particularly disturbing because they are designed by people from outside urban communities to help teachers understand the "culture of poverty" that vexes urban communities. Ruby Payne's *aba! Process*, the most widely sold of these programs, claims that teachers should teach their students to examine individuals who have attained prosperity to learn the hidden rules of wealth creation. Payne's program argues that teachers should be trained to "provide a window of escape

for individuals who are intent on improving their economic lot" (*aha! Process*, 2007, 4). There are numerous problems with Payne's program, not the least of which are the absence of critiques of historical and present-day racial and structural inequities, weakly supported empirical claims, and the use of a cultural deficit perspective (Gorski, 2006; Ng & Rury, 2006). The program also promotes a model of achievement that is individualistic, escapist, and based on wealth accumulation rather than on critical thinking and social change (Gorski, 2006). Year after year, these kinds of regressive pedagogical methods produce identically low test scores and achievement patterns, along with questions from teachers wondering how critical pedagogy might help break the pattern: Does critical pedagogy mean that we are no longer supposed to prepare students to do well on tests? Does it mean that we should throw out state and national standards? Does it mean that college is unimportant? Does it mean that we should not be preparing young people to enter the economy? What does this look like in a classroom? Won't I lose my job if I teach these things?

These questions reflect the second outcome of misinterpretations of critical pedagogy—pedagogical decisions guided by the false dichotomy of critical pedagogy or academic rigor. Teachers trained as critical pedagogues sometimes believe they must choose between academically rigorous teaching and teaching for social justice. This false binary is largely the result of the pedagogy of poverty, where teachers are trained to believe that an academically rigorous pedagogy does not have time for critically investigating the material conditions of society. Instead, an academically rigorous pedagogy focuses on skill development to prepare students to score well on state and national achievement tests—most of which are norm-referenced tests and tend to be more useful (and accurate) as predictors of parent income than intellect (see <http://www.fairtest.org> as a critical resource on testing).

We find that many teachers believe in the value of a critical and socially just pedagogy, at least on a theoretical level. But under the pressure facing their students to perform on a battery of tests by which their ability as teachers will be judged, they find much more job security in teaching to the test (learn to earn) than teaching students to think critically (learn for freedom). The bitter irony of it all is that even when they teach to the test, their students usually end up not doing any better.

To caution teachers against buying into this dichotomy, teacher educators would do well to introduce their students to the first letter in Freire's last book, *Pedagogy of Indignation*, in which he writes:

The progressive educator does not allow herself any doubt with respect to the right boys and girls from the masses, *the people*, have to know the same mathematics, physics, or biology that boys and girls from the "happier parts" of town learn. At the same time, she never accepts that the teaching of any discipline whatsoever could take place divorced from a critical analysis of how society works. (2004, 20)

The disciplined classroom environment, producing the academic rigor and critical social awareness of which Freire speaks, is the foundation on which any effective pedagogy is built. There is no binary; you cannot have critical pedagogy without academic rigor, and you cannot be academically rigorous without drawing from critical pedagogy. Ultimately, the critical pedagogy we promote for teacher development grounds Freire's theory of critical pedagogy in the K–12 urban context of this country so that teachers understand that all of the standards that students will be tested on are taught when you employ a critical pedagogy.

Increasing the Impact of Teacher Education Research

Another challenge facing teacher education is the aesthetic of teaching in urban contexts. Existing metaphors of the teacher as a helpless victim or the teacher as a missionary and savior are extremely problematic. As educators, as writers, as advocates, we can use our voice, our influence, our positions as editors and contributors to create narratives of teachers as transformative agents. We can document the role of teachers as important participants in the transformation of urban schools, not as saviors per se but as collaborators with members of their communities. These narratives, which will emerge from critical research on teachers as critical pedagogues, can take the form of books, articles, chapters, and conference papers, but they can also take the form of Web sites and documentaries. Without developing studies and creating texts that transform this aesthetic, we simply acquiesce in the existing narratives for teachers. This narrative ends up dictating much of the information that is transmitted to teachers in pre-service teacher education and professional development.

As teacher educators and university-based researchers, we are also charged with creating better materials for pre-service and practicing teachers. At present, there exists a real gap between densely theoretical texts that are

intended for doctoral students and university faculty and the very practical, pragmatic texts that are frequently peddled to teachers. Very few texts have been written explicitly for teachers that talk about the principles and practices of critical pedagogy. We have written this text to appeal to practicing teachers as well as teacher educators, but we recognize that it remains a text that will primarily be accessed by teacher educators and university-based scholars. We all need to do a better job of creating texts that are both theoretically sophisticated and immediately applicable for teachers, texts that can be incorporated into teacher education programs and influence practicing teachers.

Improving Coursework in Teacher Education

Another major challenge concerns the coursework of most teacher education programs. We recognize that this challenge falls partially on policymakers, as states often dictate course requirements to credential programs. However, we would argue that teacher credential programs have the responsibility to advocate to policymakers to rethink the current rigid and ineffective programming sequence. Credential programs often have limited space for coursework that is not predefined: a methods sequence, a foundations sequence, and fieldwork. There are few explicit spaces for the discussion of critical theory or the history or sociology of urban education. These subjects may be squeezed into a week's discussion during a foundations or methods course, but very little information can be processed in one week. Teachers will have a difficult time conceptualizing the applications of critical pedagogy if they have not had the opportunity to read and reflect upon the general principles of pedagogy in the immediate contexts where they will be working.

To create more meaningful discussions about critical pedagogy, teacher education courses have to change their structure and culture. At present, many teacher educators are reticent to assign anything that appears to be dense reading, and students are resistant to reading anything that appears to be too "theoretical" or removed from their teaching experience. Part of this can be addressed by creating more teacher-specific critical reading materials, but teacher education courses have to be re-imagined to include spaces where future teachers can read and discuss complex critical social theory.

In addition, it is important to consider the other learning spaces that exist for teachers outside of the university classroom. Traditionally, the two primary spaces of learning in teacher education are the university classroom

and the K-12 classroom, where candidates transition from observing to leading instruction for a period of six to ten weeks. The transition from observer to supported participant fits in nicely with socio-cultural theories of learning through participation. However, socio-cultural theories of learning rely on novices being exposed to expert practice within the culture that they are destined to participate in. In the world of teacher education, however, pre-service teachers are not likely to witness effective critical pedagogy in the urban classrooms where they are student teaching. Given that this is the case, critical teacher educators must seek out other learning spaces for pre-service teachers. Simply "talking them through" critical pedagogy in our seminars is not going to work; they try to tell us this as delicately as they can, and sometimes their telling is not delicate at all.

There are many spaces within the community where adults do work effectively with youth and employ the principles of critical pedagogy. Whether they are after-school dance and theatre programs, sports leagues, community-based organizations, or neighborhood tutorials, numerous adults in the community are finding ways to engage and motivate youth that would prove very useful to those becoming teachers (see Akom, 2003 as one example). Teacher education programs should find ways for pre-service teachers to access these powerful learning spaces as they develop as critical educators.

Teacher education programs can also equip young teachers with the tools of critical research so that they can document and justify their innovative practices to a variety of constituencies including parents, colleagues, department heads, and administrators. Even though the pre-service teachers themselves are a primary audience for their own research, developing the ability to document student learning is an important skill for critical educators. As we stated earlier, our desire to adequately document our innovative approaches to teaching English led us into the world of research and has allowed our work to influence other educators.

In addition to developing teachers as researchers, teacher education programs need to develop their own research studies that document the myriad ways that beginning teachers are drawing upon critical pedagogy to make powerful connections with their students. We cannot rely on gut feelings or faith in our principles. We need to develop studies that show the possibilities, for the sake of our teacher education programs and for the benefit of our recent graduates, who need all of the support that they can get.

Improving Teacher Recruitment

The pool of future teachers will certainly be diversified when we diversify the college student body. However, universities in general, and teacher education departments specifically, should be working much harder to attract, support, and retain students of color. Each region and state has its own challenges in this area, but the following strategies can be generally applied:

- Diversify teacher education faculty.
- Create scholarships that target students of color.
- Recruit early and often—this includes going to high schools, community centers, churches, freshmen seminars, dormitories, sports teams, clubs, etc.
- Place strong teaching faculty in undergraduate courses that address issues of urban students of color.
- Create dual-degree programs that link bachelor's degree, master's degree, and teaching credential.
- Form pipeline relationships with urban districts to prepare and recruit urban high school graduates to join dual-degree programs and return to their communities to teach.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While we feel that the interwoven cases in this book have much to offer the fields of critical studies and urban education, we also recognize that our studies have their limitations. One advantage of working with a small number of examples is that the data are very rich. In our fifteen years working across a small number of sites, we managed to develop strong kinship networks with students, parents, teachers, and members of community-based organizations. These relationships allowed us to develop meaningful practices and collect meaningful data that we share in this book.

A drawback, however, is that we worked with a relatively small sample of students (about 300 students across the five studies mentioned here). It is extremely difficult to make any larger generalizations from such a small sample. It is also important to acknowledge that the sample is biased. We are unable to distinguish our personalities and the dispositions of our students fully from the principles of critical pedagogy under which we carried out the work. We have a mutual colleague who constantly asks, "How do you know it isn't just you?" Maybe we would have had success with these students had

we never come across the readings of Paulo Freire. Maybe there are hundreds of other ways that educators could have been successful with these students that had nothing to do with critical pedagogy.

Furthermore, we are limited in the kinds of causal/correlational statements that we can make about the effects of critical pedagogy with urban youth. What we can say is this: youth who participated in these projects demonstrated complex academic skill development, their participation in the various activities exhibited motivation and engagement, they developed and demonstrated empowered identities, and they engaged in actions for advancing educational and social justice. We can also say that our students attended college in higher numbers than would have been predicted given their socioeconomic status and the graduation and college-going rates of their respective institutions. However, as we did not conduct controlled experiments, we cannot say definitively that critical pedagogy was the sole cause of these particular outcomes.

Finally, we were limited in our ability to impact the institutional cultures of academic underachievement at East Bay and South City high schools. To this day, both schools continue to fail large percentages of their low-income students of color. The same is true for the schools that fed our summer seminar. A look at the aggregate achievement of schools where we worked over the years would reveal a trend of consistent failure despite our documented successes with small segments. While social change is difficult to measure as an outcome, failure is not. If we had ultimately been successful in our charge, these schools and the communities that surround them would be different places by now. The students attending these schools would be receiving an education comparable to that of anyone in the United States. This, however, has not been the case.

Some of these limitations can be addressed with further research. Research can illuminate and document the practices of critical pedagogy across broader contexts with larger numbers of students. We would like to see more work that explores outcomes for students in classrooms where educators adhered to principles of critical pedagogy. What would an examination of student work reveal about their successes relative to their counterparts in similar classrooms that did not use critical pedagogy? What would comprehensive interviews with these students say about their sense of empowerment and their engagement with school? Would these studies permit us to draw definitive conclusions about the ability of critical pedagogical practices to raise grades, test scores, graduation rates, and college attendance?

Further research in critical pedagogy might reveal other practices that could inspire present and future educators. It would be ideal to create journals, Web sites, books, and documentaries that share inspired critical practices with other interested parties. For example, our work with youth popular culture was inspired by reading about critical language practices employed by Carol Lee in South Side Chicago. The assembling of such research studies would inspire practice and help us understand more about the similarities and differences of critical practices across multiple contexts. What, for instance, does critical pedagogy look like across elementary classrooms? What do these practices look like in work with the rural poor (a very significant population in our country)? What are some similarities and differences among work in urban and rural areas with similarly impoverished populations? Are there regional differences in the applications of critical pedagogy? If so, what informs these differences? And, at the end of the day, what, if anything, can be said about the core principles that tie all of these practices together?

Finally, we are in need of a great deal more research that explores the intersections between critical pedagogy and urban teacher development. We are less interested in what critical pedagogy looks like in a teacher education or professional development program than we are in how these programs ultimately generate critical educators (although the two are somewhat related). Future research should help us to identify essential skills and characteristics of critical educators and practices that help fashion those skills and characteristics. It does us no good to hold on to the belief that critical educators are born and not made. We need to develop projects and studies that help us understand the extent to which we are able to transform well-intended educators into critical educators who achieve results with students. Some studies have addressed these issues (see Duncan-Andrade, 2004, 2005b), but additional research is warranted.

Pedagogy, Love, and Revolution

Rarely, in conversations about reforming urban education, are the words pedagogy, love, and revolution juxtaposed. In fact, it is rare that the words love and revolution are associated with any facet of urban school reform. As we have spent the previous eight chapters discussing our philosophy and practice of pedagogy, we conclude with a conversation about love and revolution as these terms relate to critical pedagogy in urban education.

Teachers should love their students; this is the golden rule, a simple enough statement that does not require a book-length treatise. However, the questions of how revolutionary love differs from love traditionally defined and how it becomes manifest in urban classrooms are worthy of further discussion.

What is revolutionary love? How is it practiced in the context of education? And how can teachers be taught to love in this way? First of all we feel that revolutionary love is the love that is strong enough to bring about radical change in individual students, classrooms, school systems, and the larger society that controls them. Often love is defined by its inputs rather than its outcomes; instead of thinking about what teachers do to manifest revolutionary love, we are more interested in what happens as a barometer of this love. Even after all of these theories and practices are ingested, and even after tireless planning, something else will be required of teachers to achieve the kinds of outcomes that we describe in this book. That something else is not easy to predict, nor is it easy to quantify. It looks like endless dedication, an unyielding belief in the brilliance and potential of every student, and the commitment to stop at nothing to get kids to learn. It demands the energy and passion to present learning as an amazing opportunity for young people to prepare themselves to be engaged citizens and social actors. This something else is defined as never giving up. It is a continual search for more effective ways to help young people to learn and to demonstrate their learning in academically and socially powerful ways. This something else is revolutionary love. When teachers see revolutionary change in their students, classrooms, and schools, then they will know that they are practicing that sort of love.

Is it not possible to manifest revolutionary love without these outcomes. As educators, as researchers, as teacher educators, and as advocates for educational justice, we have to take responsibility for the failure of urban schools. If achievement results, student performance, and school climate do not look like we want them to, then it is because we have failed to manifest our revolutionary love. We know how to educate poor children. We have the knowledge and capacity. We lack the courage. We are cowards. Nothing angers us more than cowardice, because cowardice is the confluence of someone knowing what is morally right, having the capacity to act on that moral imperative, and not taking that action. Because the education system in this country has the knowledge and capacity to provide a quality education to all children and chooses to act as though it is tirelessly trying to figure out how to do that, we have systematic cowardice. Systematic cowardice, particularly in regard to

services for young people, is the reflection of a morally bankrupt society. It is possible to educate any group of children if we love them enough to do what we need to do to educate them. As long as we continue to make excuses for our inability to do this, then we are not manifesting revolutionary love. And it is only that kind of love that is going to change our schools.

Love is never easy, because great love also means great pain. It means carrying a burden. It means suffering empathically. It means recognizing and reacting to inequitable conditions that we have the power to change. This revolutionary love is not easy to carry out, and it may exist more as an ideal than a reality. But it is important to the overall thread of this book. To be a part of the difference in urban education means more than ingesting a great amount of theory and creating innovative pedagogical practices. Of course, someone who aspires to this revolutionary love will study and they will develop innovative practices. But they will also stop at nothing short of success, and this commitment will drive them to do things they did not think possible.

An important component of revolutionary love is revolutionary courage. Our love of the students and our feelings of solidarity with them and their families provide us with the courage that we need to become the kinds of critical teachers we need to be. We do not claim to have mastered this love of which we speak. However, we can say that our feelings for students have inspired us to take great personal and professional risks that have resulted in some amazing outcomes for the learning and social development of our students. Love for our students has given us the courage to take on administration, to become public speakers and advocates, to engage in critical research, and to dedicate our time, energy, and personal resources to the struggle for educational justice. As in other drastic situations, love is what gives us the courage to do the unthinkable. It gives us the courage to sacrifice for causes greater than ourselves. This kind of love and courage can turn teachers into agents of change.

We believe revolutionary love is inherent in everyone and that what must be learned is the courage to unleash it. This can be learned through practice and through mentorship. For teachers, this means seeking out those who manifest revolutionary love and courage and working with and learning from them on a daily basis. These mentors, friends, and partners may be colleagues, students, or community members. They may also be pre-service classmates, or emerge from attendance at conferences, or even come from

biographies and bibliographies—we may be apprenticed by the written word and lives of those who have come before us.

As teachers we instruct those around us about revolutionary love by leading public lives where our love for students and the world is open and evident. Students need access not only to the ideas and skills we seek to transfer. They also need to be able to access our love, and they need to be able to see how we draw upon that love to conquer our fears and to work with others for change. Really, what our students need access to is our revolutionary aesthetic. They need to see our theory of change in the world and how we act upon the world to carry out this model of change. If our revolutionary aesthetic is not compelling and reflected in the way we live, we cannot teach our students about revolutionary love. How can we share with them a life that we have not learned to live? It is not as though our students have to become “us,” but in our actions they should see the potential for their own revolutionary life.

And what of this talk of revolution? This is a loaded and connotative word that we employ with a great amount of historical respect for what the term has meant, even as we seek to reclaim it for our own contemporary uses. A generation ago, the term revolution carried very specific connotations of a way of working against Western capitalist sexist white supremacist imperialism. It implied a set of social, economic, and racial conditions to be addressed and a strategy (collective action) for dealing with these conditions. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, we face many similar conditions, although the strategies for collective action have been reframed and political boundaries have been redrawn as a result of advances in technology and the continued globalization of accumulated capital.

Revolution remains an important ideal at the individual, psychological, social, and institutional levels. It remains a potent and motivating concept to believe that collective action can fundamentally transform what has stood as oppressive and total in our lives. Critical pedagogy can play a fundamental role in contributing to revolution on all of these levels. Raising individual academic performance among students attending urban schools is itself a revolutionary act. But a primary goal of critical pedagogy is to address the psychological impact of systematic oppression on young people today. While we frequently discuss the cultural outcomes associated with hegemony, we rarely address the psychological consequences of the domination of social thought and social space for those who are marginalized within these regimes of truth. In other words, while our young people are resilient and vibrant and

full of love, we must recognize that dominant systems of thought can compel young people to engage in activities that cause great harm to themselves and to others. Past generations of critical scholars have referred to this condition as *dysconsciousness*, or the *colonization of the mind* (Fanon, 1967, 2004). These terms may be too simplistic in not accounting for conscious and subconscious resistance engaged in by our young, but they do accurately point to the relationship between hegemony and the mind-set and actions of the young people we teach. That being the case, some focus of the pedagogy of revolution has to be at the individual level; we must help these young people to feel better about themselves on the multiple levels of race, gender, class, sexual identity, and geography. A pedagogy that glosses over individual transformation in the cause of building larger collectives has missed the point. The only way that young people can become informed and empowered consumers of larger social collectives is if they are self-actualized and if they have begun the process of healing and loving themselves. Of course, these transformations can be concurrent, but it is unconscionable to deal with one without the other.

Tupac referred to young people fighting to break free of oppression as the “roses that grow from concrete.” They are the ones who prove society’s rule wrong by keeping the dream of a better society alive, growing despite the cold, uncaring, un-nurturing environment of the concrete. In a poem on this subject, Tupac wrote, “long live the rose that grew from concrete when no one else even cared” (Shakur, 1999, 3). He expanded this metaphor in his song “Mama’s Just a Little Girl,” writing:

You wouldn’t ask why the rose that grew from concrete had damaged petals.
 On the contrary, we would all celebrate its tenacity.
 We would all love its will to reach the sun.
 We are the roses.
 This is the concrete.
 And these are my damaged petals.
 Don’t ask me why...ask me how. (Shakur, 2002)

Despite the number of teachers who remain ineffectual at nurturing these roses in the concrete, we continue to be hopeful about the potential of critical pedagogy to improve urban classrooms. This optimism is spurred by the fact that most young people we encounter still come to school clinging to the hope that things will be different, despite overwhelming evidence that they won’t be. Moreover, most teachers we encounter want to be great edu-

cators; they want to demonstrate the revolutionary love and courage that will meet their students’ hopes and grow rose gardens in concrete. Contrary to prevailing public and government opinion, the majority of teachers we come across are more in need of guidance and critical support on how to be effective than they are of mandates and threats. We hope that the critical pedagogy we have described here will encourage, support, develop, and incite educators to grow roses in the concrete—educators who ask not why the roses’ pedals are damaged but *how* we can grow more of them.