Life in Schools is the story of my reinvention as an educator, from a liberal humanist who pressed the necessity of reform to a Marxist humanist who advocates a revolutionary praxis. By "revolutionary praxis," I mean educating for a social revolution through critical pedagogy. The unfulfilled or unrealized democracy that I envision is unashamedly socialist. Unlike the school of "radical democracy," I don't believe capitalism can be rescued for democracy. Capitalism is beyond salvation. And so is democracy so long as it looks to capitalism to support it. This book is an attempt to bring together two worlds that the poet William Blake once called "songs of innocence" and "songs of experience." Within the context of this writing, these worlds represent, respectively, the intuitive, practical knowledge of the beginning classroom teacher and the domain of critical educational theory. I bring them together in this book to shed a more critical light on the issue of why working-class students generally don't succeed in school, despite the efforts of well-meaning and enthusiastic educators and teachers. The tradition of critical pedagogy, out of which grew the challenge of this book, represents an approach to schooling that is committed to the imperatives of empowering students and transforming the larger social order in the interests of justice and equality. My central task is to develop a language through which educators and others can unravel and comprehend the relationship among schooling, the wider capitalist social relations that inform it, and the historically constructed needs and competencies that students bring to schools.

Every book constitutes for its author a struggle with the past; each page testifies to a place somewhere in the writer's own granular and sedimented history. This book represents for me a particular crossroads in time, an historical juncture in which I remain poised pedagogically between the innocence and naiveté of a young man's sudden introduction to teaching and the reflections of a social theorist privileged with the power of hindsight and research. *Life in Schools* is an attempt to reconstruct a set of past experiences in the light of my current research efforts, in order to give some pedagogical hope to the tension they embody and the story they tell. This "J'accuse," aimed at the custodians of empire, is a story about rage and hope, about injustice in the disguise of democracy, about pain and despair, and about the joy of collective solidarity.

The story begins in 1980, with the publication of the journal documenting my teaching experiences in an inner-city elementary school in Toronto's Jane-Finch Corridor. The book became a controversial bestseller in Canada in the wake of heated public debate. Like so many public school teachers, I survived the classroom by drawing upon a mixture of practical knowledge and relatively untutored pedagogical instinct. This got me through five years of teaching and under the circumstances I felt that I had fared quite well. But a troublesome feeling that I had not made a real difference in the chances of my students to acquire a qualitatively better future began to shadow my personal and intellectual life. With few theoretical resources to help me better understand my students, their families, and the nature of the schooling process, I had failed to see how they were related to the larger socioeconomic context and technologies of

power of the wider society. I was blind to the most damaging effects of exercising my professional duties among the children of the disaffected, the disadvantaged, the disenfranchised, the dispossessed. I let slip an important chance to develop a pedagogy that would have been more effective in both empowering my students and transforming conditions in the existing community.

My purpose in publishing my journal was neither to create scholarly discourse for an academic audience, nor to transform schools into communities of risk and resistance; quite simply, my purpose was to draw public attention to the social conditions of the disaffected students who lived in the nearby public housing units under terribly oppressive circumstances. I also wanted to address the immediate needs of inner-city teachers, many of whom felt desperate and helpless in their overcrowded classrooms, which lacked both necessary material resources and an ethos conducive to learning.

Unfortunately, I couldn't then avail myself of the conceptual tools that might have given my journal a necessary theoretical depth. I had little or no familiarity with the tradition of critical pedagogy and the writings of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Glenn Rikowski, Dave Hill, Mike Cole, Paula Allman, Peter Mayo, Donaldo Macedo, Roger Simon, Joel Spring, Paul Willis, Tom Popkewitz, and others. But I did have an important story to tell of the lives and struggles of children. In the triumphal manner of a young frontier-style muckraker, I set off an educational debate through the publication of my classroom diary. My immediate goal in publishing my journal was not to embrace despair but rather to convince school board members to decrease the pupil-teacher ratio, to develop new programs that were more sensitive to the needs and experiences of disaffected students, and to funnel more curriculum resources and equipment into inner-city schools. As it turned out, the board felt pressured enough to transfer a few hundred thousand dollars into the schools in my area, thanks in part to the efforts of the Canadian media, who reported the contents of my book on a national scale, and to the growing advocacy of grass roots groups and popular constituencies who took full advantage of the publicity brought on by the efforts of investigative journalists and by the publication of my journal. But the real roots of the problems remained inexorably entangled in the everyday lives of the students and their families. Once the publicity ceased, the Board of Education reneged on its plan for school reform.

Since the journal's publication, I have grown increasingly dissatisfied with my attempt to understand and communicate my classroom experiences. My journal was primarily description, without a theoretical framework that could help the reader better understand the conditions I was attempting to portray. On the advice of a prominent journalist, I had reluctantly removed the few theoretical insights that I had initially included in the early drafts of the manuscript. My theoretical formulations—which admittedly were, at the time, crude stabs in the dark—"slowed down" what was otherwise a good "crisp" read; forget theories, I was advised, and let the vignettes "speak for themselves." In those days, that advice sounded almost profound. After all, who was I to impose an analysis or set of recommendations on the lived culture of the disadvantaged?

I realize now that observations of events—whether in the classroom or the laboratory—*never* speak for themselves. Every description is ideologically loaded, codified, and intertextually related to larger interpretive contexts, not to mention capitalist relations of production. Nothing that can be observed or named is ideologically

neutral or innocent. No thoughts, ideas, or theories are transparent, autonomous, or free floating; to say that they are is a middle-class mystification and fleabitten fairytale that seeks to disguise the social interests being served. Ideas are always and necessarily tied to particular interests and enciphered in particular relations of power, and tied to particular power/knowledge configurations. Absolutely nothing is of unmediated availability to human consciousness. To "know" anything is always an effect of power/knowledge relationships. The crucial question is: Who has the power to make some forms of knowledge more legitimate than others? By failing to set my classroom journal within a critical theoretical context, I could not adequately reveal how power and knowledge work in the interests of the capitalist class over the working class. Consequently, I ran the risk of allowing readers to reinforce their stereotypes of what schooling was like in the "blackboard jungle" and what constituted the behavior of economically disadvantaged students. I also was in danger of portraying impoverished communities as crucibles of violence and hatred, devoid of humanity and dignity. This book is an attempt to provide the reader with the necessary theoretical framework for initiating a critical interpretation of the classroom episodes included in the journal.

I tried to convey in the journal both my concern for my students and their strength and perseverance in the face of their oppression. Looking back from my present vantage point, however, I see the author of that journal as a young, liberal teacher both fascinated by and fearful of the marginalized, the disaffected, the disenfranchised, and the indigent—fascinated because their poverty and behavior seemed to be born of defiance rather than despair; and fearful because their anger, pain, and hate had clearly been constructed out of the neglect and greed of a democratic society. The full horror of the situation struck me only when I realized that my students were essentially spitting in the eye of a ruling ideology, and in many ways I represented that eye.

The perspective of that young journal writer represents one moment in my understanding of inner-city teaching. It is a moment that defines a pedagogy I now largely reject as an example of liberal individualism. That moment has now been put in context by an excursion into the theory of schooling's "deep structure," from which I have drawn a new theoretical figuration. The project that began as *Cries from the Corridor* has now become part of a larger work that provides a critical analysis of schooling and classroom culture from the perspective of the labor/capital dialectical contradiction.

Shortly after the publication of the journal I left teaching to enroll in graduate studies. In my attempt to understand how schooling "really" works, I was soon struck by the range of sociological theories that explained how schools can and do disempower, delegitimate, and disconfirm the lives of disadvantaged students. I discovered as well that schools operate through a "hidden curriculum" that incarcerates students in the "semiotics of power" and works against the success of racial minorities, women, and the poor. Yet I was also made aware of how schools could work in emancipatory ways to empower students to accomplish, in the words of Paulo Freire, "reading the word and reading the world." This book does not attempt to answer fully the question of *how* to construct a critical pedagogy within the constraints of an educational system whose character and structure are firmly established by the state. Rather, this book asks: *Why* is a critical pedagogy so necessary? Part of the answer is that mainstream pedagogies generally avoid or attempt to obscure the question that should be central to education: What is the relationship between what we do in the classroom and our effort to build a better society?

Apart from the obvious need for a theoretical introduction to critical pedagogy, it has occurred to me that educators are rarely encouraged to seek connections that would link their personal brand of pedagogy to wider social processes, structures, and issues. One of the purposes of writing this book has been to respond to the failure of North American education to provide prospective teachers with the critical skills, conceptual means, and moral imperatives to analyze critically the goals of schooling. This book attempts to present ways of understanding schooling in terms generally unfamiliar to teachers and prospective teachers. The terminology and frames of reference that I shall be using are drawn from an educational tradition known as critical pedagogy. The book is organized with the intention of introducing readers to some general perspectives that make up this tradition while at the same time providing them with an opportunity to make informed decisions regarding the overall purposes and day-to-day realities of schooling in the United States. More specifically, the problem this book attempts to address is how critical educators can create a language that enables teachers to examine the role that schooling plays in joining knowledge and power to capitalist social relations of production. Critical pedagogy is designed to serve the purpose of both empowering teachers and teaching for empowerment. I have tried to deepen the notion of "empowerment" by connecting it to the Marxist humanist tradition. For those readers who have been socialized to recoil at the mere mention of Marx's name, I would direct you to Marx's own works, and not to the writings of those erstwhile defenders of police states claiming to be Marxists. Within a Marxist-Humanist perspective, classroom social relations and cultural formations are seen as intersecting fields of struggle, and the contradictory character of teaching as it currently defines the nature of teacher work, everyday classroom life, and the purpose of schooling is subjected to more critical forms of analysis.

Part One documents the nature of the present crisis in schooling and society in this country. It does so from the perspective of a renewed engagement with Marxist theory and praxis. Part Two attempts to present the day-to-day struggles of teachers and students in an inner-city school through the inclusion of sections of my elementary school journal. In Part Three, I offer a broad overview of the tradition of critical pedagogy and introduce you to an array of general terms associated with the critical educational tradition. Since many of the terms and theoretical formulations within this tradition are presently being debated, refined, and extended, I discuss only the more fundamental categories, and only in the briefest possible fashion. This fits well with the purpose of this book, which is to provide those of you who are virtually unacquainted with critical pedagogy or the critical social sciences with an overview of some of the more basic socio-pedagogical formulations. After reading this part, you are encouraged to return to the journal in Part Two in order to reevaluate my experiences as a beginning teacher. I also encourage you to consider the classroom journal and new theoretical categories in terms of your own experiences as teachers and as students. Some questions have been provided at the end of Part Three to help you get started. Part Four presents additional categories and theoretical perspectives from the critical tradition and concludes with a short essay on the role of the teacher as social agent. Part Five provides a unique context for furthering the analysis of critical pedagogy with respect to my more recent analyses of schooling and social and political struggles. Its central thesis deals with the abolition of whiteness. The final chapter is a reflec-

tion on education that has been influenced by recent visits to Venezuela, Mexico, and Colombia.

The purpose of this book is to provide a theoretical framework that will enable readers to interrogate critically my own ideological formation as a white Anglo male and a middle-class teacher. Reading my journal after so many years is always a painful experience, especially when I see my early development as a teacher as complicitous in the reproduction of dominant systems of intelligibility and social relations of capitalist production that position minorities and working-class students and parents in relations of subordination.

Publishing my diary, *Cries from the Corridor*, without providing a critical analysis of the conditions in which the lives of the students and their families were played out, was a grave mistake since the lives of the students were impacted by social and economic conditions not of their own making. I trust that my analysis in *Life in Schools* will provide at least a rudimentary explanation for why individuals behave as they do when they are forced to make decisions in a world in which their options are few and where their histories have either been written for them or they have been written off by history.

This book is an invitation to interrogate the liberal humanist discourse of progressive and well-intentioned teachers—including my own early teaching practices—and uncover its complicity in dominant myths about people of color and working-class people from a new, critical perspective. This perspective is the result of my work in critical pedagogy over the last twenty years. This new perspective appears in Parts One, Three, and Four of the book, and it is greatly extended in Part Five.

I hope that this book might prove to be not just a book *about* education, but an *educational book* that will promote an understanding of teaching in cultural, political, and ethical terms. This book will have failed if it merely presents an alternative or opposing view and does not provoke you to begin to examine seriously the assumptions that underlie your own teaching. I do not pretend that this book represents a scholarly advancement of the fundamental issues in critical pedagogy. If my book serves its purpose as an introductory text, then it should leave you with a desire to move beyond the theoretical parameters that I have constructed within these pages.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the following reviewers for their helpful comments: Lois McFadyen Christensen, University of Alabama at Birmingham; William De La Torre, California State University, Northridge; Sandy Grande, Connecticut College; and Carolina Mancuso, Brooklyn College, CUNY.