

Guided by a Red Star: Ed Schools Bring Frankincense to the Cradle of Marxism

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Tags: [Marxism](#) [Teacher Education](#) [Pedagogy](#)

We recently learned of a Marxist journal influencing schools of education. The Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies (JCEPS) is published by the UK-based Institute for Education Policy Studies (IEPS), “an independent Radical Left/Socialist/Marxist institute for developing policy analysis and development of education policy.”

Why is it that the field of education is drawn to Marxism and critical pedagogy? Paulo Freire’s fingerprints are all over the [La Raza studies](#) programs in Arizona elementary schools. U Mass Amherst’s interdisciplinary program in [Social Thought and Political Economy](#) (whose logo is a red star) seeks to instill a revolutionary fervor against the “modern/colonial capitalist-patriarchal system.” And the University of California at Santa Barbara has a new department

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called [critical globalization studies](#) that adopts the Marxist distaste for nation-states in favor of “a new world-system.”

[Critical pedagogy](#) is the concept developed by Brazilian radical Paulo Freire that teaches a narrative of oppression and aims to equip students with a “liberated consciousness” so that they can fully understand the meaning of oppression. Math, science, literature, and history are taught through this politicized narrative of group identity. Sandra Stotsky has described critical pedagogy’s [effect on K-12 schools](#):

To implement [Freire’s] ideas, teachers seek to develop their students’ political understandings and attitudes—hostility or resentment in students belonging to social groups to be considered “non-dominant,” and guilt in students who are to be perceived as members of the “dominant” groups.

One reason why educators are attracted by this pedagogical theory is that it makes such handy excuses for unmotivated students and incompetent teachers. The core idea, as Stotsky puts it, is that “the relatively lower academic achievement and social status of these non-dominant groups may be traced to a lack of motivation for, or resistance to, the cultural content and pedagogy of a curriculum that was not originally designed for them—thereby an alien and oppressive curriculum.”

Of course, when the radical left does design a curriculum that it thinks matches the needs of the oppressed, the resulting courses are often a clownish caricature of real instruction. For example, Eric Gutstein, an eighth grade math teacher in a Chicago public school, teaches his Latino students that all the maps they are used to looking at are propaganda on behalf of Western colonialism. He manages to

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stir up some eighth-grader indignation, which he reported on earlier this year in an article in the *Teachers College Record*, and which we wrote about [here](#). Gutstein, who is also a colleague of Bill Ayers at the University of Illinois-Chicago College of Education, has been an avid promoter of Freiran Marxist pedagogy.

Another reason educators are drawn to this pedagogical foolery is that it invites intellectual vanity. The participants are flattered into believing that they serve a higher calling, even as they deprive students of real learning. A reviewer from the *Nation* wrote, “Wherever education is explicitly involved in struggles for equity and justice, Freire’s ideas and his books, especially *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, will live on.” But *should* education be explicitly involved in struggles for equity and justice?

The Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies thinks most definitely so. The journal “addresses issues of social class, 'race', gender, sexual orientation, disability and capital/ism; critical pedagogies; new public managerialism and academic/non-academic labour, and empowerment/disempowerment.” It publishes articles that “report on, analyse and develop Socialist/Marxist transformative policy for schooling and education from a number of Radical Left perspectives.”

A prominent author is [Peter McLaren](#), a Marxist activist who worships at the altars of [Freire](#), [Raya Dunayevskaya](#), and Che Guevara (McLaren’s [personal website](#) opens with a picture of Guevara and a flashing message: “Che lives! His spirit will never die! Join the revolution!”). Our source said that “while earning my Ph.D. such articles, many by McLaren, were required reading.”

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Last month Katherine Kirsten broke a [story](#) about the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development, which will vote in January on whether to make race, class, and gender politics the "overarching framework" for teacher education. The University's Race, Culture, Class, and Gender Task Group has issued a [report](#) with guidelines for teaching "cultural competence." Future teachers, it says, must be able to define their worldview in terms of "white privilege, hegemonic masculinity, [heteronormativity](#), and internalized oppression." They must understand that they are either "privileged" or "marginalized." High on the task group's reading list is the anti-America textbook *A People's History of the United States* by Marxist historian Howard Zinn, whose celebrity-bejeweled [documentary](#) aired Sunday on the History Channel.

When the news got out about U Minnesota's plans, it sounded almost too extreme to be true. Likewise, when we at NAS first scanned the contents of the Marxist journal, we wondered whether they were composed in satire. It's not often you encounter titles such as "[A Radical Redistribution of Capital](#)," "[Critical Teacher Education for Economic, Environmental and Social Justice: an Ecosocialist Manifesto](#)," and "[The time for action is now! Anarchist theory, critical pedagogy, and radical possibilities](#)."

The JCEPS editorial advisory board has members from thirty-three universities in the United States, as well as members representing England, Australia, India, Israel, Ireland, Canada, Mexico, Turkey, Brazil, Sweden, Slovenia, France, Malta, Scotland, Taiwan, Malaysia, and South Africa. It's possible that education students at each of the institutions represented are, like our source, required to study JCEPS articles.

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While it is appropriate to study the now discredited but historically important ideas of Marxism in political science, philosophy, and economics courses, education schools have no need for radical ideology. Ed schools should be preparing teachers to train the minds of the next generation, not to arm them with socialist politics. To do so cheats both future teachers and their future students out of the sound, unbiased education they deserve.

The Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies targets extremists, but it appears to have a substantial presence at universities around the world. To the extent that it and publications like it influence schools of education, it will not be long before teachers cannot distinguish between classrooms and class struggle.

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