Reclaiming Our Voices

Emancipatory Narratives on Critical Literacy, Praxis, and Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy Beyond The Classroom: Partnerships For Systemic Change

By Joyce Germaine Watts

January 1996

The California Association for Bilingual Education

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CABE MISSION STATEMENT

The California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) is a professional organization working on behalf of furthering educational excellence and equity for all the linguistically and culturally diverse students attending California's schools. CABE works to achieve its mission through a variety of means that actively involve its membership, other concerned educators, and community members. The following are included among the many activities employed by CABE to realize its mission.

- The support and advancement of high quality bilingual education programs and research projects.
- The provision of professional development opportunities, publications, and roundtable discussions for educators, parents, community members, and other interested parties.
- The advocacy of bilingual education programs in the media, government, and corporate communities.
- The annual recognition of outstanding students, parents, and teachers.

CABE's mission to promote conditions that are conducive to achieving educational excellence and equity for all students has recently aroused within many CABE members a keen interest in *transformative* and *critical* theories of education, theories that are collectively known as "critical pedagogy." CABE has been responding to this growing member interest in the meanings of critical pedagogy and its relevancy to bilingual-bicultural education in several ways, most notably through intensive institutes on the union of the two endeavors and the 1995 publication of the book, *Reclaiming Our Voices: Bilingual Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Praxis.*

The intent of the present publication, *An Occasional Paper Series for Entering the 21st Century— Reclaiming Our Voices: Emancipatory Narratives on Critical Literacy, Praxis, and Pedagogy,* is to provide a context for a continuously expanding dialogue to occur on the meanings and uses of critical pedagogy among educators working within bilingual-bicultural, multicultural, and other related educational fields. Through sharing their own emancipatory narratives on how critical pedagogy is helping to transform their own daily practice into a praxis of critical pedagogy *for* critical literacy, the contributors to this *Occasional Paper Series* have much to offer the reader. (If you are interested in submitting a paper for consideration, please see "Guidelines for Submitting a Paper.")

CABE is confident that this series will provide a forum for educators to speak to the possibilities contained within critical pedagogy for transforming schools into sites where *difference* is truly valued and used in the meaning making process and where *all* teachers, administrators, students, and students' family members rightfully experience and participate in a democratic, just, and caring way of thinking and living. Poised as we are to enter the 21st century, can we ask any less of ourselves and society? I think not.

Rosalía Salinas
President, 1995-1997

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

QUESTIONS & REFLECTIONS
(This page has been reserved for use in your dialogical reading process)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Jean Frederickson, Series Editor

Being a human being is about agency. Being a critical human being is about agency that is taken on behalf of self and others for the purpose of transforming oppressive conditions into liberating ones with each thought we originate and action we take.
(Bill Terrazas, 1995, p. 305)

A critical educator is one who understands how much easier it is to live in sedation accepting the status quo, but how much more joyful to be alive in the struggle with our eyes and ears open and our voices heard.
(Balderas, 1995, p. 272)

From our reflections, an idea took root and continues to live: The moment that we stop challenging and transforming our thinking is the moment that we lose the foundation of critical pedagogy. The questions remain and our dialogue continues.
(Adkins, Fleming, & Saxena, 1995, p. 204)

On that day, it became clear to me that everything in life has an interrelating inner and outer structure. It also occurred to me that perhaps praxis is about exposing this dynamic relationship. The critical pedagogy institute had been an invitation to begin an inner journey. It invited me to question my thoughts, my beliefs, my actions, and my feelings. I felt an urgency for change.
(Dorta-Duque de Reyes, 1995, pp. 183-184)

The above quotes are from, *Reclaiming Our Voices: Bilingual Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Praxis,* an anthology published by the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE).

On Beginnings

In 1989 CABE took two pivotal actions that set in motion the publication of this *Occasional Paper Series* and made possible the above statements: The Association held its first critical pedagogy institute at the annual conference, organized by Alma Flor Ada, and it published *Empowering Minority Students*, by Jim Cummins. Since that time, CABE has been responding in a variety of ways to its members' increasing demand for opportunities to explore the educational possibilities that emerge when bilingual education and critical pedagogy are joined in *praxis*. These efforts have included sponsorship of a "special issues" conference in 1990, institutes and workshops at the annual conferences, regular newsletter articles under the column heading, *Perspectives,* week-long institutes in the summers of 1991 and 1992, and the publication in 1995 of the book, *Reclaiming Our Voices: Bilingual Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Praxis.* In some fashion I have been involved in all these functions since 1990, most intensely as coordinator for the two summer institutes and as editor of the 1995 book.

As a result of my many CABE experiences with critical pedagogy, I proposed to the Executive Board that CABE publish an Occasional Paper Series emphasizing critical pedagogy. That proposal was approved and accounts for the present publication, *An Occasional Paper Series for Entering the 21st Century,* which for 1996 will carry the subtitle, *Reclaiming Our Voices: Emancipatory Narratives on Critical Literacy, Praxis, and Pedagogy.*

This *Occasional Paper Series* can be considered as a companion piece to the 1995 book and as a continued affirmation of CABE's commitment to assist members who are interested in creating a transformative educational experience for themselves, their students, and the students' families. Given the accelerating breakdown of the structures and institutions of the modern era, the changing demographics that make people of color the majority population in California, economically hard times for all but the elite, and heightening racial, cultural, and linguistic xenophobia evidenced among many in

the dominant culture, it is not surprising that swelling numbers of CABE members would show growing enthusiasm for a pedagogy that provides a theoretical framework for making these conditions both *problematic* and *transformative*.

On Similarities

For several reasons, this *Occasional Paper Series* should be considered as a companion publication to the 1995 book, *Reclaiming Our Voices: Bilingual Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Praxis*. For starters, the first two papers published in the series (winter of 1996) were originally intended for publication in the 1995 book. Instead, they are being used to launch this series, serving as *transitional* papers between the book and the more specific aims of the *Occasional Paper Series,* which are summarized in the next section. Other traits link the two publications beyond the use of these two papers as a bridge. For example, both publications contain essays that approach the use and understanding of literacy, praxis, and critical pedagogy through the authors' personal stories, or *narratives.* The use of narrative writing as a form of inquiry and self-study is highly consistent with critical pedagogy's theoretical principle regarding the "social construction of knowledge." In particular, a narrative text allows for the telling, affirming, questioning, and challenging of the *interests represented* in our voices and stories, permitting the expression of our personal and social histories in their fullest and most transformative form (McLaren, 1989, pp. 169-180; 226-237). Immersed thusly, we begin the process of promoting a critical understanding of our relationship to the broader society, of our own and its political nature, and the transformative possibilities that lie latent in our voices and stories (Walsh, 1991, p.17). In other words, by *reclaiming our voices* we enter into the world of *critical literacy.*

On Reading Dialogically

As in the book, I suggest that the series' narratives be read in a dialogical, participatory fashion. To that end, "Question & Reflection" pages have been dispersed throughout the publication to use as you read. Although you may not often think of written texts as "contexts" for experiencing a dialogical relationship with an "absent" author, if you approach the stories with that intent in mind, you may experience some of the insight customarily gained in "face-to-face" dialogue. For example, in practicing *dialogical reading* you can still discover yourself as a knowing subject and social agent who is capable of revealing the central contradictions of your life, of achieving a deepening awareness of the sociopolitical, economic, racial, and gender realities that sculpt your life in the interactive context between yourself and society, and of re-making and resisting those shifting, asymmetrical social relations and conditions of society that are oppressive to you and others (Darder, 1991, pp. 94-95).

As you engage in dialogue with the author, you will find it profitable to use your personal and social history (your voice) to mediate the theorizing and practicing presented. As needed, pause to reflect and pose questions, to consult with other people and authors, re-entering the dialogue only when you are ready. Together, you and the author will make and re-make meanings for ideas and questions being presented in the narrative. Hopefully, in this process you will begin to wonder about such things as the *purpose and nature of education,* and to feel a need to pull to the surface those hidden assumptions that underlie and shape conventional schooling as well as your own vision for education. During this process you may even experience some discomfort as you reflect on a contradiction made visible by your questions or those of the author. This is a good sign in critical pedagogy, because it signals the opportunity for deep dialectical introspection and critical learning (Frederickson, 1995, p. 21). At such moments, you may be liberated into knowing the "uselessness of blaming, and the empowerment of critical questioning....[of knowing that]...Blaming is a form of passivity, while questioning is a form of agency" (Terrazas, 1995, p. 305).

As you read, it may be encouraging to remember that in dialogue the potential resides for achieving *critical consciousness* and *emancipatory knowledge.* Realizing these two capacities is partially what the phrase *reclaiming our voices* means and surely must also refer to the meaning of critical literacy. Briefly, critical consciousness takes place when people consider themselves and all other people as *knowing subjects* capable of effecting *liberating conditions* for themselves and others. Emancipatory knowledge is the *understanding* of the nature of the conditions and processes necessary for critical consciousness to emerge and actions to be taken. Both critical consciousness and emancipatory knowledge take place in the dialectical union of *reflection* and *action* (praxis) informed by critical pedagogy. In turn, praxis takes place in the emancipatory process of problem-posing *dialogue* (Frederickson, 1995, p. 19).

On, Knowledge, Power, and Truth

I would like to mention one final link between the book and this *Occasional Paper Series.* This link has to do with the way critical educators theorize the concept of *knowledge.* Authors in both publications have approached their writing aware that knowledge is always in process of "becoming," therefore it is always *unfinished, incomplete, unstable, and plural.* The authors also view knowledge as being created and re-created in social relations through the use of various symbolic systems, and as such, it is always *historically situated, culturally mediated,* and *ideologically based.* Recognizing knowledge as always *partial,* the narrators understand that what they write is bound in complex ways to their own positions or locations in society (Walsh, 1991, pp. 12-15), ones that are usually defined by the interactive and socially constructed categories of class, race, gender, ethnicity, language, sexual preference, etc. to which one self-identifies *and* is assigned to by others.

Importantly, critical educators, such as these authors, hold that *knowledge* and *power* are intimately related, which privileges the knowledge of those in power over those who are oppressed. Such privileging, however, should not necessarily make the knowledge of elites "true," as if it existed somewhere "out there" discernible by a set of "natural and absolute laws." Nor does this circumstance render all truth "relative," meaning that many real "truths" exist that are all *equal* in their effects. Rather, truth is determined *relationally* through its "effects" on the self and others. The authors of both the book and the series write from the position that knowledge should be valued and analyzed on whether it is oppressive and exploitative or empowering and transformative, and not on the basis of whether it is "true" (McLaren, 1989, pp. 182-183). For all critical educators this means that knowledge is used to take informed actions directed at eliminating pain, oppression, and inequality so that the conditions in schools and society may be transformed into more culturally democratic places to experience life.

I encourage you to approach reading the papers in the series keeping in mind all of the above mentioned pivotal assumptions of critical pedagogy. Readers of the 1995 book have told me that by paying attention to these assumptions they were able to participate more fully in reading and constructing critical meanings.

On Contrast

While the two forms of publication share similar characteristics in many ways, they also differ slightly. Whereas the authors of the book were connected in some fashion to the 1991 and 1992 critical pedagogy summer institutes, **CABE is soliciting papers for publication in this *Occasional Paper Series* from its membership at large.** CABE invites you to contribute because a central goal of the series is to encourage educators working in bilingual/bicultural and multicultural education, especially classroom educators, to become published authors. If you have been working with and applying the

theoretical framework of critical pedagogy to your life and education, and are interested in this project, please see the section entitled, "Guidelines for Submitting a Paper."

In addition to providing a format designed to encourage CABE members to publish, the other principal intent of the series is to provide tightly focused narratives in the manner described below. Specifically, CABE is looking to publish papers that:

- Provide an ongoing context for authors and readers to explore and construct increasingly meaningful *personal* and *shared* understandings of the (a) theoretical principles and meanings of *critical pedagogy,* (b) the *praxis* that such principles and meanings generate, and (c) the concept of *critical literacy;*

- Demonstrate how various people are exploring and creating educational conditions designed *intentionally* to liberate and nurture the emergence, development, and usage of *critical literacy;*

- Describe the *interactive* and *transformative* relationship that exists among *critical pedagogy, praxis,* and *critical literacy* as it pertains to conditions and questions regarding bilingual/bicultural, multicultural, or related areas of education;

- Use original, experimental *writing styles* and *textual formats* that invite readers to engage in a highly *participatory* and *dialogical* reading/meaning-making process;

- Aim primarily at the interests of practicing classroom teachers and teacher candidates. However, this aim should not preclude papers from being of interest to other people, such as teacher educators, paraprofessionals, parents, administrators, district level personnel, curriculum specialists, and curriculum developers, and;

- Succeed in (a) keeping an active, probing dialogue going within the CABE membership between conferences and other events and (b) provoking dialogue in school-site dialogue groups, teacher education classes, inservice programs, community dialogue groups, CABE-sponsored functions on critical pedagogy, and elsewhere.

The specificity of this *Occasional Paper Series—Emancipatory Narratives on Critical Literacy, Praxis, and Pedagogy*—has resulted from many sources: conversations I have had with other CABE members, comments shared with me at conferences and elsewhere, and my own and other critical educators' observations on how terms central to critical pedagogy often are invested with meanings not representative of a critical interpretation, even taking into consideration the nature of knowledge presented above. For example, "dialogue" is frequently used when people really mean "discussion" or "conversation." In so doing, "dialogue" is robbed of its problem-posing nature where the intent is ultimately the creation of an alternative world free of oppressive and exploitative structures and social relations. Likewise, the meaning of "empowerment" often is reduced simply to an "effect," such as "self-esteem." Meanwhile the complex and arduous, yet highly rewarding, self-empowering and transformative process of perceiving and understanding "more clearly the relationship between what is going on in the world and what is happening to and with ourselves" is ignored (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 29).

Another example can be found in the interchangeability with which some educators use the terms "problem-solving" and "problem-posing." In the theoretical perspective of critical pedagogy, these terms are not the same. "Problem-solving" takes the world at face value, with solutions to be found *within* the existing relations of power, institutional structures, and the elite body of knowledge. "Problem-posing," on the other hand, begins by making the givens problematic and engages the imagination in creating alternative ways of being in the world, one thought and one action at a time.

If we hope to create a *practice* through the activity of *praxis* informed by the theories of critical pedagogy, or any theory for that matter, we must help each other have recognizable theoretical meanings for the theories' analytical terms and principles. Such rigorous discipline, however, should not be mistaken for rigidity of meaning, especially since a tenet of critical pedagogy is the need for *practice* to turn back on *theory* in the regenerating activity of praxis. Without some underlying agreement of the theoretical meanings that comprise critical pedagogy, important terms are too easily appropriated by the culture of power and used to maintain the system of inequities that critical pedagogy challenges—a feat that is accomplished through language that *sounds* the same as that of critical pedagogy, but is devoid of its transformative meanings and uses. By narrating our stories through an *explicitly described praxis,* I hope we can assist each other in becoming increasingly precise and practiced in *living critically*, which is reminiscent of the theorizing of *critical literacy* in works by Darder (1991), Walsh (1991) and Lankshear and McLaren (1993).

A Time for Reflection

This series is being published in the waning years of the 20th century, with only four years remaining before we enter the 21st. The timing is of no small consequence. Typically, this juncture in time stimulates people to pay more attention to the past, present, and future conditions of society than they usually do. Many people also tend to become more reflective about these conditions, aware that a new century symbolically signals new beginnings, which in turn may require new ways of perceiving, thinking, and behaving. Often, a tendency to want to understand *how* individuals and society have become what they are today, and *what* is it about themselves and society that they no longer want to be, grows more pronounced at this time. Absorbed in such thoughts, many people could allow their imaginations to take over and begin creating visions of alternative modes of society and the social relations that sustain them. For educators, especially critical educators, participating in society's reflective mood on the eve of the 21st century is an opportunity we do not want to miss, and explains partially the naming of the series as, *"An Occasional Paper Series for Entering the 21st Century."*

Participating in the mood, I have been reflecting repeatedly on a question posed by the educational philosopher John Dewey during the early years of this century. At that time, he asked the American people to consider the distinction for democracy *between education as a function of society* and *society as a function of education* (McLaren, 1989, p. 158). As I consider this question, I cannot help but think that it raises many questions about the concept of "literacy," especially concerning its past, present, and future meanings. As a critical educator, I find the meanings given to past and present forms of "literacy" to be problematic and to correspond primarily with the view of *education as a function of society.* Is this the literacy we need for the 21st century? I think not, given the current conditions of society. So do we need a literacy directed toward creating *society as a function of education?* Maybe, but that depends on the kind of education one has in mind.

The dialectical theories grounding critical pedagogy, however, would ask us to avoid the trap of an either/or framing of the distinction between the two functions. Instead, we would be moved to consider investing literacy with much more complex, dynamic, socially just, and generative meanings. Moreover, the meanings would be openly *partisan,* since critical theories work in favor of creating a more participatory democracy with non-abusive relations of power and social, political, and economic justice for all.

I fervently hope that in these closing years of the 20th century, critical educators will unite with members of other social justice groups to give full voice to the dreams and stories put forth with each other in dialogue. I imagine that these alliances among differently positioned people, creating a shared vision in solidarity, will be a necessary component for moving us toward an authentic democracy. Assuredly, alliances will only be possible if those accustomed to having more power can de-center their voices so others can be heard. If this happens, then collectively we can improve our chances of forging paths into our unknown futures by traveling together, giving a "polyvocality" to our *narrations of emancipation*.

I close this introduction with two interactive thoughts that daily inspire me to continue my work of effecting personal and social change in the way humans form relationships with each other and with the planet earth.

> It is when you are really living in the present—working, thinking, lost, absorbed in something you care about very much, that you are living spiritually.
> (Ueland, 1993, p. 179)

> In the very act of practicing critical literacy teachers and learners are necessarily involved in living new social relations of learning and addressing the hierarchies of power and privilege inherent in conventional schooling.
> (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 47)

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Critical Pedagogy Beyond The Classroom: Partnerships For Systemic Change
By Joyce Germaine Watts

On very rare occasions, we experience moments that heighten our consciousness of the many locations we occupy simultaneously, and that allow us to hear all the diverse notes of our identity blended into one symphonic chord reflecting our true integrated selves. Such a moment occurred for me during CABE's critical pedagogy institute in the summer of 1992. At that time, unexpectedly, I experienced a moment of pronounced and harmonious appreciation of my race, class, generation, gender, occupation, and language.

The institute was an intensive and energizing week-long convergence of about 70 co-learners, who were meeting to extend their knowledge and uses of critical pedagogy. Among the participants were high school and university students, internationally recognized scholars and authors, classroom teachers, and school and district administrators. Much to my surprise, I left the institute knowing from first-hand experience that under the right conditions, it is possible to engage in serious risk-taking dialogue around tough, uncomfortable issues. I also learned that the process can unify and galvanize, rather than polarize and paralyze, a diverse group of participants. The dialogue and learning occurred not because we avoided or "transcended" our differences, but because we attempted to ground the dialogue in an honest exchange through which we surfaced and honored our uniqueness.

For me this experience underscored how much the 1960s political climate in the United States and the world influenced my formation as an adolescent African woman, and how much my involvement as an educator and community activist shaped my evolution as an adult. During that dialogue at the institute, I recalled vividly two distinct perspectives on education that I have always embraced, which are also fundamental principles of what is *now* called critical pedagogy. First, I have never viewed *authentic education* as simply consisting of a course of study that prepares an individual *only* for a career. Second, I grew up keenly aware that education must play a vitally transformative function in society, as it had for southern Black families and communities since the period of Reconstruction until the 1960s.

The openness that developed during the institute was the outcome of several factors, a few of which stand out in my mind. First, the seven resource facilitators were asked to open the institute by sharing *how* we came to our work and *what* sustains us through the discouraging times. This was the first time that I had been called upon in a professional/political setting to speak about the personal side of my involvement with critical pedagogy, and it changed the quality of my participation from that point forward. Another factor was the compelling and honest voices of *Students for Cultural and Linguistic Democracy* (SCaLD), accompanied by their teacher Bill Terrazas, a bold, gifted, and intuitively liberating educator. I had visited with these students twice since first meeting Bill during a session in the critical pedagogy strand conducted by my doctoral advisor and dear friend, Alma Flor Ada, at the CABE conference earlier that year. I, and others, felt that these students could make a profound contribution to the institute. They exceeded my expectations, especially as they very forthrightly surfaced issues of race, which earlier in the institute had been "de-selected" by the adults as a theme for dialogue. Also, the personal reflections that Jean Frederickson and Catherine Walsh shared with the group, coming from their positions as White females, created a space for other White educators to engage with them in introspective dialogue with uncommon trust and candor. In addition, the session conducted by Anita DeFrantz, also a member of my dissertation committee, enriched us with a very

specific application of critical pedagogy to African American children. Her presentation called to mind that the experiences of most African American children in bilingual classrooms pose many serious questions of equity.

As the institute continued, I believe we all became more aware of the multiple and complex dimensions of our role as critical educators in ways that we had not considered before. My conversations with participants were extremely useful in helping me to identify three general areas for our future growth as critical educators, and led to the design of a self-assessment tool which is presented below in Figure 1. This device was a modification of one I had used with junior high students, and proved to be as successful with adults as it has been with the youths. The graphic serves to illustrate that to deepen our practice requires our *commitment, consciousness*, and *courage* to take actions through words and deeds that move us beyond our *comfort zones* to engage with others in confronting injustice and oppression.

In my last session, everyone drew their own figure, reflected for a moment, then shaded in each one of the sections to indicate their present capacity based on their own, subjective, scale of 0 to 100. Not surprisingly, we all rated ourselves highest in commitment, or "heart." For some, the greatest need was for more study to develop their consciousness, or "head," while for others courage, or "gut," was the section requiring the most growth.

Figure 1:   *Self-Assessment for Future Growth*

CARING
(Heart)

CONSCIOUSNESS
(Head)

20 40 60 80 100

COURAGE
(Gut)
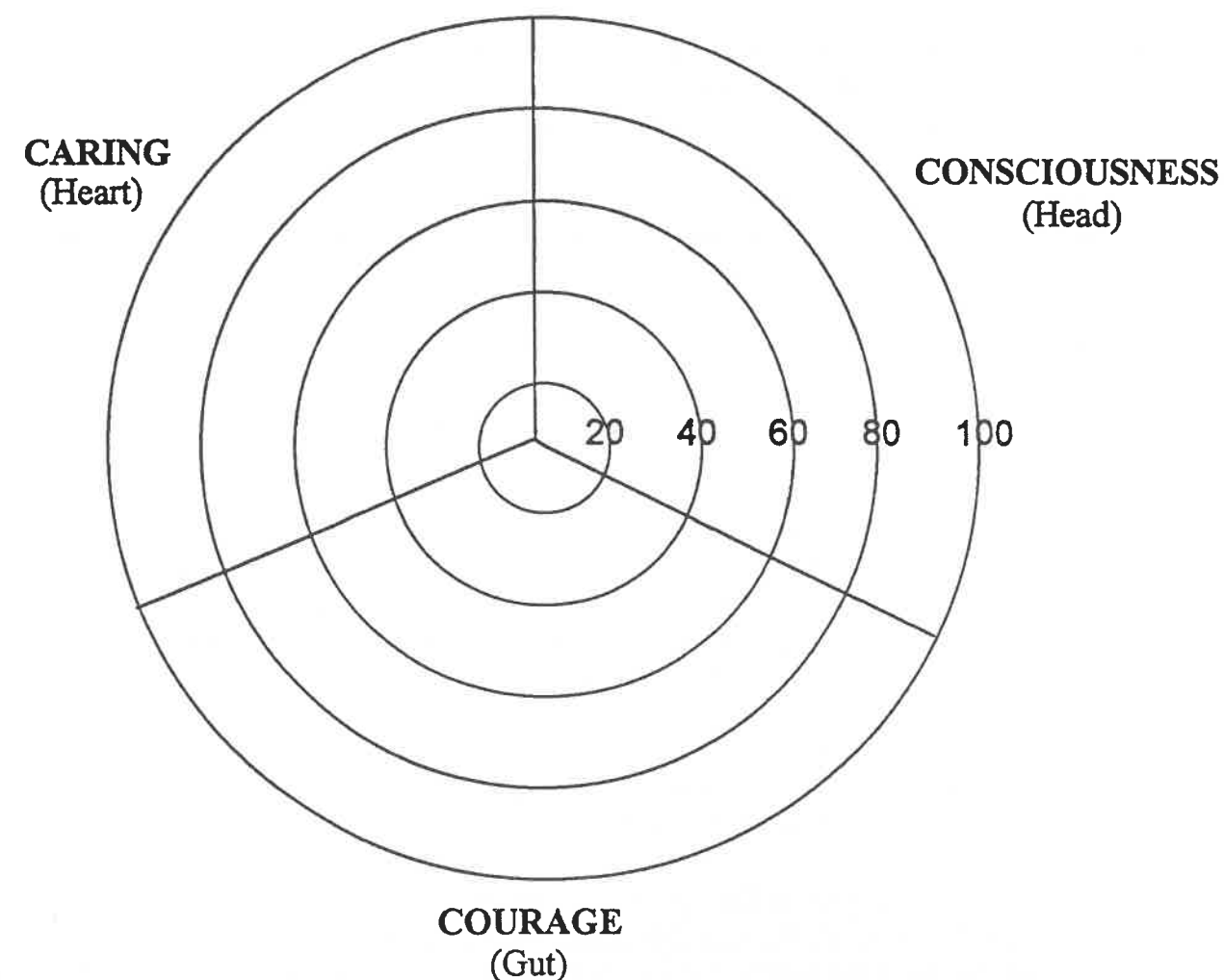
Although the institute offered great promise, it also presented limitations and challenges that I learned from. For example, the institute's focus seemed limited to the classroom, with little attention given to the relationship between critical educators and the larger environment of the school and community that constitute students' fuller reality. With the institute's emphasis primarily being on the relationship between teachers and students as an end in and of itself, many seemed to lose sight of the reality that critical pedagogy is first and foremost a methodology to help students build their capacity for reflection and action against injustice *in the world throughout their lifetimes*.

Another limitation seemed to be the lack of sufficient time given to the big picture or macro analysis, even though many participants seemed very limited in their understanding of the deeper systemic roots of social and economic oppression and how the school system functions to maintain the status quo. Many educators clearly were not connecting with the communities where they work and had very little first-hand information about the social, political, and economic profile, or infrastructure, of the students' neighborhoods, nor did this appear to be an important theme. Also, discussion was very limited within the full group about the essential need to involve parents and community members in the framing of the curriculum and in participating as resource persons and co-learners.

In a true democracy, public institutions such as schools serve at the discretion of the public. In working on behalf of the public, educators, especially critical educators, must necessarily collaborate with community members in defining and providing education appropriate to their community. This point was clearly made when Los Angeles city residents, testifying before a California assembly committee, were emphatic in their position that "a community should have control over its own destiny, rather than be subject to the control of outsiders" (California State Assembly, 1992).

In *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children*, Lisa Delpit concurs with these residents' position, one that obviously applies to critical educators, no matter our color, no matter whose children we teach:

> I am suggesting that appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture....Black parents, teachers of color, and members of poor communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion of what kind of instruction is in their children's best interest. Good liberal intentions are not enough....Educators must open themselves to, and allow themselves to be affected by, these alternative voices.
>
> The dilemma is...communicating across cultures and in addressing the more fundamental issues of power, or whose voice gets heard in determining what is best for poor children and children of color. Will Black teachers and parents continue to be silenced by the very forces that "give voice" to our children?
>
> We must be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness.
>
> Teachers are in an ideal position to play this role, to attempt to get all of the issues on the table in order to initiate true dialogue. (Delpit, 1998, pp. 318-319)

My hope is that this paper contributes toward advancing true dialogue.

> There was so much history and a lot of people who had been struggling in this neighborhood for so long. [They] talked about how nothing they could do would make a difference. They had just lost hope or were very cynical about anything really changing.
> – Quotes from people in the neighborhood in the book, *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood* (Medoff & Sklar, 1994)

> Many participants feel a hopelessness about schools that is reflected in the larger society. Paradoxically, hope seemed to emerge following honest dialogues about our collective despair.
> – *Voices From the Inside: A Report on Schooling From Inside the Classroom* (Poplin & Weeres, 1992)

> The idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naiveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism and fatalism. We need *critical hope* the way a fish needs unpolluted water. Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope...dissipates, loses its bearings and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness can become tragic despair. One of the tasks of a progressive popular education is to seek...a critical understanding of the mechanisms of social conflict to further the process in which the weakness of the oppressed turns into a strength capable of converting the oppressors' strength into weakness. This is a hope that moves us.
> – *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1994)

Children in urban communities are growing up in a atmosphere of ambivalence and apathy about the future. For many parents there is little optimism about their chances of providing a secure and comfortable life for their families in neighborhoods long neglected by public and private sectors alike. Such bleak prospects give rise to feelings of futility, powerlessness, anger, and even guilt in the absence of any real hope that there might be a way to change the economic and social adversity they must contend with. It is the sentiment expressed in the words of the Boston resident that open this essay and that are echoed in city after city. In California, as elsewhere, the hardest hit are communities of color, which now constitute the state's majority school population. It is a gross and inexcusable contradiction of the promise of democracy and a loss to society as a whole. Yet it is explained away as the failings of *individuals* and deficiencies of *cultures*, with little or no reference to *structural inequality*.

The despair that is endemic to inner city communities of color does not stop at the edge of the campus. We who are educators serving urban schools must paint ourselves into this picture, since we also may feel overwhelmed by social and economic macro forces that seem beyond our influence. We convey to students our beliefs about their chances of success through our words and practice–what we acknowledge and what we avoid–in ways that either alleviate or exacerbate the sense of pessimism. We watch students compete against formidable obstacles–including the education system–that turn excitement on the faces of kindergartners into the disillusioned and hostile glares of so many adolescents with no sense of purpose or hope for tomorrow.

There is a growing mood of fatalism among young people who see no apparent means of controlling their life choices. In their resentment and confusion, they strike out at each other and reject the authority figures of the system that is confining them to the margins of society. Increasingly, they are giving up on life, as indicated by an alarming rise of 120% in the suicide rate among young adolescents from 1980

to 1991. Among African American males, the rate increased 300% in the same period (Carnegie, 1995). It seems more than coincidental that the same decade saw significant reductions in social programs for low income communities, a shift away from concern about social issues, more emphasis on greed and materialism, and the emergence of the "me" generation. In the first half of the nineties, race and class scapegoating and polarization have been fueled openly by opportunist politicians seeking a decoy to divert attention from a failing economy. In California this has been made manifest through anti-immigrant and anti-affirmative action initiatives; at the federal level the main target has been welfare recipients. Tragically, many students are internalizing negative images of themselves and their communities, which they see projected through distorted and destructive media campaigns used to manipulate public opinion.

The eighties and nineties have also brought an increased interest in critical pedagogy on the part of educators from preschool through the university, along with greater use of popular education methods in communities. Within schools the unit of change has been the classroom, where the emphasis is on re-defining relationships in the direction of democracy and student empowerment so as not to replicate the oppressive structures that dominate students' lives in society. It complements the movements to affirm cultural identity, embrace students' primary language, and assure access and equity to a solid core curriculum. However, converting our classrooms to islands of democracy may offer students temporary sanctuary, but it leaves the external *systemic* forces of domination intact. If our focus is on the full reality of students *in the world*, then we must not remove the classroom experience from the context of the social and economic struggles which they, their families, and community wage daily.

In the reality outside the classroom, rarely will young people encounter individuals and institutions with power who, of their own volition, remove themselves as obstacles and–like the benevolent teacher–offer to relinquish their authority and privilege. As Frederick Douglass once observed, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and never will." Thus, it is essential that teacher and students recognize their classroom experience as a *simulation* of democracy under conditions not likely to be replicated in institutions and a social system where others actively oppose the right of all people to self-determination. By separating the classroom from the larger environment, we fail to help students understand the structures that are at the root of the pervasive sense of hopelessness that engulfs them. What does it mean to move critical pedagogy beyond the classroom? Where else could it be applied? Who else needs to be involved?

The second quote at the beginning of this essay makes the point that being able to talk about despair and alienation is more healthy than denying these sentiments. But voicing our feelings is only the beginning. Students also need a critical understanding of how their personal experiences in large part are the result of systemic forces that will only yield to organized action by people who are committed and prepared to struggle for justice. Students need to see their potential as a constructive force in their community and to recognize education as a resource for personal and social transformation.

In moving to democratize our classrooms, critical educators are taking the crucial first step in reclaiming the right to define our role and relationship with the students. But if our focus is truly *on the students*, then our greater concern must be about their relationship *with the world* in a society that would deny their humanity and about what we must do as their teachers to help them alter that relationship. Otherwise, the experiment with democracy fades to a fond memory of "that semester in Ms. Martinez's class."

Hope in the Face of Doubt, Uneasiness, and Complexity

A lot depends on our own hopes and vision. We must question our deepest held beliefs about the potential of urban students, their families and neighbors–in spite of the obstacles–to shape the destiny of

their own communities and about our ability to help build their capacity. For some this is an uneasy subject that causes us to confront our own doubts, bewilderment, frustrations, and fears about where we factor into the power equation. Do we know what it really would take to begin to disturb the status quo? In a political climate as vicious as the present one, should we dare encourage students to dream of their community transformed into a thriving, harmonious, life-affirming environment? Some may also ask, "But how many young people were crushed by the success of Proposition 187 after they took risks to demonstrate their opposition to the initiative?" Is it better to provide them even a temporary safe haven where their rights are protected and then hope that maybe something from the classroom experience will carry them through? What could I accomplish in a semester or a year anyway that could make a dent in the system? What do I know about organizing? I'm not from this community. I can't do it alone. It's like David against Goliath. It's not realistic.

These complexities may tempt even critical educators to proceed with the democratic experiment behind closed doors in the relative safety and seclusion of our self-contained classrooms, but at what cost? Have we, too, been intimidated into silence, except within the space we control? Could the democratic classroom be an act of charity or simply a more satisfying way to teach, and if so, what interest does that serve? How do we begin to deal with our own misgivings, especially as they confine us to our comfort zones and deter us from taking risks in the interest of our own and the students' emancipation? Do we even recognize our potential as catalysts for systemic change? On what scale? How would we begin?

In the current education reform movement it has become popular to raise questions for the sake of inquiry alone. However, as prison construction proceeds at an urgent pace, so too must we consider these to be urgent questions for critical bilingual cross-cultural educators working with urban youth. To get at some definite answers, we must be open to re-thinking our vision, analysis, purpose, and practice.

A fundamental issue is the relationship of the school to the community, which has been likened to a colonial model that serves an external authority. It imposes the dominant language, culture, and world view; punishes nonconformity; recruits an elite group of students into the mainstream, pushing the rest to the margins; and gives little attention to local priorities. Figure 2 shows the artificial, yet intentional, "disarticulation" between school and community in its present form, in contrast to a more systemic and holistic view. Although there may be some argument as to the details of this comparison, there is a gulf and, in many cases, animosity between urban schools and communities that contributes to students' sense of alienation as they straddle the divide between these two major spheres of their lives. As critical educators we must ask how our classroom would appear to the outside observer. What evidence is there of our authentic involvement—formal and informal—in the environment of the school and community? How would we describe or diagram our relative estrangement or engagement? Are we okay with it the way it is or do we need to change it?
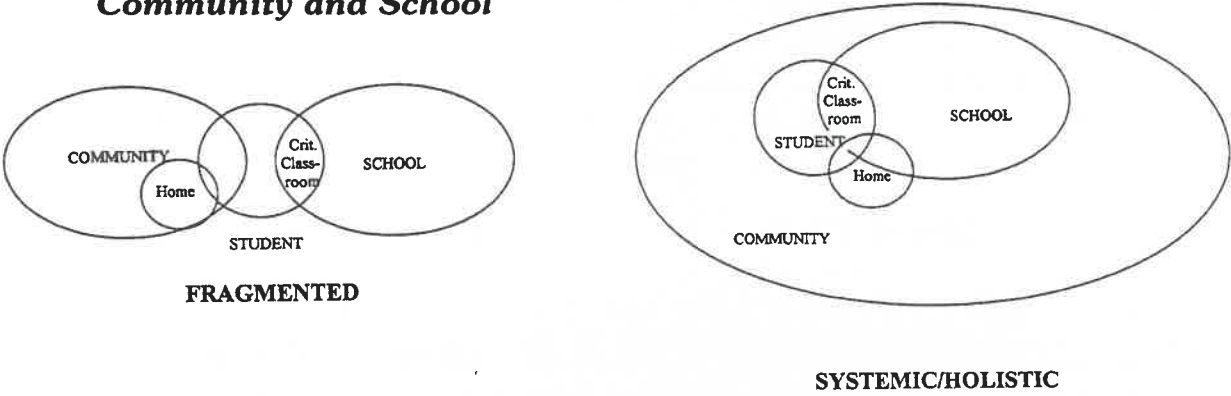
By grounding the learning experience in the fuller context of students' lives we are able to eliminate the artificial gap that has been constructed between life within and beyond the classroom. As we decompartmentalize these dimensions of students' lives and our own, we honor the integrity and validity of their experiences. By recognizing the community as curriculum and structuring interaction with its residents and workers, we create new opportunities for partnerships for systemic change that would not be possible from the isolation of our classrooms.
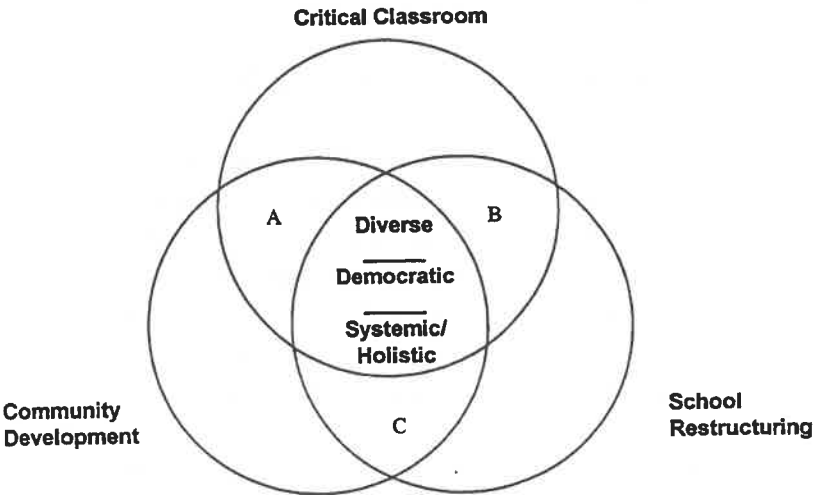
How might students' outlook change if teachers were to pose issues of race and class as systemic problems to be analyzed critically and acted upon collaboratively, strategically, and decisively, rather than accepted as a way of life? How might education become more meaningful and credible to students if the emphasis were placed upon learning to take charge rather than learning to take orders? How could teachers benefit if students' behavior demonstrated a sense of authority and accountability in place of apathy and antagonism? What might we as critical bilingual cross-cultural educators do to facilitate change in these directions?

As we assist students to interpret and act upon the world, they are better prepared to struggle with others to demystify, confront, and emancipate themselves from oppressive forces in all spheres of their lives, including their fuller school experience. They can begin to appreciate the potential of education becoming a resource for building *their* communities, rather than a one-way ticket to "success" somewhere in suburbia. It is an ambitious endeavor that carries personal, professional, and political significance for the teacher and can have profound implications for students, their families, and community. It is a much needed restoration of faith that together we can find ways to transform the quality of life for all students, their families, neighbors–and their teachers. Simply put, confined to the classroom, we substantially weaken the power of critical pedagogy as a compelling approach that can engender the "hope that moves us," in the words of Paulo Freire, quoted above.

On Common Ground

The potential of the community as curriculum is evident. However, it is the prerogative of teachers to tap into the community in a partnership for achievement and social transformation. Some fundamental principles of critical pedagogy are compatible with recent empowerment efforts in site-based school restructuring and local community development and make a helpful starting point for thinking about the common themes, issues, and dynamics across classroom, school, and community. Three core values are presented in Figure 3. Within each setting we aim for the solidarity among diverse individuals and groups through democratic participation to bring about systemic change. The challenge is to connect the empowerment efforts under the overarching tenets.

Figure 2: **Model of Fragmented and Systemic / Holistic Relationships Between Community and School**

FRAGMENTED

SYSTEMIC/HOLISTIC

Figure 3: **Three Core Values of Empowerment**

Although critical educators disagree about the scope of our engagement with the students' world, an idealized portrait moves some of us intuitively toward aligning the vision, principles, goals, and strategies for change in the classroom, school, and community. For the most part, critical educators serve low income, new majority communities. We strive to understand the power structures in society and the relative position of our students and ourselves in that arrangement. We aim to engage students in "reading the world," through which they critically analyze individual systemic forces that dominate their lives in order to define and carry out a determined struggle for justice. As bilingual teachers, we have taken a stand on students' right to be taught in their native language as an issue of access and equity. Some know this struggle from our firsthand experiences growing up bilingual. Others have made a personal investment in learning the language of our students.

As cross-cultural educators, we affirm the ethnicities and cultures of all students and uphold diversity as a strength. We reject the imposition of a single norm to which all must conform. We attempt to facilitate interethnic relationships effectively among students. We may have to contend with reactionary views of colleagues on issues of race, class, language, and culture.

Critical teachers recognize that education is not neutral. In parting with the status quo, we express our bias openly in favor of a reflective, creative, dynamic pedagogy for action that helps students liberate themselves from all forms of oppression at the hands of individuals and in the structures of society. We support the democratic right of self-determination for all persons and groups. Our classrooms and our behaviors reflect our values. We encourage students to search for truth and to question those in authority.

Critical educators have made a conscious choice that is a personal, professional, and political commitment to live authentically and to promote true democratic ideals in all aspects of our lives. This choice often requires that we move beyond our comfort zones in the classroom and in the world, taking risks in upholding justice and committing ourselves to personal integrity in our relationships with others. Our work calls for continuous growth to recognize and confront internal contradictions, as well as institutional inequities. Critical educators nurture and are nurtured by a process of dialogue through which we engage mutually with others in analysis and reflection linked to conscious action.

With this rich experiential base, we should be able to help facilitate collaborative partnerships that include colleagues, students, parents, and community members. However, each of us has to decide which features of the portrait fit. Choosing to move our practice beyond the classroom is a personal decision of great consequence that must be consistent, not with the portrait, but with our own fundamental views about how powerful a role we desire to play as educators in the social transformation in low income communities of color. Is it possible to accomplish our goals by remaining inside our classrooms? Is it enough to raise the blinds and *refer* to the world outside? Is it really necessary to be engaged? What *are* our goals, anyway?

Aligning Methodology With Goals

Figure 4 offers criteria for identifying educational practices with respect to their effect upon the status quo. Conservative, liberal, and transformational approaches, although not mutually exclusive, represent different analyses and serve distinct goals with respect to the politics of education. According to this classification, transformational approaches alone support the empowerment of the oppressed in their struggle to change social and economic structures. Methodologies would vary across categories in their respective expectations, content, strategies, and outcomes and also in the teaching and learning environments that are most conducive to accomplishing the educational goals.

Although conservative and liberal approaches focus on *changing the learners*, transformational practices, in process and outcome, are intent on *changing both the system and individuals*–with students

themselves emerging as change agents. This third category presents a more provocative goal, since the prevailing theory holds that school failure is mainly a function of individual, rather than structural, deficiencies.

Figure 4: Criteria for Identifying Educational Practices

EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES	PARTICIPANTS	GOALS
1. **CONSERVATIVE** • **Range from traditional to technocratic**	• **Priority goes to those considered "essential" to the workforce**	• **Effective leadership, pliable citizenry**
2. **LIBERAL** • **Range from corporate to personal**	• **Self-directed individuals seeking growth**	• **Learners well-adjusted** • **"Neutral" on power issues**
3. **TRANSFORMATIONAL** • **Range from participatory to "top down"** • **Collective reflection and action**	• **Oppressed people and those allied to their interests**	• **Change power relations** • **Transform socioeconomic systems**

Source: Arnold, R. et al. (1991). *Education for a change.* **Ontario, Canada: Between the Lines and Doris Marshall Institute for Education and Action**

Ambiguous goals can indicate educators' ambivalence and confusion over the purpose, content, methodology, and environments for teaching and learning. They can weaken our impact with students and our credibility with colleagues and parents who already may be skeptical. Once our goals have been identified, it is important to see if, in fact, our practice aligns and is consistent with the outcomes we desire.

Two abbreviated descriptions of how critical pedagogy might look to a classroom visitor appear below. Taken from lists that were distributed in workshops I attended at several education conferences, the two excerpts compared demonstrate the varied interpretations and uses of the term "critical." It is an informative exercise to further compare these two excerpts to the different categories shown in Figure 4.

"Critical Pedagogy Characteristics"

- Encompasses academic, personal, social success
- Embraces prior knowledge and experience
- Demands reflection and action
- Respects and loves self and others
- Stimulates creativity
- Provokes critical thinking and beyond
- Encourages collaborative work
- Creates an independent learner

"Key Components of a Critical Classroom"

- Students'/teachers' lives part of the curriculum
- Commitment to peace and justice
- Connected to community
- Truth in education: Expose the lies
- Empower students for social justice
- Teach tools to organize [for resistance]
- Actively oppose racism, sexism

The first excerpt closely resembles "constructivist pedagogy," currently the wave in mainstream education reform. In this form, critical pedagogy even might be welcomed in an elite prep school. There is no reference to power, race, or class. No serious challenge to the status quo. Nothing very controversial. Although far from being neutral, this version poses no serious challenge to the power structure, thus furthering the continuation of the present social order. The first list also seems to correspond to the liberal description in Figure 4 and could probably work fine as a classroom-bound model.

By contrast, the second list comes closer to the description of transformational approaches. This list goes deeper and broader; it is more explicit, direct, and grounded in its implications is an agenda for social change. The second list also refers specifically to the community. It is clear that if our classrooms more closely resemble the "Key Components of Critical Pedagogy," we would be better prepared to initiate partnerships with colleagues and community members who are concerned about systemic change.

As interest in critical pedagogy grows, it is important for us to try to clarify the elements and tendencies that define our practice. Otherwise, as we attempt to communicate within the field and with others, we are bound to encounter confusion about purpose, meaning, and methods, including the need to move beyond our classrooms. Some key concepts and language of critical pedagogy even have been inserted into workshops for corporate management–an unlikely source of support for transformation of existing power relations.

A critical pedagogy reflection group could provide an opportunity for educators to achieve a sharper theoretical analysis and to choose methodologies appropriate for our respective goals more deliberately. In such a setting, we could discuss the relationship between theory and practice, clarify the scope of our work, and avoid internal contradictions and inconsistencies.

Challenging Our Views of Community

The opinions of students must factor in to the decision to move toward forming collaborative partnerships for change within the school and community. If the decision is to venture beyond the classroom, then students and their parents would need to be willing to expand their role in shaping curriculum and pedagogy and in reaching out to enlarge the community of learners.

Referring back to Figure 3, there are three places of intersection–(A) classroom and school, (B) classroom and community, and (C) school and community–each involving a different set of participants, processes, dynamics, challenges, strategies, and outcomes. Where to start will be influenced in part by assessing the circumstances of each situation separately and also in the different combinations. Figure 3 also identifies three central principles that should be valued in all three settings. There should be an interest in bringing together *diverse* participants on *democratic* terms working toward change that is

systemic and *holistic*. Because not all schools are engaged in restructuring, (A) could be an entry point at any site. One important distinction in deciding to connect with others is that it requires longer-term involvement in the lives of students, well beyond one semester or one year. But opening up the windows of the classroom onto the wider environment is by no means the sole responsibility of critical educators. Rather, the endeavor must be undertaken jointly with students, parents, and other adults who define community life. Those who have a vested interest in improving the quality of life for youth and the community might include elders, neighbors, clergy and congregations, workers, unemployed persons, cultural organizations, block clubs, health and social service agencies, artists, people who market services and products, neighborhood economic developers, and elected officials. However, community members are not likely to be aware of critical educators as a potential resource; it is up to us to extend the offer to collaborate.

Forming collaborative partnerships among diverse participants has its rewards and challenges, chief among which is examining and holding in check our pre-conceived notions about each other that tend to be impediments to building trust. Because critical educators are not immune to the influences that alienate school from community, it is a good idea to begin by re-thinking and re-shaping our own perceptions of the communities we serve.

Children often are referred to as society's most valuable resource. Yet, while it is now commonly understood that natural resources must be viewed organically as part of a total ecosystem, students seldom are thought of holistically within the social ecology of their communities, nor the communities within a larger political ecosystem. Rather, most public services provided to students and families– including education–have been fragmented, compartmentalized, and not of the highest quality. A systemic/holistic view emphasizes the dynamic interaction of individuals in relationship to others and to larger social and economic structures that have a major influence upon those relationships. Figure 2 illustrates the two contrasting views.

The essence of this ecological paradigm is captured in the frequently quoted African proverb that states, *"It takes a village to raise a child."* The impact of teachers in shaping the future of the village cannot be underestimated. Neither the community, the home, nor the school is autonomous, but rather they are influential upon each other and in the lives of the students who cross their perimeters daily. The relationships obviously are interdependent. Yet the reality finds students of color in social institutions that are severely fractured, with the result that countless numbers of young people and their families fall through the cracks. Forming collaborative partnerships for change begins to fill in those cracks, but creating a seamless system is a long-term enterprise.

The community is the student's base. It is home to family and friends. It is the source of culture and values. It is a dynamic social and economic subsystem with a demographic profile and a character defined by its history, culture, politics, and spirituality, which help to shape the identity of young people. Urban low income communities of color have a particular relationship to the dominant society, which we should critically analyze from a macro and micro perspective in understanding the purpose of school and in defining the role we choose to play. The critical classroom may be the only place where students learn to assess and appreciate their neighborhood for its *strengths* and *assets,* and to better understand the systemic reasons for its shortcomings.

However, the vitality and potential of urban communities of color are lost when one cannot see beyond projections of the news media, entertainment industry, politicians, and others who relentlessly exploit the fears and prejudices of the general public with a steady barrage of distorted and sensationalized portrayals of residents as an amorphous and burdensome mass of faceless undesirables thrown away by society. This leads people to conclude that present conditions always have been and always will be and that individuals are to blame. This naive and erroneous view causes many people to give up on these neighborhoods.

Service providers, in their professional roles–including some of our colleagues–tend to interact with urban residents in ways that draw unfavorable responses. The typical portrait depicts someone who, in some combination, is aloof, arrogant, demeaning, intimidating, probing, paternalistic, naive, opportunistic, overzealous, missionary, suspicious, or scared. Less frequently, professionals are seen as humble, relaxed, genuine, trusting, open, or approachable. Educators must bear this legacy in mind as we seek to develop partnerships with parents and community members. In traditional societies, teacher and student are neighbors, and racial, linguistic, and cultural difference is uncommon. In the urban setting, the teacher is likely to be unknown in the community. And, as we know, many neighbors are strangers to each other.

We must keep in mind that in our encounter with community we are not stepping into a void, but rather we have inherited a legacy from a lifetime of people's experiences with educators and other professionals. If by our presence we hope to cultivate within ourselves and others the hope, trust, and self-confidence necessary for dialogue, then we need to examine our motivation and even our styles of interacting across class, race, and culture. Recognizing the paternalistic tendencies that are common to our profession, we must remind ourselves of the limits of our knowledge and enter the relationship with sincerity and humility.

Bilingual educators have a particular advantage in being able to communicate in the primary language of adults who are significant in the lives of students and the community. Bilingual teachers who are of the same race and ethnicity as their language-minority students have the potential to create even stronger bonds with parents of that background. On the other hand, a teacher's class orientation can be a distancing factor that has a strongly negative influence that will counteract a shared language and culture. As critical educators, we should never underestimate the need to build trust across lines of race, class, language, and culture.

A bilingual classroom that is also multiethnic in student composition presents an even greater challenge, particularly where mistrust between ethnic groups exists in the school and community. Initially, in the community, someone almost always will perceive the teacher as partial toward one group or another. Teachers who have already created a sense of cross-cultural kinship with and among students in the classroom can build upon these relationships in fostering a spirit of collaboration in the larger community.

The vision of the "village" developing as a healthy, vibrant, coherent, and democratically empowered system, its public schools operating in harmony with a plan for school and community transformation focused on achievement, democracy, and empowerment, may seem to be a long way off. Presently there is little or no collaboration between schools and communities. Yet, critical teachers can become catalysts for holistic change. We can begin by recognizing ourselves as part of the community and building on its strengths in forming solid partnerships with others. Collaboration is imperative if the "village" is to carry out its responsibility to all children and youth and expand the experiment in democracy to encompass their lives beyond the classroom.

A driving force must be the understanding that young people will shape the future of the community and the belief that all young people have the potential to assume responsible, creative, and substantial roles, given the right support from the partnership. Community development requires resources, both human and material. Students must hear messages that communicate high expectations for achievement and inspire them to develop the outlook, knowledge, skills, and strategies that are needed for personal fulfillment and to make a solid contribution to the transformation process.

However, schools have functioned as a primary gatekeeper to equal access and thus have not served the interests of students, families, and communities of color. Johnson (1994) has observed that:

> Deeply rooted historical values and beliefs are characterized by who is identified as "college material" and who is capable of high-level learning. Values are manifested in the way

students are sorted, labeled and taught. Beliefs are reflected in conversations such as: "What more can you expect of these kids?" and "We are doing all we can." Little attention is paid to how the institutional culture can change to meet students' needs.

The cumulative impact of institutional racism is devastating. Education is a critical variable in this equation as Figure 5 illustrates.

Figure 5: ***Yearly Earnings Potential and Level of Education***
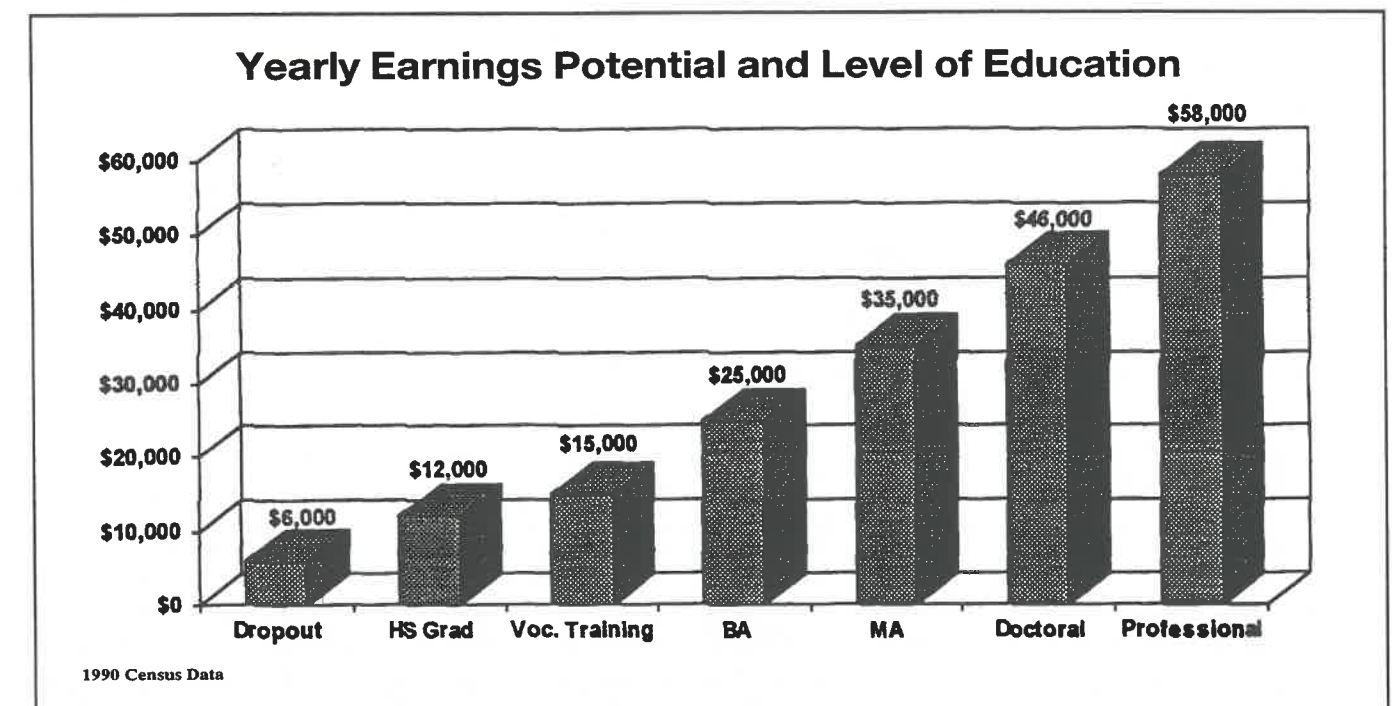
Yearly Earnings Potential and Level of Education

1990 Census Data

Source: California Tomorrow. (1994a). *The schools we need now: Action and information for parents, families and communities in school restructuring.* **San Francisco, CA.**

School failure accounts for an enormous loss of income to individuals, but the toll on communities is staggering when multiplied by the number of young people whose education is cut short year after year. According to 1990 data from the California Post-Secondary Education Commission, of every 100 Latinos or African Americans who enter kindergarten, only 57 graduate from high school, and of those, just 13 are eligible to enter a state university. For Asian students the numbers are 86 graduating, with 81 eligible for college. For White students the numbers are 75 and 31, respectively. This means that for every entering Latino or African American student, an average annual loss of $5,000 in earnings throughout adulthood is due to underachievement. *In a community with 1,000 Black and Brown kindergartners, upon graduation from high school these students together would earn $5,000,000 more every year* if the achievement rates were comparable to their Asian or White counterparts. It is impossible to calculate this loss in terms of personal fulfillment and community development. As we approach the 21st century, lack of access to technology is widening the achievement gap even further. At the same time, affirmative action programs in higher education are being dismantled (as rates of incarceration and new prison construction are accelerating). Educators and others must work with a sense of urgency to remove the obstacles to achievement imposed by the "pedagogy of poverty" (Haberman, 1991) that produce school failure and assure the decline of individuals and communities of color.

We can no longer settle for boosting a few students up the academic ladder–the "fast track" that becomes their escape route out of the community to occupy a slot in the mainstream where they still face a precarious future. Research shows that nearly twice as many African Americans from upper-white-collar backgrounds slip all the way back to lower-blue-collar positions as compared with Whites. Another measure of their vulnerability is the inability to remain above the poverty line in the event of the loss of regular income. Although almost two-thirds of White households have sufficient reserves to avoid poverty for three months after loss of income, only about 21% of African Americans and 30% of Latinos could remain above the poverty line if they were laid off or unable to work (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995).

Systemic change in full motion means understanding that when we speak of the community, we include the schools. The influence of educators and other community members on student achievement is decisive in the advancement of individuals, families, and the community as a whole. Over the long term, community members need to be active and competent participants in self-governance, who are able to ensure that human needs are fulfilled and democracy and justice are upheld. Imagine the impact if these were continuous themes in a community-centered education for all students so that they were inspired to achieve at the highest levels and carry out their responsibilities as members of a partnership for genuine systemic change.
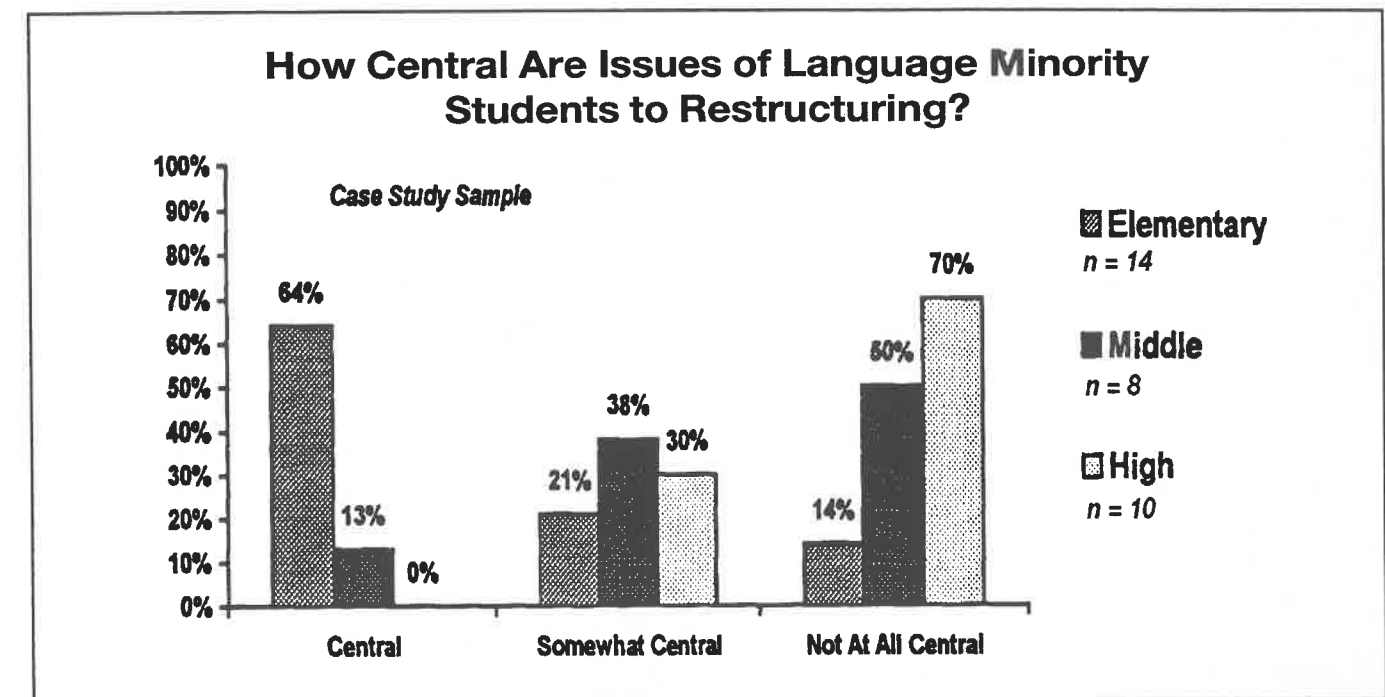
Voices Missing in Reshaping School Change

School restructuring, intersection (B) in Figure 3, has been defined as a "holistic" model for changing entire schools from top to bottom, from the way they are managed, to how they teach, to the involvement of the district, parents, and the community in order to improve education overall. However, not all students are benefiting from this movement. Most restructuring efforts are generic approaches that pay little attention to the needs of new majority and language minority students. A study by California Tomorrow (1994b) found "much confusion regarding the concepts of racial segregation and integration, heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping, and access and equity in relation to instruction specifically targeted to meet the needs of students learning English as a second language," that demonstrated "widespread misapplication" of the principles of *Brown v. Board of Education and Lau v. Nichols*. The extent of the problem, particularly in the state's middle and high schools, is represented in Figure 6. The report concludes:

> The bilingual education field remains largely marginalized from the school restructuring field....There is little crossing over that might inform the school restructuring movement of the cutting edge knowledge regarding language and culture. And there is little of the cross fertilization that might inform the bilingual education movement of the powerful lessons of the restructuring movement about how to bring about whole school change. And, as a result, in the majority of schools in this research, restructuring reforms were bypassing the needs of immigrant and language minority students, and even in some cases eroding programs which had been designed to meet their unique needs.

A major reason given for the movement's neglect of language minority students is the lack of expertise among most educators who are designing restructuring plans. *The voices of critical bilingual educators, and particularly educators of color, are needed around the restructuring table, along with the voices of parents and students of color.*

Figure 6:   Views on Issues of Language Minority Students to Restructuring, By School Level

How Central Are Issues of Language Minority Students to Restructuring?

Case Study Sample

Elementary n = 14
Middle n = 8
High n = 10

	Central	Somewhat Central	Not At All Central
Elementary	64%	21%	14%
Middle	13%	38%	50%
High	0%	30%	70%

Source: California Tomorrow. (1994b). *The unfinished journey: Restructuring schools in a diverse society.* San Francisco, CA.

Schools present many obstacles to achievement, democracy, and empowerment, some of which are structural, while others are interpersonal. Without the involvement of knowledgeable advocates for new majority students in shaping the restructuring agenda, this movement is not likely to significantly reduce urban school failure. But getting to the table is only the first step. At every juncture there is a need to question and critique fundamental beliefs and rationale and to systemically transform relationships, policies, and practices. This level of change calls for an alternative paradigm.

Educators have recognized that systemic change means radically altering the way districts and schools are run. As an example, teachers' unions have included among their collective bargaining demands the establishment of new participatory structures for site-based decision making as alternatives to top-down governance. However, shifting toward democracy and empowerment of new majority communities in school governance will require going beyond mainstream restructuring models and must include an examination of internalized perceptions and institutional and classroom norms that define race, class, language, and power relations. It is imperative to include parents, students, and community members as consistent and powerful partners in this process.

Discussions about race, in particular, almost always raise tension within bilingual faculties and between bilingual and monolingual staff. In some instances, the place of White teachers in bilingual programs has been disputed. Serious questions have been raised as to the outcomes for African American students assigned to bilingual classrooms and the issue is an outgoing source of tension between Latino and African American parents. Confrontations between Black and Brown high school students are a recurring problem. In-group color prejudice is seldom dealt with and often denied among language minority populations. Yet, for the most part, these issues are ignored or treated only as a human relations concern. Bilingual educators also avoid deeper examination of these points of conflict.

Racism is among the most devastating forms of injustice and oppression against which young people

feel unable to defend themselves. It has been used to the advantage of the power brokers to keep oppressed groups divided against each other. Interracial tensions are exacerbated by the absence of a critical understanding of the larger socioeconomic order and the political forces that maintain race oppression and pit individuals and groups against each other, preventing them from recognizing their common interests. Conflict resolution activities or celebrations of heroes and holidays cannot take the place of honest dialogue about institutional racism in schools as essential and integral to the apparatus of structural inequality.

A study on school reform in Chicago found that schools having the most difficulty achieving strong democratic governance structures were in multiracial communities (Byrk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, & Sebring, 1993). Rapid demographic shifts also contribute to tensions between ethnic groups. Undoubtedly, there are seldom opportunities in these schools for candid, constructive, and sustained dialogue around tough issues of race, class, and language disparities. Critical educators can help place the analysis in a broader context so that unified action will be aimed at eliminating systemic, as well as individual, causes of inequity and conflict.

To succeed in democratizing education with an emphasis on inclusion, access, and equity for disenfranchised students, families, and communities requires more than the familiar human relations or parent participation activities. It is necessary to re-think core assumptions and values about authority and accountability for public institutions in a democracy and whether a different standard is applied to low income communities of color. Deficit theories about race, class, language, and culture that are used to blame school failure on students and their parents must be examined, which can be expected only when the climate is safe for risk taking.

The process must include an honest assessment of why these theories are condoned and institutionalized in schools through labeling and tracking practices that structure in low achievement for urban students and educators as accepted norms. Changing academic culture means turning around expectations, curriculum, teaching, and learning so that all students perform at high levels, take charge of their future, and help build and better their neighborhoods. To accomplish this will require skilled facilitation of dialogue involving many role groups and resource persons in order to reach consensus on how to begin the process of transforming school and community. The experience must help build capacity so that all students, their families, and their teachers, inspired by critical hope and faith in each other, begin to work collaboratively to dramatically improve education and the overall quality of life.

Without involving critical bilingual cross-cultural educators in comprehensive restructuring, many hard issues that get to the heart of achievement and empowerment for students and communities of color are likely to be avoided, resulting in carrying existing weaknesses into the next era. From matters as obvious as providing translation for parents who are members of a collaborative governance team, to language ability tracking, the needs of the underserved regularly are overlooked when there are no strong voices emphasizing equity and democracy. Involving bilingual cross-cultural teachers in restructuring is an opportunity to influence the direction of education throughout students' school years, not only during their participation in a critical classroom. However, the opportunity will be missed if critical teachers remain isolated and uninvolved in facilitating, informing, and framing the change agenda.

The Role of Reflection and Support Groups

Tearing down the wall that shuts off critical teaching and learning from the larger environment of a particular school and community requires preparation. It means expanding and reorienting our focus from the physical confines of the classroom to the wider institutional and social reality. This involves forming new relationships with other adults and youth who are significant in students' lives. Too often

educators rush to try something new in isolation, without adequate understanding, preparation, or support. Then they abandon the innovation when it doesn't work. Impulsive innovation is one of the norms of our professional culture that is counterproductive to *sustained* improvement.

Choosing to link the classroom with the school or the community should be the outgrowth of a thoughtful and responsible process that each of us initiates, then opens up to students, parents, colleagues, and others. Many factors should be considered before moving ahead. Discovering and declaring our intentionality becomes extremely important as we engage with others beyond the classroom. Breaking the isolation of the classroom is a serious venture and cannot be undertaken alone. It carries with it a commitment to participate in collective reflection and analysis with a support group of peers and others who can nurture our personal, professional, and political growth. There is too much at stake to quit when things heat up–which they will inevitably–or cool down, thereby betraying trust and adding to our own and our partners' disillusionment.

We must recognize that not only our own development is affected, but that our decisions and actions as educators could have a major impact upon the future of students, their families, and their communities. Therefore, we have to understand the limits of our individual perspectives. We must seek the involvement of others upon whom we will depend to give the critical input and feedback that helps deepen the introspection and analysis that inform our actions. The reflection group is also a source of encouragement as we move beyond our comfort zones in the classrooms and in the world to examine our internal contradictions and grapple with hard issues that otherwise we may not see or tend to avoid. In this way the group supports us in taking risks and holds us accountable for our declared intent, especially at those difficult moments when we are inclined to retreat.

A reflection group is where we can build trust, be open with each other, examine our insecurities, anxieties, and shortcomings and unveil our biases–all of which will affect the relationships we develop outside the classroom. Ideally, it is a gathering of people from across age, race, class, culture, and gender lines with differing perspectives. It is where we look to others, not for polite concurrence with our ideas and actions, but for honest appraisals offered sensitively to help us gain clarity and resolve. A reflection group may be where we first share our hopes and our vision. It is also where we study literature and data that sharpen our analysis and ground our theory. It is where we reflect on our actions and refine our strategies for advancing our own development and the collaborative change process. Of course, the support is mutual and we are there as critical friends to encourage others in the same ways. Learning together and drawing upon the range of our intersubjectivities, we get closer to the truth about ourselves and the world and are better qualified for the assignment we have chosen.

As we re-think fundamental aspects of our work and relationships, the following are some possible questions for reflection.

- Who am I in the lives of these students and their families, their community, their society, and their world?

- Do I want to become more, and what do I stand to lose in the process?

- What is the source and intensity of my hope and passion for transformation?

- What is my vision for the students' futures and how closely does my practice align with the scope of my vision?

- Because this work is not neutral, what is my personal bias?

- What concerns do I have about venturing beyond the security of a curriculum that fits comfortably within the borders of my classroom? How ready am I to invite others inside?

- What are my own beliefs about the students' and my potential as change agents whose efforts can lead to "critical hope" and genuine empowerment in place of disillusionment and cynicism?

- How ready am I to take risks as I increase my capacity to grapple honestly with the politics of race, class, gender, power, and privilege in my life and my work?

- How supportive is the institutional culture and professional climate of my school?

- What are my likely sources of support and opposition within and outside of the school?

- How will I locate or establish networks and a reflection group with educators and others committed to the same principles?

- What are the limits of my own subjective perspective based on my identity in the world?

- What is my understanding of the community as classroom and appreciation of its residents as co-teachers and co-learners?

- How prepared am I for the influence that authentic engagement with my colleagues and the community is likely to have upon my own transformation?

Depending upon an educator's assessment of her or his level of understanding, readiness, and resources, the most responsible and sensible decision may be to maintain a self-contained classroom. For example, a teacher may be just starting to try alternatives to teacher-centered and textbook-driven instruction, such as heterogeneous grouping for hands-on science. It would be a good idea in this case to allow time for students to appreciate the diversity of their learning styles and become accustomed to cooperating rather competing with each other, as well as to respect and evaluate their own opinions, hypotheses, and observations of the physical environment. Later students will be able to use these fundamental attitudes and skills when they engage in collective reflection and problematizing of phenomena in the social environment.

However, a critical teacher whose theory and practice are sufficiently advanced, whose reflection and support group is viable, and who feels ready to venture out could begin to move beyond the classroom into the community or the process of school restructuring. Parents and community members can be asked to participate directly with the teacher and students in determining ways to bring the community into the curriculum. The possibilities range from students conducting interviews with elders, to inviting guest speakers who can share their analysis of community issues and priorities. It could include organizing a meeting with local politicians for action on a pressing problem. The various components must not be fragmented, but rather should fit into a coherent plan for classroom-community engagement. This will lay the foundation for making the classroom-school connection and possibly a school-community linkage at a later point, as illustrated in Figure 3, intersection (C).

Resources for Involving Students in the Community

Critical teaching and learning should help students reveal, analyze, and challenge the structures that perpetuate injustice and disparity in their communities. Even young children can design small projects that will give them experience in forming and voicing their opinions about problems they identify and asking or working with the responsible officials to find solutions. In *The Anti-Bias Curriculum,* written for preschool teachers, the author presents a section on "Activism with Young People," which discusses ways to involve children in creating change both in the classroom and also through participating in community events (Derman-Sparks & A.B.C. Task Force).

The Kids Guide to Social Action, a resource for students in elementary through high school, begins with a chapter on "Life Beyond the Classroom," and contains practical strategies and actual tools for direct participation to challenge social problems. These range from petitions to media coverage to public demonstrations. Older students can engage in deeper examination of the structural underpinnings of conditions they want changed. They can develop and carry out action plans that identify their objectives, strategies, and responsibilities and also their expectations of designated officials to provide remedies and resources.

By planning these types of experiences, critical educators offer students who would probably be silent, invisible, and powerless outside the security of the classroom an opportunity to recognize and assert their rights in the larger learning environment. Members of both established and less well-known groups–religious institutions, block clubs, community-based organizations, etc.–are a valuable resource for helping students and teacher alike develop the skills to carry out action projects. Teachers whose participation in social action is limited can learn along with their students. Making contacts with community resource persons opens new lines of communication between classroom and community that the critical bilingual cross-cultural educator can use in broadening curriculum and the partnership. It is also a good idea to expose the administration and colleagues to the experience that students are having, to gain their support and eventually their involvement. Sharing literature with administrators and other teachers is another way to generate discussion of the issues.

Connecting School Improvement and Community Development

Schools that are in the process of restructuring should have a governance structure and a participatory process that involve a wide cross-section of the school community in collaborative decision making, strategic planning, and implementation. As the California Tomorrow report emphasizes, critical educators are needed as advocates for achievement, democracy, and empowerment, particularly for students of color. Becoming part of a governance team makes it possible to influence the agenda for change and keep the focus on students as achievers and community builders. We must be prepared to surface the tough issues of beliefs, access, and equity concerning all students. We also must stress the importance of active student participation and inclusion in the restructuring process and get our own students involved. In addition, critical teachers have much to offer in support of consensus building from their experience in facilitating cooperation in the classroom. In time, it will become apparent whether it is possible to move toward collaboration involving the whole school and the community.

New initiatives continue to be introduced by local community developers in isolation from school improvement efforts. At present, few school change efforts consider the long-term social and economic needs of the communities they serve. Clearly, school change is not considered under the authority of the students' community, nor is the future of that community relevant to the systemic effort. On the other hand, many communities are the targets of plans that usually are under the control of outside commercial

developers who rarely place local needs at the top of their agendas. Even when there is local participation, the process often is not participatory. In neither case are schools usually factored in as a component of the design. Linking school improvement and community development plans can help strengthen both and begin to unify these two important dimensions of students' lives.

Many of the skills and processes that are learned by participating in school restructuring can be applied to community development, thus building capacity of parents and students to play a decisive role in shaping their future. Schools and communities that are willing to collaborate in designing their plans for change can build upon the foundation laid by critical educators who have ventured beyond their classrooms to connect teaching and learning with the larger environment, emphasizing diversity, democracy, and systemic transformation. The role of the critical educator is vital in helping this to happen and engendering new hope for urban communities.

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QUESTIONS & REFLECTIONS
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GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING A PAPER

The Proposal

If you are interested in submitting a paper for publication in this *Occasional Paper Series,* please complete a **two-to-three-page typed, double-spaced proposal** that indicates how your paper will be organized to accomplish the "intent of this series" and feature the "suggested paper characteristics" described below.

The proposal will be reviewed by a committee; if it appears that the proposed paper corresponds to the intent of this series and suggested paper characteristics, you will be invited to submit a paper for consideration. Papers will be accepted based on content, clarity of expression, and accurate application of the writing guidelines found in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA).

Proposals can be submitted throughout the year, with two-to-four papers selected and published each year.

Guiding Assumption of This Series

The overall intent of this series stems from the fundamental assumption that the conditions of life in the 21st century will be such that the attainment of *critical literacy* by *all members* of this society will be absolutely necessary for the survival of viable, healthy, and diverse social and ecological systems in the United States, as well as across the world. Furthermore, although individuals from all groups of people and in all kinds of societies possess the potential for realizing critical literacy, actualizing it will be a difficult process unless educational conditions are created to *intentionally* liberate and nurture its emergence, development, and usage.

Primary Intent of this Series

1. To publish *personal narratives* that demonstrate how various people are exploring and creating educational conditions designed to intentionally liberate and nurture the emergence, development, and usage of critical literacy.
2. To publish papers that describe the *interactive* and *transformative* relationship that exists among *critical pedagogy*, *praxis,* and *critical literacy* as it pertains to conditions and questions regarding bilingual-bicultural, multicultural, or related areas of education.
3. To publish papers that provide an ongoing context for authors and readers to explore and construct increasingly meaningful *personal* and *shared* understandings of the (a) theoretical principles and meanings of *critical pedagogy,* (b) the *praxis* that such principles and meanings generate, and (c) the concept of *critical literacy*.
4. To provide a context for authors to experiment with a *writing style* and *textual format* that invites readers to engage in a highly *participatory* and *dialogical* reading/meaning-making process.

Suggested Paper Characteristics

To achieve the intent of this series, CABE seeks papers with the following characteristics. When writing your **proposal,** be sure to keep these characteristics in mind, describing how you plan to use them to address the underlying assumption and intent of this series.

- Written by people who use their own history to describe, or narrate, how they are knowingly applying identified theoretical principles of critical pedagogy to the re-theorizing and re-making of a praxis of bilingual-bicultural, multicultural, or a related area of education to construct conditions conducive to the emergence and development of critical literacy within themselves and others.
- Organized and written from an *exploratory, problem-posing* orientation with a focus on a specific problem and set of questions, conditions, and interests. As an example, a paper might include sections that (a) describe existing assumptions and conditions representative of the particular area of education being examined, (b) make existing assumptions and conditions "problematic" by identifying and describing those principles of critical pedagogy being used to formulate the questions asked in the problem-posing process, (c) reflect on the questions posed and re-theorize assumptions and conditions that appear to be more conducive to the emergence of critical literacy, (d) describe actions taken based on the reflections and re-theorizing process and recount how these actions both affirm and challenge the theoretical principles of critical pedagogy used, and (5) discuss the interactive relationship that operates among critical pedagogy, praxis, and critical literacy, and how principles of critical pedagogy are being used to construct meanings for the terms "critical literacy" and "praxis."
- Use of an original *writing style* and *textual format* that invites readers to engage in a highly *participatory* and *dialogical* reading/meaning-making process with the author's narration.
- Aimed primarily at the interests of practicing classroom teachers and teacher candidates. However, this aim should not preclude the paper from being of interest to other people, such as teacher educators, paraprofessionals, parents, administrators, district level personnel, curriculum specialists, and curriculum developers.
- Concise, focused, exploratory, and problem-posing papers that can be used to (a) keep an active, probing dialogue going within the CABE membership between conferences and other events and (b) provoke dialogue in school-site dialogue groups, teacher education classes, inservice programs, community dialogue groups, CABE-sponsored functions on critical pedagogy, and elsewhere.
- Between 20 to 25 pages with all lines double-spaced and typed using a 14-inch Times font with standard margins. This length includes the reference list. *(Proposal should also conform to these typing guidelines and should be no longer than three pages.)*
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Please read the following questions and write your responses legibly. CABE is considering expanding its publication efforts and is interested in knowing what areas or topics, as well as publication formats, members and other educators find useful. CABE will give serious consideration to what you say, so please complete this survey and mail to: **The California Association for Bilingual Education, 320 West G Street, Suite 202, Ontario CA, 91762. Attention:** *Occasional Paper Series* **Committee.**

This survey is concerned primarily with your ideas about the usefulness of an *Occasional Paper Series,* although the last question addresses any suggestions you may have about publications in general. The future direction of *this particular series* will be influenced by the comments made on this survey. For example, the specific subtitle of the series for 1996 *(Emancipatory Narratives on Critical Literacy, Praxis, and Pedagogy)* could change each year between now and the year 2000 depending upon the responses CABE receives from this survey and other means.

Thank you for completing the survey. It indicates your interest and willingness to be a *participatory member* of CABE, which is the only way CABE can continue its tradition of being responsive to the needs of its members!

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5. On what other orientations, areas, aspects, subjects, etc. of education would you like CABE to publish a focused *Occasional Paper Series?*

6. Please let us know of any other ideas you have regarding the possibility of CABE expanding its publication efforts.

Thank you. Cut along inside margin and mail to address on front side of survey

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jean Frederickson, Series Editor, resides in Running Springs, California and has worked in both formal and informal educational contexts within the fields of bilingual-bicultural, multicultural, and environmental education. Primarily interested in effecting social change regarding the way humans form relationships with each other and with the earth, Jean spent her college summers in rural Mexico working with the people and the land, learning the value and importance of difference as she helped. Since then she has been active in environmental and social justice movements and has been a classroom and resource teacher, a university-based and free-lance consultant, and a doctoral student. Jean's work appears in The Tomás Rivera Center's book, *The Broken Web,* which examines the educational experiences of Latinas in the United States, *A Child's Place in the Environment, Project Learning Tree,* and in CABE's 1995 book *Reclaiming Our Voices: Bilingual Education, Critical Pedagogy, and Praxis,* for which she also served as Editor. She is now completing her dissertation based on a three-year participatory study that problematized environmental education from the perspectives of critical pedagogy, ecofeminism, and ecophilosophy.

Joyce Germaine Watts, author of the featured paper, resides in Los Angeles, California where she is extremely active in her community, especially around issues concerning youth empowerment, educational transformation, and community development. She received her doctorate from the University of San Francisco and currently is Associate Director of The Achievement Council where she focuses on issues of educational equity and school restructuring. In the summer of 1992, Joyce was one of the eight invited resource facilitators at CABE's week-long Critical Pedagogy Institute held in Highland Springs, California. Since that event, Joyce has participated in other CABE events and continues to provide a context where students, students' families, educators, and local community members can come together to devise the contours of *what counts as authentic education* for students from oppressed communities.

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