CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND CLASSROOM PRAXIS*

In this paper we argue for the incorporation of critical pedagogy in the teaching of sociology. We first establish the theoretical and emancipatory rationale for critical pedagogy with a review of the neomarxist concept of reproduction. *We then examine a specific application of critical pedagogy in the sociology curriculum of Western Oregon University. We give particular attention to a course sequence on community organizing in which students have developed a successful tenants union that serves as a vehicle for both personal and social transformation.*

DEAN BRAA
Western Oregon University

PETER CALLERO
Western Oregon University

EVERY RELATIONSHIP of *hegemony* is necessarily an educational relationship. (Gramsci, quoted in Forgacs [2000:348]).

Critical pedagogy is a radical approach to education that seeks to transform oppressive structures in society using democratic and activist approaches to teaching and learning (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2003; Freire 1973, 1974; Shor 1987). Given the Enlightenment roots and emancipatory motives of sociology's founders, it is surprising that so little attention has been devoted to the application of critical pedagogy to the sociology classroom (Feagin and Vera 2001). While a number of authors have made this same observation in arguing for a more radical sociology curriculum (Kaufman 2002), only a few have offered descriptions of alternative classroom practices and strategies. Our goal in this paper is to advance the development of critical pedagogy in the sociology classroom. Up to now most proposals or suggestions for change have focused on general principles, course assignments, or new syllabi that have been relatively limited in both scope and detail (cf., *Teaching Sociology* 1998). Our approach is more ambitious.

In the first part of the paper we show why a commitment to critical pedagogy moves us beyond concern for individual student achievement and requires an additional commitment to the transformation of education and society. We begin by establishing the epistemological grounding of critical pedagogy with a brief overview of the neomarxist concept of reproduction. In the second part of the paper we focus on the use of critical pedagogy in the sociology curriculum at Western Oregon University. Our intent in this section is to illustrate the transformative potential of the sociology classroom. We do this with a detailed description of an established course sequence in community organizing where major components of critical pedagogy have been incorporated.

EDUCATION AS REPRODUCTION

A fundamental premise of neomarxist critical pedagogy is that systems of formal education in modern society function, in part, to maintain and reproduce an exploitative capitalist system (Apple 1990; Mayo 1999; McLaren 2003). This is accomplished when

schools are used to advance the class interests of economic elites at the expense of non-capitalist classes (Morrow and Torres 1995). The manner in which formal education contributes to class reproduction is not always obvious and usually involves domination through consent, or what Gramsci called *bourgeois hegemony* (Allman 1988; Forgacs 2000; Mayo 1999).

For Gramsci, hegemony is the domination of society through the use of a range of structures like trade unions, churches, families, and schools. These structures convey to individuals a system of values, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and morality that supports or *reproduces* the established social order and the class interests that dominate it (Boggs 1976; Forgacs 2000). As Carl Boggs argues, "Hegemony in this sense could be defined as an organizing principle, or world view, that is diffused by agencies of ideological control and socialization into every area of life" (p. 39).

Scholars working within the tradition of critical pedagogy have identified several disciplinary practices within the classroom that contribute to the reproduction process. For example, Apple (1990) points to the existence of a *hidden curriculum* whereby students are socialized and behaviorally conditioned to accept hierarchical structures of power, and Shor (1992) describes the *authoritarian classroom* where students are conditioned to become passive, conformist, and obedient members of society, thus generating easily manipulated workers and passive, apathetic citizens.

Reproduction also occurs when teachers promote a set of cultural ideologies that serve to legitimate existing class dominance. For example, students are often taught in American schools that individual decisions and actions (individualism) are the basis of success and upward mobility (Apple 1990; Bowles and Gintis 1976). The lesson here is that people are ranked in society according to their relative merit and that inequalities in income, wealth, and power are the result of individual actions (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Another example is the promotion of *free market competition* (laissez faire) or the belief that individual pursuit of profit will produce collective benefits—an obvious cornerstone of capitalist ideology (Giroux 2003).

In addition to advancing consent through discipline, curriculum, and ideological content, schools also reproduce the established social order by omitting certain forms of knowledge—including serious analyses of inequality, oppression, exploitation, imperialism, revolution, class struggle, and labor movements—that might raise critical questions about capitalism (Apple 1990). Howard Zinn's (2001) enlightening and critical text, *A People's History of the United States*, is a very good example of the history of America that most Americans never learn. The failure to teach science as an inherently critical, theory driven process is also an evident omission. Schools tend to present science as a collection of facts or patterns of facts (empiricism and positivism) rather than as a method for developing models or structures (theories) that explain social phenomena (Keat and Urry 1982).

The practice of critical pedagogy is not limited, however, to explanations of reproduction. Even though the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy is built on a critique of the reproductive process, the most significant defining feature of critical pedagogy is its emphasis on the emancipatory potential of education. As Michael Apple (1985) argues, the capitalist system does not completely determine education outcomes, and most public schools maintain a level of relative autonomy that allows for the emergence of "resistance, contestation, and lived culture" (p. 28). Thus, from a critical pedagogical perspective a successful education system will not only resist forms of capitalist reproduction but will necessarily take positive steps to facilitate social change by promoting the development of a *counter hegemony*. This would include theories, practices (praxis), values, morality, and an overall culture that acts as critique and negation of corporate, capitalist hegemony (McLaren 2003; Shor 1992).

In the following section we explore the manner in which critical pedagogy can be applied to a sociology curriculum to encourage the development of a counter hegemony and advance a more democratic, humane, and egalitarian society.

TRANSFORMING THE SOCIOLOGY CLASSROOM THROUGH CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Even though critical pedagogy has diverse origins and does not represent a singular programmatic, it is possible to identify a common set of principles and elements shared by most advocates. In this section we begin with a brief overview of four central components of critical pedagogy, followed by a detailed description of an actual application of these components in a sequence of courses at Western Oregon University.

Any serious application of critical pedagogy must at some level take steps to facilitate greater *dialogue, critique, counter hegemony,* and *praxis.* These core elements of critical pedagogy are generally lacking in the traditional classroom.

Dialogue refers to the active participation of student and teacher in discussion and analysis. By transcending the conventional *culture of silence* (Freire 1974), students gain a sense of empowerment, especially when interaction is directed toward a critical examination of actual student experiences. Dialogue seeks not only to increase active student participation in the classroom but also to develop a critical social consciousness among students.

By *critique* we mean the systematic analysis of both self and society with a focus on inequality, exploitation, oppression, and domination. An examination of class exploitation is crucial to most advocates of critical pedagogy, but equally important is the consideration of race, ethnicity, and gender-based oppression (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2003). In exploring these themes an understanding of the scientific method is crucial. Advocates of critical pedagogy reject empiricist, positivist, and post-modern

approaches in favor of a *critical realist* paradigm where scholars pursue research that includes praxis as the basis of science and emancipatory knowledge (Bhaskar 1997; Callinicos 1992; Collier 1994). According to Roy Bhaskar, "critical realists argue for an understanding of the relationship between structures and human agency that is based on a transformational conception of social activity" (1989:2-3).

As noted above, critical pedagogy advocates the construction of a *counter hegemony* in opposition to a bourgeois hegemony. Exposing class contradictions in student lives, showing how dominant ideologies may work against their own material interests, facilitates this construction. It also involves the development of a counter culture where oppositional values, attitudes, and behaviors are promoted. Thus, individualism and meritocracy might be countered with communalism and egalitarianism, while authoritarian and hierarchical forms could be countered with democratic and participatory structures (Beyer 1996; Shor 1987).

Praxis refers to the actual application of knowledge to the transformation of society. It moves the sociology curriculum beyond the classroom and connects critical reflection to action in the community. From a critical pedagogical perspective, praxis distinguishes itself from service learning or community-based volunteerism with a more explicit emphasis on collective efforts at social transformation. Less radical approaches to facilitating community involvement are not designed to confront systems of power and may even help reproduce an individualistic worldview (Gimenez 1998). In this sense, praxis in the sociology curriculum is concerned with more than advancing individual learning objectives and has the additional goal of changing one's community (Feagin and Vera 2001).

Incorporating these elements of critical pedagogy into a sociology curriculum can be challenging, especially when faced with the institutional constraints of many colleges and universities (Sweet 1998). It is also

impossible to have every component equally developed in every course. Indeed, it is important to recognize that critical pedagogy is best realized throughout the curriculum under conditions of cooperation and commitment among a dedicated faculty.

For over ten years now we have gradually moved the curriculum of our small sociology department (three full-time faculty members) in the direction of critical pedagogy. We have, for example, developed several courses and course sequences that merge education and community action. We have used classrooms as the basis for multiple and ongoing forms of praxis, including student participation in an extensive mentoring program with Latino high school students, service and internships with labor unions, organization and implementation of anti-sweatshop activities on and off campus, organization of pro-migrant worker boycotts of food services on campus, and anti-globalization forums.

In each of these projects we made a conscious effort to implement principles of critical pedagogy by facilitating dialogue, critique, counter hegemony, and praxis. Unfortunately space does not allow a detailed examination of all of our efforts in these areas. We can, however, illustrate many of the principles of critical pedagogy with a historical overview of our course sequence in "community organizing," showing how a sociology program can be used to develop and implement key concepts of critical pedagogy.

Community Organizing and the Classroom

"I could see the red fire, the color of it, underneath the bed. That's when I got out." Cedillo grabbed a fire extinguisher, it didn't work. "As soon as I got back in the room it went up in flames."

"When I heard about the fire it was like a big 'I told you so'", Woolsey said. "They didn't listen." (Granvelle 1999:A1)

The quotations above are from a two-page story headlined "Students Form Tenants Union" that appeared on page one of a major metro newspaper. The story describes a near-fatal fire on the campus of Western Oregon University. Woolsey, a student and former resident of the complex that burned down, was also an activist in a new community tenants union that had repeatedly warned the university administration of fire hazards in the building.

What makes the story particularly relevant is that it did not receive press attention until students in our sociology course on community organizing wrote and distributed a press release that eventually received statewide coverage in print, radio, and television. In fact the tenants union described in the story had been founded a year earlier in the same sociology course. The above episode is a dramatic illustration of how students can be empowered to transform their community in fundamentally important ways. In this section we describe our course sequences that led to the development of a community tenants union. What follows is not intended as a blueprint for the development of a specific course structure; such a "cookie cutter" approach cannot account for important variation in departmental, university, and community structures. Instead we offer our particular experience as an illustration of how the application of critical pedagogy has the potential to effect change.

Our project began seven years ago with the goal of establishing a sustainable praxis component in our curriculum. In other words, we wanted to create an opportunity for students to apply sociological knowledge to the transformation of society. But altering systems of domination in a community is never easy, and doing so with a small group of transient students from diverse backgrounds, with limited time commitments and few resources is especially difficult. Nevertheless, we have had real success with the development of a grassroots tenants union organized and directed by students who are trained and advised in a sequence of courses on community organizing. Since 1998 the tenants union has in various ways empowered tenants, exposed hegemonic

ideologies, and altered some practices of exploitation.

The formal curriculum structure begins in the fall term with approximately 35 students enrolled in SOC 340: Community Organizing (no prerequisites). Students who complete SOC 340 may then enroll in SOC 341: Community Action, which is offered in the winter term. In the spring and summer terms students who have completed both Community Organizing and Community Action are eligible to earn additional academic credit by enrolling in a series of "independent study" courses. Students who complete the sequence become "veteran organizers," directing the tenants union and assisting faculty as the course sequence is repeated the following year. A particular strength of this structure is that student actions are linked from year to year in a way that contributes to the building of a cumulative power base.

Dialogical Process and Experiential Knowledge

Students begin the fall term with a classroom experience that initially looks like most university courses (formal syllabus, textbooks, and standard lecture format). Over a ten-week period, however, this formal structure gradually evolves into a student-centered dialogue focusing on common experiences as tenants, the exploitative nature of the landlord-tenant relationship, and possible remedies for change.

During the first several weeks of the term, directed reading and discussion covers the history of community organizing in the United States and the particular philosophy and experiences of Saul Alinsky. We have found the focus on Alinsky and Alinsky-style organizing to be effective for several reasons. First, his written work is highly provocative, sociological in orientation, and easily accessible to students (Alinsky 1969, 1971). Second, multiple training resources and examples of successful organizing efforts have links to Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation (see, for example, http://www.industrialareasfou

ndation.org) thus providing students with models of successful grassroots empowerment. And most importantly, Alinsky-style organizing privileges radical democracy, dialogue among citizens with common interests, and debate over the relationship between personal troubles and social problems (cf., Feagin and Vera 2001).

Students traditionally have little experience with public discourse regarding social problems and they are initially hesitant to freely participate in open discussion on issues when they do not feel expert. However, we have found that dialogue is particularly energetic, focused, and productive when it centers on students' personal experience, especially when the experience is one of exploitation.

When we initiated the community organizing sequence seven years ago we first assigned students to identify a common issue or problem in need of remedy. This began in small groups but eventually involved an open forum of the entire class and was characterized by wide-ranging expressions of frustration, anger, resentment, and feelings of powerlessness in their lives. Initial discussions focused on salient themes that failed to produce a consensus (e.g., gun control, abortion, and affirmative action), and many students were silent or uncomfortable with the emotional and sometimes vituperative public disagreement. This changed, however, over several weeks as the instructor regularly directed students to find common ground in their shared experience. Eventually they temporarily transcended significant differences of religion, gender, sexual orientation, politics, race, age, lifestyle, and personality and identified the experience of rental housing (both on and off campus) as the most pressing common problem. By the end of the first term students enthusiastically agreed that the community needed a grassroots organization of tenants.

The dialogue that led to the organization's founding was at times frustrating, occasionally chaotic, often disorganized, but always energetic. It would be difficult to repeat this

process each year. Although experiencing such a radically democratic method is valuable, it is not practical if the goal is to sustain an organized community project. Consequently, in subsequent years, each new student cohort has begun with the expectation that they will carry on the work of the already established tenants union. Today the course still privileges student dialogue but it is focused on the issues, goals, and strategies of the organization.

Critical Analysis and Community Contact

Near the end of the first term, students begin to move from reading and dialogue to critical analysis and community contact. In the first couple of years of the project, community contact involved walking the neighborhoods surrounding campus, knocking on doors, and interviewing tenants about their rental experiences. The goal at this time was to assess the range of tenant issues and gauge the degree of concern. More recently, the door knocking has involved more focused organizing with a strategic and practical emphasis. In both instances, however, students have been engaged in critical analysis.

The critical analysis of self is most evident when students first come in contact with other tenants. For many this can be a moment of high anxiety. Even though students prepare with role-playing exercises in the classroom, and the door knocking occurs in groups of two or three, it is still a novel and uncomfortable experience that produces a degree of self-consciousness. But self-reflection regarding one's material relations with others is key to personal insight. We have found that some of the most significant personal changes occur when student organizers begin to recognize their "tenant identity" as distinct from their "student identity"—a personal transformation necessary for building solidarity among tenants. This change flows directly from face-to-face contact with neighbors who share the same problems and frustration with rental housing but do not share the social advantage of attending the university. Dialogue among students reflects this shift

as discussion moves from a concern with "student problems" to a more encompassing concern with "tenant problems." As students come to realize that their issues are not isolated, they often experience a corresponding shift in self-perception, leading to a wider sense of solidarity. As one student reported in an anonymous written evaluation of the course:

> I learned that tenant problems are not limited to students. Many tenants that have rental issues are not aware of their rights, whether they are students, low-income renters, or your average community member. Being a part of an organization that's [sic] purpose is to educate or inform renters of their rights was very valuable. It was through my experience with the community organizing that I learned when individuals come together they can make change.

Social critique begins with the identification of specific issues and problems tenants face (broken appliances, fire hazards, broken windows, poor heating, pests, mold, water damage, leaking pipes, unresponsive managers and landlords, unreturned deposits, rent increases, privacy violation) but moves quickly to more fundamental issues of power. As students conduct background research on state and local housing law they discover the legal advantages in favor of landlords. They find, for example, that some persistent health hazards are not codified as violations (e.g., mold), the enforcement of violations places a disproportionate burden on the tenant, and legal penalties are more severe for tenant violations than landlord violations. In terms of critical pedagogy, students notice a form of class advantage and begin to articulate this using a language of critique.

It is at this moment that students reach a critical analytical juncture. Once the structural injustice is made visible, problem solving and social change become salient. How and why do landlords have legal advantage? How do tenants gain power? Where does tenant power reside? Working through these questions and organizing for social change is the focus of the second

course in the community organizing sequence.

Confronting Power and Exposing Hegemony

The second course in the community organizing sequence is titled Community Action and it is devoted entirely to student praxis. It is during this period that students strategize to build tenant influence and along the way confront the obstacles to a more just distribution of power. A level of experiential learning rarely found in traditional university education takes place during this course. Equally important, however, is the positive social change resulting from the student activism. The following is a partial list of accomplishments "won" by the tenants union over the past several years: 1) structural improvements to tenant housing leading to safer and healthier buildings; 2) expansion of the city housing code, including recognition of mold as a health hazard; 3) adoption of a formal procedure for reporting landlord violations; 4) adoption of a policy requiring the distribution of a tenant rights pamphlet to all new tenants; 5) dramatic increase in the enforcement of housing code violations; and 6) consideration by city council of an additional code enforcement position.

Although the advances listed above may seem relatively minor in the context of class struggle, the student-organized tenants union has achieved a significant degree of influence and power in the small college town of Monmouth, Oregon. Thus it serves as a source of motivation and pride for students exploring community organizing and the possibilities of social change. The path toward achieving these modest goals can be characterized as organizationally democratic and politically strategic. From the very beginning of the second term, the regularly scheduled class time is transformed into a twice-weekly meeting of the tenants union, complete with formal agenda and a consensus-based planning model. The professor no longer leads the class but rather serves as an ex-officio facilitator and advisor. This

change of structure is a deliberate attempt to move still further away from the banking concept of education toward a partnership where student and teacher cooperate as critical co-investigators.

Organizing strategies and political interventions emerging from this collaboration have varied from the pedestrian and comfortable to the risky and disruptive. Students have distributed informational flyers to tenants, packed city council meetings with members, organized tenants in specific buildings, challenged landlords and city officials through media stories, organized letter-writing campaigns, negotiated policy changes with the city council, challenged city council members in mass membership meetings, and confronted recalcitrant landlords. In each of these instances the decision to act was one of deliberate consensus. To be sure, the actions have not always had the intended effect, and landlords, city council members, and city officials have met many tactics and strategies with resistance, repudiation, and retaliation. Yet confrontation with power is itself instructive in that it exposes dimensions of control that are initially invisible to most students.

In a traditional lecture course it is usually a difficult struggle for students to recognize the process by which cultural ideologies and "common sense" serve the interest of those in power. But the experience of trying to advance the collective interests of tenants brings to life real examples of cultural hegemony and economic power. For example, an issue that regularly surfaces early on in the course has to do with the fear and trepidation some students have about being "political" and "biased." A typical concern is that we are using public resources to advance an "interest group agenda," a charge that seems to most students to be a reasonable critique of the course. However, when we ask students to consider whether this same argument can be extended to more traditional courses offered by the university, we expose a hidden curriculum. Why, for example, is the curriculum in economics, with its dominant neoclassical theoretical

assumptions, not challenged for its political bias? Students begin to see that the status quo is not politically neutral and that internships in business management, computer science, and law enforcement also employ public resources in service of the political interests of a capitalist class. Thus, "being political" in a course on community organizing helps to expose the manner in which a traditional university education contributes to class reproduction.

Of course, a significant difference between traditional internships and efforts at organizing a community tenants union is that the former do not generate opposition from those with power—something that cannot be said of the work completed in Community Action. Indeed, over the past several years student organizing efforts have been met with a range of actions intended to limit tenant power. This was the case, for example, when students initiated an informational column in the university newspaper in an attempt to raise consciousness and educate tenants on their legal rights. The weekly piece was titled "Dump of the Month" and it featured photos of particularly problematic rental units captioned with quotes from frustrated tenants. The column ran for several months and generated enthusiastic feedback from students. However, it also sparked anger and retaliation from landlords whose units were highlighted. When a local rental agency threatened to pull its advertising from the paper, the editorial staff (dominated by a "university advisor") informed the tenants union that they could only run the column as an "advertisement" and that the students would have to come up with an advertising fee, a policy change that effectively ended the column.

A more severe example of retaliation on the part of powerful landlords occurred when the tenants union focused its organizing efforts on a notorious apartment complex with a history of complaints and serious health and safety violations. Student organizers distributed informational flyers door-to-door, organized house meetings of tenants, notified city officials, and appeared on a local cable-access television show to describe the unsafe living conditions. At first, the apartment manager made a failed attempt to ban the organizers from the property. Later, the manager pressured tenants to sign a "liability waiver" intended to relinquish the landlord of responsibility for health and safety violations. When this also met with resistance the apartment owner took legal action and served the faculty advisor to the tenants union, the university administration, and sympathetic city officials with a "tort claim notice" asserting that the reputation of the owners had been defamed. Although all of these actions proved to be unsuccessful, the threats clearly demonstrated to students that power and profit are not easily relinquished.

After experiencing resistance from those with power, students come to realize that landlords prefer isolated tenants because problems and complaints can be individualized, personalized, and redirected. They also learn that change results from oppositions and contradictions and that power does not cede without a struggle. Moreover, resistance to student efforts actually works to form tenant solidarity, increase student enthusiasm, and galvanize commitment to the cause. Indeed, we have found in anonymous course evaluations that students see the structure of the course sequence as uniquely positive. The following representative quote, from a student who wrote an end-of-the-term course evaluation, expresses this point:

> Learning through interaction with people outside the classroom is very fulfilling and it feels more productive. Knowing my professor had faith and was giving us the power to take what we learned and immediately put it to use was very challenging and frightening [but] since I was advocating something I really believed in it gave me confidence.

Counter Hegemony and Counter Culture

A central element of critical pedagogy is the

development of a counter hegemony or counter culture that stands in opposition to the dominant ideological values of capitalist elites. While such a comprehensive project is beyond the capacity of a course sequence on community organizing, students are able to use the tenants union as a site for building confidence in their alternative interpretations of community problems. This begins with a collective effort to establish the tenants union as a legitimate organization, trusted by tenants, with recognizable influence and respect in the community. Success in the cause of tenant problems is primary to achieving such regard, but the development and deployment of symbols of solidarity is also essential. Students have employed this strategy of "codification" in several ways.

One of the very first projects of the tenants union was to create a symbol to represent the nascent grassroots organization, which they accomplished in cooperation with faculty and students from an advanced art course on graphic design. Students in the art course received a detailed background on the goals, ideals, and motivations of the tenants union and then created a representative logo as part of a class assignment. Students in the community organizing course established a public viewing and competition in which the winner of the design contest was honored with a small award. The process not only produced a symbol of solidarity but also served to introduce the tenants union to the larger campus community.

As we noted earlier, one of the structural limitations of a student-based tenant union is that students and tenants are relatively transient and turnover among activists can disrupt the continuity of organizing efforts. However, we have found that a consistent and recognizable symbol can successfully represent the stability and collective history of the organization. Thus, once the logo was formally established the tenants union deployed it on letterheads, press releases, informational bulletin boards, buttons, T-shirts, and banners. In this way it has served as a cultural anchor for the organization and a sign of permanence and persistence despite high turnover among the organization's members.

Another strategy of codification has been the development of alternative media in the form of community access cable, an "underground" newspaper, and an Internet website. Of these three, the website has been the most consistent and effective tool for advancing the interests of the tenants union. Unlike television and print media, a website does not disappear when activists move on. This is a particularly important quality given the high mobility of the student organizers. Although the website functions primarily as a resource for tenants seeking assistance with rental problems, it also serves as a venue for writing and preserving the history of the organization. Each year students experience a degree of frustration when segments of the community (city council, news media, and university administrators) attempt to define the tenants union as a "club" or "service organization." The experience is instructive in that the union members are able to decode these designations and recognize that officials prefer traditional labels because they are more familiar and less threatening to the status quo. In the end, students come to learn that controlling the narrative of their struggle is a critical element in the development of a counter hegemony.

Student Evaluations

One of the structural challenges to implementing critical pedagogy is the requirement of a formal grade for each student as a summary measure of individual performance. Traditional grading policies typically encourage individualistic learning and may even be structured to promote competition among students. In some extreme cases students may develop a fetish relationship to the grade itself and become alienated from the learning process. We recognized these challenges in our community organizing course sequence and initiated an alternative

evaluation policy that promotes dialogue and assessment without jeopardizing the group solidarity so critical to community power. In fact the procedure that we use was initially established by students themselves in the first year of the course sequence. Over the years it has been "edited" in various ways and re-adopted by each new student cohort. Our approach shifts significant power and responsibility to the students, who commit under a consensus model to accept the standards for evaluation as collectively defined in a common evaluation document.

In the community organizing course sequence the criteria for evaluation have been changed slightly from year to year but the core principles have remained stable. In general, students have agreed to the following guiding assumptions: 1) all students are committed to the success of the tenants union and therefore each student starts the class with an "A" grade, 2) all students agree with the individual and collective goals and expectations of the organization and will work equally to achieve these, 3) some students will for various reasons fail to meet the expectations of the group and when students fail to meet individual or group expectations the problem should be discussed in a group meeting, and 4) the group delegates authority to the professor to lower a student's grade when there is group consensus that a student has not met expectations regarding group goals or individual achievement goals.

Students also agree to collect a "portfolio" of their contributions to the group goals and to maintain a diary of their personal thoughts and experiences. These become part of the documented history of the organization and are used to educate subsequent student cohorts. Since students establish the evaluation standards and procedures using a consensus model, a dispute over grades is extremely rare. Indeed, we have found that a focused enthusiasm for the shared group goals pushes concern with evaluation and grading so far to the background that it is rarely raised as a discussion point.

CONCLUSION

Our objective in this paper has been to advocate for the incorporation of a critical pedagogy in the teaching of sociology. If the promises of liberation that motivated Enlightenment thinkers and the founders of sociology are to be fulfilled, higher education must move away from a hierarchical-authoritarian model that functions to reproduce bourgeois hegemony.

The goal of critical pedagogy is to enable emancipation through personal and social transformation. Success in this regard is difficult to measure using standard course assessment tools. We are seeking a change in student consciousness that goes beyond a shift in attitude to the more fundamental development of a "political self" defined by new activist identities (Callero 2003). Although our quantitative course evaluations demonstrate very positive ratings, consistently in the top 5 percent of the university, more indicative of success is that most students volunteer written comments indicating that their career choices, political orientation, or community activism have been altered in a manner consistent with the principles of critical pedagogy. The following comments, taken from three different personal evaluation assessments collected at the end of the most recent term, support this assertion. All three students had completed the three-term sequence and had therefore been a part of Monmouth-Independence Tenants Union (MITU) for a full academic year.

My involvement in the community has changed a great deal. Before I was only involved with and concerned about on-campus issues that directly affected me. I have learned from community organizing that there are other issues that may be negatively affecting the community I live in.

My work with MITU has had a profound effect on my politics…. [S]ince becoming active with MITU I have started to become more active with Latinos Unidos Siempre and Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste.[1]

Working with MITU has greatly influenced my view on politics and community activism.... I am planning on becoming an educator and these lessons will come in handy when I become part of a union that will have to clash with officials in order to make improvements in the workplace.

In addition we know that our courses have been a vehicle for positive social change in the community. There is no doubt that rental housing is safer and more closely regulated as a result of our efforts. The tenants union has helped to establish important enforcement practices, city officials regularly consult the tenants union, and tenants have a recognizable ally when confronting housing injustice.

We hope that our advocacy for critical pedagogy and the examples from our curriculum will help spur greater recognition and adoption of this more radical orientation to teaching sociology. As we noted in the introduction, we have developed a curriculum that includes several nontraditional courses, but we believe that the basic principles of critical pedagogy can be applied throughout the curriculum. By developing or cooperating with a grassroots community organization and by emphasizing dialogue, critique, counter hegemony, and praxis, traditional courses can become vehicles for transformation. For example, a research methods course might produce a community survey that advances the interest of an oppressed group or serve as a basis for identifying organizing issues. A social theory course could begin with the identification of a salient local issue (downsizing of a production plant, lack of health insurance or child care) and use particular theories to achieve a more sophisticated understanding of the problems, discover solutions, and recommend strategies for change.

We have found particular value in a cu-

mulative strategy that builds on the work of successive cohorts and allows students the opportunity to engage in projects over a long period. Community and personal transformation rarely occurs as the result of one academic term or even one academic year, but when a project is sustained by multiple waves of students over several terms and a number of years, real change is possible.

We recognize the potential difficulties in incorporating critical pedagogy in a sociology curriculum. First, there may be barriers on some campuses that will make it more difficult to implement similar community organizing courses. A dean might overreact, for example, to community complaints from landlords who threaten law suits, advertisers who pull their ads, or conservative alumni who call to ask questions. And nontenured members of the faculty might think twice before initiating a program that could produce controversy. Nevertheless, we have not experienced this form of administrative control or faculty trepidation on our campus. With the exception of an occasional mocking reference to the "troublemakers" in the sociology department, our campus administrators (including three different presidents, provosts, and deans) have never interfered with our curriculum. This may be due in part to the relative strength of our faculty labor union, and it may also reflect a campus culture that places a very strong emphasis on academic freedom. However, we suspect it has less to do with our unique structural context and more to do with the potential consequences of trying to control a student-centered course. Because our students are addressing a widely recognized community problem, receive consistently positive press, and find wide support among faculty and other students, any attempt to limit the course would likely generate a negative backlash. Moreover, singling out a sociology course might also call into question student internships and practica where community-based learning is occurring in more traditional settings—something most administrators would want to avoid.

---

[1]Latinos Unidos Siempre is a Latino political and cultural advocacy organization and Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste is a farm labor union located in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

At its best the student tenant organization can be seen as a local justice movement. Thus far there is no evidence that economic relations have been altered or that the structure of the university system has been transformed.[2] We are not naïve enough to believe that a reformed sociology curriculum will itself produce revolutionary change. What we offer is a small step toward emancipation. In the words of Paulo Freire (1974:47), "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity."

---

[2]This is not to say, however, that tenant struggles cannot produce such a change. As Aronowitz (2003:53) points out, tenant organizations in New York at the turn of the twentieth century used alliances with unions and radical political parties to engage in struggles over class that "effectively changed the face of the city's real estate industry, and reduced the power of landlords over city politics for nearly a half century."

REFERENCES

Alinsky, Saul. 1969. *Reveille for Radicals*. New York: Random House.

_____. 1971. *Rules for Radicals*. New York: Random House.

Allman, Paula. 1988. "Gramsci, Freire, and Illich: Their Contributions to Education for Socialism." Pp. 85-113 in *Radical Approaches to Adult Education,* edited by Tom Lovett. London, England: Routledge.

Apple, Michael. 1985. *Education and Power*. Boston, MA: Ark Paperbacks.

_____. 1990. *Ideology and Curriculum*. New York: Routledge.

Aronowitz, Stanley. 2003. *How Class Works: Power and Social Movement*. New Haven, CT: Yale.

Beyer, Landon. 1996. *Creating Democratic Classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Bhaskar, Roy. 1989. *Reclaiming Reality*. New York: Verso Editions.

_____. 1997. *A Realist Theory of Science*. New York: Verso Editions.

Boggs, Carl. 1976. *Gramsci's Marxism*. London, England: Pluto Press.

Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis. 1976. *Schooling in Capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books.

Callero, Peter L. 2003. "The Political Self: Identity Resources for Radical Democracy." Pp. 57-70 in *Advances in Identity Theory and Research*, edited by Peter J. Burke, Timothy J. Owens, Richard T. Serpe, and Peggy A. Thoits. New York: Kluwer/Plenum Press.

Callinicos, Alex. 1992. *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers.

Collier, Andrew. 1994. *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*. New York: Verso Editions.

Darder, Antonia, Marta Baltodano, and Rodolfo D. Torres. 2003. *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Feagin, Joe and Hernan Vera. 2001. *Liberation Sociology*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Forgacs, David, ed. 2000. *Antonio Gramsci: Selections form Cultural Writings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Freire, Paulo. 1973. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum Books.

_____. 1974. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

Gimenez, Martha. 1998. "The Radical Pedagogy Mystique: A View from the Trenches. Response to 'Practicing Radical Pedagogy: Balancing Ideals with Institutional Constraints.'" *Teaching Sociology* 19:116-21.

Giroux, Henry. 2003. "Education Incorporated." Pp. 27-56 in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, edited by Antonia Darder, Marta Baltodano, and Rodolfo D. Torres. London, England: Routledge.

Granvelle. 1999. "Students Form Tenants Union." *Statesman Journal,* November 19, p. A1.

Kaufman, Peter. 2002. *Critical Pedagogy in the Sociology Classroom*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

Keat, Russell and John Urry. 1982. *Social Theory as Science*. London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

Mayo, Peter. 1999. *Gramsci, Freire, and Adult Education*. New York: Zed Books.

McLaren, Peter. 2003. *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Pearson.

Morrow, Raymond and Carlos Torres. 1995. *Social Theory and Education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Shor, Ira. 1987. *Freire for the Classroom.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

_____. 1992. *Empowering Education*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Sweet, Stephen. 1998. "Practicing Radical Pedagogy: Balancing Ideals with Institutional Constraints." *Teaching Sociology* 26:100-11.

Teaching Sociology. 1998. Special Issue. 26(2).

Zinn, Howard. 2001. *A People's History of the United States*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Dean Braa is an associate professor of sociology at Western Oregon University. His academic interests include political-economy, theory, social problems, and historical sociology. He is also interested in the development of a sociology program based upon various critical pedagogical concepts and processes. Dean is an occasional union and political activist.

Peter Callero is professor of sociology at Western Oregon University where he teaches courses on community organizing, social theory, and research methods. His research interests center on questions of power and politics in the self-society relationship.