Theorising Creative Critical Pedagogy: the art of politicised agency

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Introduction: The Irish context for radical educators.

The financial collapse at the end of the first decade of the new millennium revealed the extent to which the equality agenda was dishonoured in favour of the myth of 'the rising tide lifts all boats', echoing JFK in the USA (Lemass, 1964). This was reinforced in the 80s by the neo-liberal 'trickle down' belief that wealth created by the rich, promoted by favourable economic policies will ultimately benefit everyone. The crisis demonstrated the widening income inequality and deterioration of health and welfare provision (Chang, 2010, p. 144-146). Irish society embraced the 80s neo-liberal economics with enthusiasm, resulting in the business climate for the economic development, but virally contagious for welfare, education, transport, health and housing. These spheres, formerly the concern of the state, were piece-meal transferred to private profit-making. This has resulted in the proliferation of private hospitals and commercial home care; private provision of early childhood education, vocational training, and 'back to work' programmes; selling off public housing and land for profit-making development; public-private road-building programmes, all partially funded from public taxation, and benefiting from the depression of wages due to the labour surplus activated by the population who came to Ireland from the central and eastern Europe and elsewhere for work. This has led to the steady decline of concern for the welfare of the people, particularly those deeply and profoundly affected by poverty, alienation, disadvantage and neglect. Neo-liberalism's creep into the national psyche was facilitated by the business climate, seducing a large proportion of the people into what has become known as the madness of the Celtic Tiger, characterised by the indebtedness of ordinary citizens, on the one hand, and the untrammeled, unregulated money markets which funded the particularly Irish version of boom.

McLaren (2005), said that we live in a time that is so brutal and so unforgiving that we must always ask ourselves if we are dreaming. Looking back at 2005, just seven years ago, the past seems like a foreign country, as today's world is infinitely more brutal and unforgiving. It is as if we are hurtling towards our own doom, and worst

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of all, democracy has been press-ganged into bringing us there. The trend all over Europe, in spite of specific exceptions, conservative and centrist governments and politicians are in the ascendant, intent of pursuing austerity, clearly targeting public expenditure, while simultaneously, actively reluctant to tax wealth and property. And, most unforgivably, this austerity is the response to reckless lending, monetarism and de-regulation.

In the meanwhile…

During this time, radical adult educators have been concerned with creating an alternative vision of what is possible, through the integration of the imagination, 'really useful knowledge' (Thompson, 1996) and 'really useful practice' (Connolly, 2005). This Cinderella of education and community has been working with people forgotten by the Celtic Tiger, in addition to the New Irish, people coming to Ireland as a reserve army of workers, as refugees and asylum seekers and as economic migrants. This article will look at this integration in the form of critical pedagogy, especially that which goes beyond the academic and the formal, but is also situated within community development, non-formal and accredited adult and community education. I will examine the pedagogy that stems from the arts, with particular emphasis the work of Boal (1979), exploring the implications for the arts in general, the *Arts of the Oppressed,* as it were. These arts articulate a complementary, non-rational discourse (Newman, 2006) and as such, enable educators and students to engage with the complex relationships between power and society. I will look at the thinking that underpins the praxis, with a deeper discussion on the micro-macro integration that is essential to connect the individual and society, for working upon the world, and argue that creativity is an essential element of critical pedagogy, to equip people with the resources needed to counteract myriad forces against equality and justice.

The Practice of Community Development and Education

Amsler *et al* argue that critical pedagogy is vitally important today (Amsler *et al*, 2010). As an educator in a university as well as the community, the pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1997) is vital for imagining an alternative future of structural transformation. This work is supported by the knowledge that there is a community of like-minded people who share in the struggle in diverse contexts, such as the Popular Education Network (Crowther *et al*, 2005), which revitalises this thinking. Bourdieu (1977, p. 3) considers that *practice* is the key way out of the false conflict

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between the individual and society, and this community of practice is crucial to create the conditions for politicised educational work. The inspiration for this work comes from dialogue, reflection and interrogations, and writing an article as the practice of renewal and re-envisioning. There is still an urgent need for more dialogue on justice and equality, and on the role that activist practitioners and academics can play in working towards the aspiration (see Crowther *et al* 2005, p. 4). Community development and education are critical sites for radical work.

In the 1980s and early 90s, community development and education was framed as fundamental in addressing poverty and disadvantage (Kelleher and Whelan, 1992). The Combat Poverty Agency, established when Kennedy (1982), asserted that a third of the population lived in poverty, endorsed this. The then socially conscious Irish Government's Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (ultimately short-lived), also endorsed community development and education, with radical policies on equality and social inclusion (Connolly, 1997). Powell and Geoghegan suggested that it was a progressive manifesto of social change, in the same league as the Swedish model (2004, p. 151). However, with the change of government in 1997, the manifesto shifted from the Nordic support for universal healthcare, education, welfare and rights, to free market liberalism. This meant that the work for equality was left to the community development activists, often without support and acknowledgment.

However, the problem with community development, notwithstanding the work undertaken by radical organisations such as Community Action Network in Ireland, and the critical constructs by Marjorie Mayo (2000), Margaret Ledwith (2005), Mae Shaw, (2008) and many others, is that the concept of community development has been interpreted in myriad ways (see Shaw, 2011). It has been used, at times, as a Trojan Horse to enact the ideology of the dominant hegemony. In the UK, New Labour's Third Way embraced it as a resolution to the adversarial left versus right, while Cameron's Big Society incorporated it to coincide with the withdrawal of the state from community and the dilution of citizenship of collective, emancipatory dimensions, (Craig, *et al* 2011, p. 309). In Ireland community development has been revised and re-evaluated as primarily a service provision vehicle, not a process of empowerment, emancipation and participative democracy (Connolly, 2007, Powell and Geoghegan, 2004). This has been felt in the aftermath of the financial collapse, when the Irish Government demolished or undermined key agencies working towards equality, especially those which took critical stances towards the social policy enacted since the election in 1997, in a process similar to Klein's (2008)

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account of the *Shock Doctrine*. These included the withdrawal of funding from community development projects, from the independent Equality Authority, Community Workers Co-operative, on the one hand, and the so-called mainstreaming of similar agencies, such as the Combat Poverty Agency, and New Irish integration agencies into government departments. However, rather than a thrust towards mainstreaming the Nordic social model, these maneuvers are much more geared towards the suppression of critique of opposition. In many ways this control is facilitated by the reaction that Zizek (2009) notes: 'crisis as shock therapy' indicates that the popular response to the crisis will not necessarily result in radical emancipatory politics, but rather the reversion to the traditional conservative politics. And most of all, it is highly individualized, leading to the quite recent interest in adult and community education.

The publication of the White Paper on adult education was highly significant in raising awareness of the quite invisible work that characterised the field (Government of Ireland, 2000). While we in the adult education world see the systemic difficulties as they play out in people's lives, the state now perceives adult education as an ideal route to access hard-to-reach people, but with the intention of dealing with them, rather than transforming the system.

Critical pedagogy overview

A key ally in this project is Freire (1972), and reflection on the crisis has provided the opportunity to revisit his influence on critical pedagogy. Darder *et al* (2003, p. 3) maintain that critical pedagogy aims to organise the set of radical ideas and practices that contributes to democratic principles in schooling. They trace the first usage of the term to Giroux (1983), and he continues in his subsequent work (1992, 1988) with the project of linking critical educational practice with democratic principles in the wider society.

Darder *et al,* link developments of progressive education (Dewey, 1966, Bowles and Gintis, 1976) with critical theory (Marcuse, 1969, Habermas 1996) and the struggle against all kinds of domination, including anti-democratic forces, tyrannical governments and authoritarianism. They assert that the early 1970s were pivotal in the development of critical pedagogy, with the thinking around the role of education in changing the relationship between the school and society, the learners and educators and even the nature of education (Boal, 2000, Freire, 1972 and Illich, 1978). They hold that the concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) enables the analysis of unequal power relations that sustain the ruling classes, and is thus an

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invaluable tool in critical pedagogy. They also hold that, as a pedagogical tool, the study of ideology is able to unmask the contradictions of the mainstream cultures of schooling, and the lived experiences of people, and in providing a starting point for asking critical questions (2003, pp. 3-14). Thus, as practitioners, we can embody these critical dimensions, whether at basic community education or at doctoral level. Noddings (2011) argues that channeling all students towards the academy is self-defeating, undermining democracy, forcing people into unsuitable programmes. However, critical educators do not need to privilege higher education; this means that adult basic education is not a 'dumbed down' version of doctoral level education, but rather the foundational studies that build towards the co-creation of knowledge. Thus, regardless of eventual life choices, entrance and exit from the educational institutions, critical pedagogy equips people to analyse power, authority and democracy in any context.

Critical pedagogy had been very influential among activist educators – though not necessarily within education, *per se*– along two strands, that is, via Giroux (1988) critical pedagogy in mainstream schooling, and bell hooks (2003) feminist pedagogy. Giroux (2005) poses the critical questions on schooling, and in whose interest schooling serves. He argues that school practices need to be informed by a public philosophy that addresses the construction of ideological and institutional conditions in which the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of students becomes the defining characteristic of schooling. He asserts that critical pedagogy attempts to create new knowledge through interdisciplinary thinking, which takes the lived experience of people into account. This is fundamentally an ethical positioning, which locates itself around the categories of race, gender, class and ethnicity in these experiences. However, Giroux positions critical pedagogy in schooling, but not all education takes place within formal settings. For example, Reay (2011) argues that the perpetuation of dual strands in education, that of academic goals on the one hand, and vocational training for employment, on the other, further exacerbates the difficulties of radical educators as they work towards the different goals.

We can see the seepage from the vocational training and education philosophy into the academic models, with the resultant instrumentalist pedagogy, in spite of Reay's contention that the ruling classes would resist it in their own, private or quasi private educational provisions (2011, p. 1). Apple (1986, p. 163) maintains that, contrary to the ethical positioning of critical educators, teaching has been reduced to a technical role, in line with a training model, and this technical role is

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part of the overall decline of education as the practice of freedom. He maintains that, far from promoting critical reflection, it systemically promotes education for employment, for consumption, and, tellingly, the school as a market place. Moreover, he considers that the market/consumer dynamic pushes the individualistic trend to the logical end-point, that of the disconnection with the social and cultural contexts. This is *de facto*, a substitution with quite a sinister sleight of hand. Instead of universal education as a right for all citizens, meritocracy silences dissention. It is very difficult to generate class/race/gender consciousness with the meritocratic system, because it is framed as the fairest way in which to distribute educational resources. Thus, meritocracy as a central pillar of equality of opportunity is, in itself, perpetuating inequality, disconnected as it is from the social and cultural contexts. McLaren (1998, p. 230) suggests that critical educators need to interrogate this connection, to bring the social and cultural into the individual learning experience, to develop agentic, theorising intellectuals.

The Government of Ireland (2000) policy document positions adult and community education as the meeting point of lived experience and social categories. Critical practice is one of the characteristics of adult and community education, but it has lacked theory, a failure that Thompson noted in the 1980s and which still holds. On the other hand, Kanpol (1999) asserts that critical pedagogy is theoretically visionary, but lacks the practical tools or process to implement it: critical pedagogy has the theoretical foundation, it lacks the practice, and while adult and community education lacks the substantial theorising, it is rich in ways of working that aim for democracy and equality.

Lynch (1989) is the clearest voice in the critique of education in Ireland. She argues that the role of ideology in education is obscured and disconnected from the practice of education. Moreover, she asserts there was no evidence that critical theorists, including Freire, Giroux and hooks, have had an impact on the culture of schooling. Thus, in mainstream education, Lynch (1989) finds that critical analyses of education were few, which re-iterates the point that Crowther *et al* (2005) make, with regard to the urgent need for this discussion. Lynch (1999) acknowledges that adult and community education held a strong critical agenda particularly in practice. Bassett *et al* (1989, p. 27-28), and more recent writers, including Connolly, *et al*, (2007) contends that critical reflection for emancipation is core, from the organisation of it, to the practice in the classroom. This type of critical reflection is fundamental to feminist pedagogy.

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Feminist Pedagogies

hooks (1994) engages with Freire (1972), taking him to task for his lack of gender analysis, but acknowledging his contribution to feminist pedagogy. Lather (1992, p. 121), in foregrounding a feminist reading of post-critical pedagogy, takes the definition of pedagogy as developed by Lusted (1986, p. 3). Lusted provides a key characterization of pedagogy, which I consider congruent with my own take on it, comprising the transformation of consciousness between the educator, the learners and the knowledge they generate in the pedagogic relationship. In this tripartite process, the equality of the educators and learners is fundamental, and the knowledge co-created in this tripartite process is dynamic rather than static. Further, his characterisation is congruent with Freire's contention with regards to partiality. Learners, educators and knowledge are situated. Authenticity and transparency around these situated conditions would be essential to ensure that pedagogy moved beyond the science of methods, or the mere transmission of static knowledge. This is the heart of feminist pedagogy.

Gore and Luke (1992, p. 1), attempt to create feminist learning spaces that demystifies canonical knowledge and clarifies relations of domination which subordinate not just women, but also people of colour, minority ethnic groups, class and other signifiers of difference. hooks (1994) is deeply influenced by Freire's thinking. She argues that Freire's lack of gender awareness, a major flaw, is remedied by the pedagogy of oppressed, providing the tools to generate a feminist pedagogy. She argues that engaged pedagogy is a development of critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy, but engaged pedagogy is more demanding than either: it advocates the well-being of the students, with attention to the relationship dimensions. hooks (2003) contends that the teaching and learning relationship is essential to building community in the classroom. Engaged pedagogy became the foundation for community building, starting in the classroom. Community building, as an intended consequence of pedagogy, needs the feminist analysis, in order to ensure that it is fully imbued with human values, interrogating hidden patriarchal values. For example, Stanley and Wise (1993, p. 26) argue that feminism shows that social sciences are sexist and embedded in patriarchal ideologies. Thus, feminist pedagogies problematise critical pedagogy, with Lather (1992, p. 124) asking: *why doesn't this feel empowering?* This question was originally posed by Ellsworth (1992, p. 93), when she analyses her experience of teaching an anti-racism programme in an establishment university, and found that critical pedagogy is most abstract with regards to working with learners, leaving her and the students

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struggling. Lather (1992, p. 132), rather than set critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy in antagonistic opposition, proposes that the difficulties Ellsworth experienced and the theoretical orientation of critical pedagogy, are opportunities to develop. In the context of adult and community education in Ireland, this is vital. Radical educators need allies and the debate can continue as critical friends, rather than as opposition.

Praxis and Critical Reflection

According to Marx (2000), the purpose of philosophy is not simply to interpret the world, but rather to change it. This precept is echoed by feminists, (e.g., Oakley, 2005, Lengermann, and Niebrugge-Brantley, 2003, and Stanley and Wise, 1993). In radical adult and community education, we echo Freire's contention about naming our worlds in order to change them (1972, pp. 60-61) and he inspires us to work for social change, through praxis. He shaped the concept of *praxis* to articulate the nature of acting upon the social world, in the cycle with the reflection of conscientization. It is vital that this is not diminished to the 'critical thinking' of mental gymnastics with no reference to real world politics. Critical thinking is now commonplace, including business, nursing, and communications, but is more focussed on logic and argument, rather than addressing social justice. Newman (2006) warns that critical thinking has become removed from critical theory and scepticism, becoming domesticated – in the Freirean sense – in its ubiquitous refrain (pp. 9 – 10). Gramsci (1971, pp. 334-336) proposes a praxis which unites theory and practice so that neither is subservient to the other. This was the sense in which I see it: practice enriched theory; practice equally enriched by theory. Smith (1999) develops the concept that praxis consists of informed activism, committed to human well-being, underpinned by critical reflection honed by rigorous interrogation of our values and beliefs. Praxis links theory and practice and embeds it in thinking about practice. This ensures that the practice of adult education is the basis of the theory, rather than the other way around.

New social movements, as the 'trumpet call, as the counterweight to oppressive power, as a summons to popular action against a wide range of scourges' (Tilly and Wood, 2009, p. 3) are now recognisable as an alternative or complementary to the traditional politics, particularly action against highly resistant dominant discourses. Social movements forge the link between theory and practice, and subvert the disconnections between diverse groups and issues in society, in the search for insight into the lived, experiential realities. Further, this subversion is political

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activism in its own right, in the struggle for social justice. Praxis as a key dimension of critical pedagogy is thus located within the struggle against oppressive powers, with congruence between adult education and new social movements. The crucial social movement of the 20th century was the women's movement. It's at the forefront of the generation of new knowledge and new ways of knowing. Freire (1972, p. 81) asserts that *conscientization* emanates from reflection on the condition of existence. He emphasizes that people emerge from their enveloping reality through reflection, and develop the ability to *intervene* between their reality and their historical awareness of it. Conscientization consists of insight and understanding of the social world, facilitated by the distance created by reflection, such that the reality of experience is seen in a more objective light. This reverberates with feminist consciousness raising.

Freire is not simply proposing a method; rather he places the onus on the educator to generate knowledge, to engage in critical consciousness themselves and to avoid the tendency to remain mere technicians. Feminist pedagogy also deals with this danger, the danger of the *methods fetish.* Bartolomé contends that the response to educational underachievement is often seen as methodological rather than social, and in her experience, student educators often believe that they do not need to interrogate their own positionality, bias, beliefs and assumptions; rather, that they simply need special techniques, curriculum and materials in order to address academic underachievement, especially among people coming from marginal backgrounds, (Bartolomé, 2003, pp. 408- 409). Radical adult educators resist the pressure to develop the highly technical approach to pedagogy, to develop their role as organic intellectuals in the community, and their grasp on the ways in which their individual practice connected with the social world. Newman (2006) has no fear that methods undermine radical practice; indeed he proposes what I term 'really creative practice', echoing Thompson's 'really useful knowledge' for defiance.

Creative critical pedagogies

Newman speaks of creativity in terms of non-rational discourse. The arts can articulate a deeper, more significant 'truth' beyond what is merely accurate and factual; that metaphor, story, novels, plays, poetry, visual arts, even dreams, open up insights, almost mystical, accidental encounters with originality and creativity. Insights enable people to understand without necessarily explaining the understanding (2006, pp. 173-177). This is the key outcome of praxis: insight into

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and understanding of the human condition, and with the community to contextualise wider social constructs.

Boal continues the work of Freire with the *Theatre of the Oppressed*, holding that all theatre work is political, because all the activities of human are political and theatre is one of them. His aim is to show how theatre can be placed in the service of the oppressed, so that they self-express, using this new language; they can also discover new concepts, the poetics of the oppressed, to change the status of people from passive spectators to subject, actors, transformers of the dramatic action (1979, pp. 121-122).

Really creative pedagogy can access the abstract, non-rational world, in concrete, practical ways available to everyone. This capacity brings both optimistic and pessimistic possibilities. On the one hand, forum theatre for example, can enable people to see familiar situations in unfamiliar and disconcerting ways. On the other hand, the facilitator/educator must be very clear about their own ethos in order to ensure that community arts does not replicate the status quo, or indeed create a new order of power and control. Hussey (1999) contends that creative pedagogy poses critical questions: for example, what is the hidden curriculum in a personal development programme? Does the person need curing, redemption, saving, or liberation? He explores community arts within a matrix of colonisation. The matrix elements include domination of the physical space, the creation of dualism between the facilitator and the participants, the inhibition of the usual expression of the participants, the reward for mimicry and alienation for those who are changed through the process (pp. 47-48). That is, the kind of vision of freedom and emancipation that radical educators hold may be in the same league as the vision of ‘ civilisation ’ that colonisers hold. It is timely warning, that creative pedagogy must start where people are at, but practice must be reviewed, renewed and re-evaluated constantly. The main objective is to change people into actors, such that they don’t delegate action to someone else, including the educators (Boal, 1979, p. 122). Further, the issue of cultural identity, including class, gender and ethnicity, is central, as dimensions within the colonisation matrix suggested by Hussey. However, the thing is to expand the cultural and historical worlds in the process of learning and seeking (Freire, 2005, p. 124)

Gilligan (1999) holds that the imagination is the only way to see the world in a new way; it is the key faculty that empowers new ways of being and novel ways of understanding our worlds. Further, she maintains the critical pedagogy must be creative and that critical consciousness must also be creative consciousness. She

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fears that without imagination, dominant ideologies will prevail without restraint (p. 201). The arts are essential to feed and nurture the imagination. Newman (2007) and Boal (1994) both use stories to develop their arguments. Newman shows how he is *in* the world, as an educator, rather than an observer of others in the world, and Boal tells the story of the *Political Master Swimmer* to connect the personal with the political.

Micro-macro lifeworld

Tovey *et al* (2007), discuss the role of lifeworld in understanding how societies change. Lifeworld includes the everyday interpersonal relationships, within and outside of the family, where everyone is orientated towards mutual understanding and common ground. They hold that lifeworld explained or, at least, helped to explain the new ways of living, new takes on relationships and, particularly, the new emphasis on personal development and self-understanding which has emerged in adult and community education. That is, lifeworld as life as it is lived, is useful in the discussion on how we simultaneously live in macro and micro worlds. Habermas speaks of it as a vast web of shared understandings and assumptions that we draw on in order to make meaning of our lives and those in our community (1987, p. 131). These understandings form the solid ground that is needed before people can challenge what they hold as familiar and transform them through social and feminist analysis. Williamson (1998, p. 172) argues that all personal change is a form of learning or questioning. In his discussion on the lifeworld, concerned as it is with the minutiae of everyday, (extra-) ordinary living, the face-to-face realities of interpersonal relationships, he positions personal change in the sphere of adult learning. Thus, when ‘turbo-capitalism’, (Powell and Geoghegan, 2004) colonise the lifeworld of (extra-) ordinary people’s lives, it objectifies and reduces them to consumers, helpless in the maelstrom of market forces.

Ritzer (1979, 1981) provides a matrix that helps to analyse the macro-micro linkage, together with objectivity and subjectivity. He proposes a four-level analysis of society.

MACROSCOPIC

I. Macro-objective Examples – society, law, bureaucracy, architecture, technology, and language	II. Macro-subjective Examples – culture, norms and values

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III. Micro-objective Examples – patterns of behaviour, action and interaction.	IV. Micro-subjective Examples – perceptions, beliefs; the various facets of the social construction of reality

MICROSCOPIC

(Ritzer, 1979, 1981a, cited in Ritzer, 2003, p. 487)

These categories have inherent problems. The underlying assumption in this meaning of objectivity is that the elements, such as the law, architecture, and so on, are impartial, free from uninformed bias, while the subjective is biased, prejudiced and all too human. But feminist thinking about subjectivity questions this. Weedon defends subjectivity as the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world (1997, p. 32). That is, Weedon's (1997) take on subjectivity encompasses the macro and the micro, with the different personal levels of 'knowing': the conscious and the unconscious. This links to Ritzer's objective sphere, especially with the regard to actions and interactions: the relations that the person has with the world.

However, Ritzer's matrix is useful because he circumvents the problems inherent in dualism. Micro and macro are co-existing dimensions in that any one was not prior to the others. Thus, his four-dimension matrix enables the view that these are equally co-existing and influential, a vital element of critical creative pedagogy.

Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (2003, p. 474-475) say that women learn to perceive themselves as unequal to and less than the super-ordinate group, in the process of internalising society's norms and values, along with the way in which the self as a social actor must operate out of established knowledge (*cf.* Foucault, 1994, Lukes, 2005 on power). That is, women, with these internalised inferiorities, are different to the dominant cultural norms. Dominant groups and individuals develop their sense of identity through feedback from their peers. Women and other subordinate groups see themselves through the eyes of these dominant norms, and therefore see themselves as fundamentally inadequate. Most of all, this disjointed sense of identity denies the validity of their own experience. Davis (2006, p. 426) expands on this theme of the fragmented sense of identity, which depends on

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powers external to itself. We might resist and agonise over those very powers that dominate and subject us, and at the same time, we also depend on them for the context.

These feminist analyses of subjectivity encompass a highly complex set of elements, from the outside social norms and values, to the internalised imperatives, both conscious and unconscious. Through feminist analysis, and eventually through macro-micro integration, it is possible to develop an understanding of subjectivity as a powerful aspect of the human condition, rather than an inadequate, deficient opposite of objectivity. Further, subjectivity is holistic, imaginative and multi-faceted, including the rational and logical with the emotional and intuitive. Moreover, objectivity must be dislocated from the prime position as unqualified truth or uncontested knowledge. Feminist research promotes subjectivity to locate it alongside objectivity as valid knowledge. I regard that the research methodologies based on subjective data and analyses can capture these complex elements, and provide a meaningful account of the experience of adult and community educators. That is, adult and community education can extend its depth by virtue of feminist analyses. But there is another aspect of this issue that needs to be explored: that of structure and the way agency operates within it, while creating it simultaneously. Personal change through adult and community education could remain at the level of the superficial unless it is accompanied by the sense of self as actor, agentic within our own lives, capable of making decisions about our destinies.

Agency and Structure Continuum

Ritzer and Goodman locate the micro and macro ends of social phenomena on a continuum rather than regarding them as dichotomies. They associate the agency/structure dilemma with micro to macro continuum, with distinct differences. While agency generally refers to micro-level, individual human actors, it can also refer to (macro) collectivities that act on communally. That is, this characterisation takes into account that agency includes collective action, not just individual action. Their view of structure, similarly, locates it also within the macro and micro, with structure generally referring to large-scale, it can also refer to the micro-structures, such as interrelationships and engagement (2003, p. 508-509).

This is essential when we consider a social movement such as the feminist movement, where groups of women, acting counter-hegemonically, are consciously working towards explicit goal of liberation. As well as changing their community and society, the feminist movement went into the domestic sphere, fundamentally

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questioning personal interrelationships. This is key to the argument for creative critical pedagogy, as individual educators act collectively towards the goal of equality and social justice, through practice.

Bourdieu (1977, p. 3) considers that *practice* is the key way out of the false conflict between the individual and society, with the focus on practice as the outcome of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency. When I consider pedagogy as practice, I can see this relationship: pedagogy directly connects the content with the process of teaching it. Creative critical pedagogy transforms this relationship by focusing on critical ways of looking at the world in imaginative ways. Included in this critical mode in critical pedagogy and in the women's movement, is consciousness raising. Reflexivity is an indispensable component of consciousness raising, located within the concept of praxis, the process of action and reflection.

Bringing it all back home

So, what does this mean for the repertoire of practice? Practice is the route to negotiate between the personal and political, and critical pedagogy is the practice of a political positioning. However, we must always critique our critiques, in a continuous cycle of questioning and interrogation. For example, I constantly fear that critical pedagogy will regress into a patriarchal mind-set, with the lure of academic rhetoric, at worst. I also fear that feminist thinking will be side-lined, appropriated and re-interpreted in masculinist analyses. But I also interrogate feminist pedagogy, taking into account Lather's question: *Why does this not feel empowering?* That is, getting the balance right between challenge and affirmation. My practice was developed within women's community education and I try to keep this practice current in community development, community arts and community engagement. I also bring that learning into the academy, in my work with post-graduate students, where I hone the intellectual rigour that is vital for political work. Nevertheless, I constantly re-evaluate it, to try to ensure that the academy does not colonise the field, with the help of Hussey's matrix, in the push towards qualifications, accreditation, higher level learning, and so on.

However, I know whose side I am on. With the community of practice of PEN, the work is rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people; it is critical of status quo, and completely committed to progressive social and political change, (Crowther *et al*, 2005). Thus, the base line of my practice is saturated with feminist ideology and feminist imagination, obviously within normal limitations and inadequacies.

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We need to develop our own creativity. Newman tells of his practice when he uses the sonnet to facilitate students in their understanding of a thesis (2006, p. 187-194). I was reminded of a metaphor that occurred to me, when I was working with similar students with similar worries. These students were all working towards their own individual thesis, in a joint supervision session. We wanted to encourage sharing of resources and support, even within the individual project. I thought of my mother, who was a baker, and the way she could fling the ingredients into a basin, and turn out wonderful brown bread. She was always generous with her recipes, and would really encourage people to use the ingredients that she used, but to add their own, if they liked. But even if I used exactly the same ingredients, the same techniques, the same oven temperature, and so on, my bread would turn out differently. And this is what happens in a critical learning environment. Regardless of level, whether basic adult education or doctoral, we include our embodied positionality into our work. We share our experience, we take the same raw materials, and we create a different outcome. This is the magic of creativity.

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