

FOREWORD

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A coffee shop in Tenerife was a good place to begin reading this collection about facilitating student centered and transformative pedagogies in post-secondary and higher education. Outside on the sunny sidewalk adults with mobility needs passed by using readily available motorized scooters. Battery powered one-person and two-person machines were widely used in this resort designed for easy access. There is a significant increase in the use of such mobility scooters in 2025. Scooters are now used by people without any (obvious) physical disability or mobility needs. Young people are using them just to get around in what looks like an example of universal design. Those who supply mobility aids may not have anticipated this development but it illustrates how the best approaches to mobility supports are also viable options for people with little or no mobility challenges. Young people were having fun using an economical, user-friendly, ecological modes of transport. This collection forefronts the experiences of teachers and students, and I take my lead from them.

When I was eight, I remember going to London with my parents. It was 1955 and not long after World War II. I recall large numbers of self-propelled mechanical wheel chairs making their way through the London traffic. Many had been injured during the war. This experience left a lasting impression. The conversations with my parents were my introduction to disability studies. They also informed my attitude to war, but that's another story! John Counsell and George Klein designed mechanical and motorized wheelchairs in the 1950s with support from the National Research Council of Canada. Their electric wheelchair was mass produced in 1956 (Science Museum, 2025) and first distributed in Canada with patent-free rights. In the United States the first programs for disabled students in the 1950s and 1960s were followed with the *Federal Rehabilitation Act* (1973), and the *Individual's with Disabilities Education Act* (1975). History recounts a story of slow progress through many decades.

Hannah Arendt (2018) understood that experience and our theories are connected (Fleming, 2003).

No matter how abstract our theories may sound or how consistent our arguments may appear, there are incidents and stories behind them which at least for ourselves, contain in a nutshell the full meaning of whatever we have to say. (Arendt, 2018, p. 200)

This collection is built on autobiography, on narratives and experiences. The historical imagination is a key ingredient in exploring critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire's (1972) pedagogy always begins with experience and his critical pedagogy transforms experience. Transformative learning, most often associated with Jack Mezirow (2003) also transforms experience. However, the intention of the authors in this collection is to use transformation in order to bring about social justice and a more caring egalitarian higher education experience for students. This collection explores in experiential and theoretical ways, but primarily in practical and pedagogical ways, diversity, equality, intersectionality, universal design learning (UDL), critical

pedagogy, transformative learning, student centered and critical pedagogy and of course neoliberalism, as it best describes the context in which higher education operates today.

Before moving on from this autobiographical narrative one caveat is necessary. At a recent conference (Fleming, 2024c) I recounted an early life experience of poverty and inequality in my home town. Again, I was 5. One dark November evening after school I saw a school-friend selling newspapers on the street. He had no shoes. I continued to highlight how one's current priorities, practices and philosophies in education are connected to earlier experiences. A participant at the conference thanked me for the reminiscences, and wondered if this was nostalgia for a distant and less complicated past. This is/was no "once upon a time..." story; no trip down memory lane. It is/was a challenge to locate whatever drives our current thinking and values and priorities and pedagogies in our own autobiographies. In such moments of recall and connection, current unsettling are connected. History, experience, narrative, biography are essential ingredients of current critiques and pedagogies.

This is exactly how Alfred Schutz (1970) and C Wright Mills (1959) understood the sociological imagination when they wrote about the connection between history and our current problems or troubles (Fleming, 2016, 2024a, 2024b; Kokkos & Fleming, 2024). Each asserts that in order to understand current unsettling problems in society most fully we need to understanding how problems are experienced in individual lives.

Critical pedagogy understands that human experience has been both constructed and colonized by the social context. Some of the themes of this collection are connected in this one vision. Through working with experience in a pedagogical environment with a critical intent the real impact of (in this case) the neoliberal environment is understood clearly and this in turn informs transformative action or praxis. History, experience, theory, practice, pedagogy and narrative are all connected.

Educators are expert at naming how neoliberalism attempts to produce students as consumers, or clients or customers. Its managerialism brings management styles and values of business into the academy; learning is for sale; staff are most efficient when they are part-time; many teach on-line; and only economically useful learning is prioritized. This is a full attack on the traditional idea of a university. It is the pedagogical challenge facing those working within higher education and this is explored eloquently in this collection. The task is to study, research and focus on the steps instructors take to implement the full philosophical potential of education. This collection explores this question: What does critical pedagogy look like in the current neo-liberal environment of post-compulsory and higher education?

Too often history is the missing ingredient in unearthing the impact of neoliberalism. History is also rejected by conservative attitudes to, for example, Me Too, Black Lives Matter and most clearly in critical race theory. David Harvey's *Brief history of neoliberalism* (2005), Monbiot and Hutchinson's (2024) *The invisible doctrine* as well as Nancy Fraser's *Cannibal capitalism* (2022) support an historical approach to understanding neoliberalism which is hugely more destructive than what many educators state. Neoliberalism "has inflicted devastating harms on both human society and the living planet" (Monbiot & Hutchinson, 2024, p. 5) from which "we may not recover" (p. 5). A critical pedagogy will bring a more

thorough analysis to bear on higher education if the focus is also informed by history (a critical history) as understood by C Wright Mills.

For Mills, sociological imagination means studying the historical context of social events in terms of the meaning and impact on an individual's inner life (history). Sociological imagination takes into account "how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions" (Mills, 1959, p. 5). It connects individual experiences with broader structures of society. This connecting is important for transforming experience; it connects individual problems, experiences, narratives and dilemmas with broader social issues.

In *The Sociological Imagination*, Mills (1959), while outlining the impact that society has on individuals, asserts that "neither the life of the individual - nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both" (Mills, 1959, p. 3). Biography is lived in society. Social science must include "both troubles and [social] issues, biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations" (Mills, 1959, p. 226). This makes our thinking, our sociology, "more sprightly" (1959, p. 18); the "imagination spurred" (p. 211) with a "playful mind" (p. 211); and a fierce drive to make sense of the world (p. 211). This will "release the imagination" (p. 215). Mills (1959, p. 186) describes the work of social scientists:

What he ought to do for the individual is to turn personal troubles and concerns into social issues and problems open to reason - his aim is to help the individual become a self-educating man [sic], who only then would be reasonable and free. What he ought to do for the society is to combat all those forces which are destroying genuine publics and creating a mass society...his aim is to help build and to strengthen self-cultivating publics.

This approach to thinking is not lost on the contributors to this collection. Alfred Schutz is the better-known originator of the sociological imagination. He is the most important sociological support for Mezirow's TL (Mezirow, 2003) who uses concepts borrowed from Schutz such as typification, bracketing, lifeworld, role taking and multiple realities. Schutz understood the *lifeworld* as the taken-for-granted horizon within which we understand the world (Schutz, 1970). It is subject to a "sociopathological form of *internal colonization*" by the system (Habermas, 1987, p. 305) and is the pathology of modernity (Murphy & Fleming, 2010). *Typifications* (Schutz, 1967) act as form of *recipe knowledge* or handy unquestioned assumptions that make sense - until they don't. The challenge of critical pedagogy is rise above and transcend typifications that are our socially given meanings acting as a "stock of knowledge at hand", "biographically determined" and "sedimented" (Schutz, 1967, p. 247). For Schutz these form a "socially approved set of rules and recipes for dealing with reality" (1967, p. 34) and are the "sediment of previous experiences" (1967, p. 33). Critical pedagogy is not easy, Transformation is not done without a great deal of training our thinking and experiences.

More importantly, Schutz (1945) theory of sociological imagination has a well-developed concept of *dialectic thinking* that involves a dynamic relationship between individual actors and social structures; between objective reality and subjective experience; between structure

and agency (Fleming, 2024c). Not only are personal problems connected to broader social issues but are connected in a particular way - dialectically. Without taking this dialectical connection between the personal and the social seriously we misunderstand both individual problems and the social context. This makes critical pedagogy more complex. Not only is the personal political (as the successful feminist mantra acclaims) but the political is personal. The neoliberal context in which equality, pedagogy, teaching, learning operate are connected dialectically. An archaeology of these connections is the raw material of Freire's pedagogy and transformative learning.

Oskar Negt (Fleming, 2024d), an adult educator closely allied to the Frankfurt School has also progressed pedagogies about the sociological imagination. His first book (Negt, 1971), *Sociological imagination and exemplary learning*, provoked considerable discussion in European workers' education circles. Working with Alexander Kluge (Kluge & Negt, 2014) they again assert that individual experience cannot be properly understood unless it is seen as in dialectical relationship with the social environment. In this way, critical pedagogy becomes more complex as without the dialectical relationship each is misconstrued. The social and the personal require integration in our thinking.

Habermas (2008, p. 14) had previously addressed this forcibly when he wrote that the "public domain of the jointly inhabited interior of our lifeworld is at once inside and outside". Even in the most personal moments our consciousness thrives on the "impulses it receives from the cultural network of public, symbolically expressed, and intersubjectively shared categories, thoughts and meanings" (Habermas, 2008, p. 15). It is difficult to imagine a stronger statement than this of the false dichotomy between individual and society; between the experience of students and teachers and the neoliberal superstructure. Critical pedagogy requires an ability to imagine the world in this dialectically connected way.

Uniquely, among critical theorists Negt (and Kluge) present teaching materials and instructional methods as part of their pedagogy of the sociological imagination. Negt was aware that imagination is also compromised by neoliberalism which subverts people's inner resources. They borrow the concept of "*imploitation*" from Bertolt Brecht to describe this process and quoting him, Kluge and Negt (2014, p. 445) state how exploitation operates in the inner world. "Since the object of exploitation is put inside them, they are, so to speak, victims of *imploitation*" (Negt & Kluge, 2016, p. 35). This may hinder understanding the real conscious experience of oppression and how systems undermine imagination. They reclaim imagination calling it the "productive force of the brain" (Negt & Kluge, 2016, p. 37) that has been neglected and "barricaded into the ghettos of the arts, dreaming, and the 'delicate feelings'" (p. 36). In typical expressive language they see imagination as the "vagabond, the unemployed member of the intellectual faculties" (Negt & Kluge, 2016, p. 37). According to Kluge and Negt an obstacle is erected for emancipatory practices when this productive force of the brain is undermined (imploited) so that it cannot obey its own laws as to how it operates. The imagination cannot imagine. An important tool is lost for the "self-emancipation..." (Negt & Kluge, 2016, p. 37). The arts are seen as such important (re)resources for critical pedagogy.

But all is not lost. Negt introduces the imaginatively original concept of *obstinacy* to describe the extraordinary capacities of human nature to not only survive exploitation but to have the potential to become wide awake (Kluge, & Negt, 2014). Maybe a critical pedagogy is possible! Both Mills (1959, p. 197) and Schutz (1967, p. 212, 1970, p. 72) already associated the sociological imagination with being “awake”. The struggle for recognition, the resilience of learners and the drive for transformative learning are multiple ways of expressing this obstinacy and a deeply engrained posture and possibility of becoming wide awake (Fleming, 2024a).

Negt’s critical pedagogy involves, thinking independently, dialectically, systemically, with sociological imagination, utilizing critical reflection. Adult learning is a process of analyzing and bringing into awareness the historical process of how learners’ interests are defined for them and how relationships of power are experienced, so that they can learn about their roles in society. Experience is the most important thing that “workers actually produce” (Negt & Kluge, 2016, p. xlviii). I suggest that students in university, acting as learners, produce experience. When we then understand how experience is influenced by social structures, the possibility arises of what Schutz calls breaking through the inertia of convention when people “are enabled to explain their ‘shocks’ and reach beyond” (Greene, 1973, p. 39). Such a pedagogy, “offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light” (Greene, 1973, p. 133). The sociological imagination re-imagines the lived experiences of learners and the submerged possibilities that emerge through learning. It is imagination - sociological imagination grounded in history - that provides the firm foundation for transformation. Negt’s education goes beyond views of education that emphasize personal growth leading to fitting into the social structures of the current world (Negt & Kluge, 2016). Using literature, science fiction, satire, fairy-tales, film, documentaries and a range of innovative materials they support the critical and sociological imaginations of learners.

These ideas provide a framework for an historical and material interpretation of subjectivity as produced by capitalist (neoliberal) systems as well as a source for a new more just and caring social order – this demands sociological imagination. All our allies (Mills, Schutz, Freire and Negt) are aware that social change is difficult, involving what Kluge (2017) calls in his book title a slow and powerful *Drilling through hard boards*.

Against this the tidal wave of neoliberal capitalism and its imperatives to focus on instrumentally and economically useful knowledge and qualifications rises and makes progress a serious challenge. Teaching, learning, management, access policies and practices, implementing UDL are reconstructed as system imperatives engage in what is accurately called the colonization of higher education. This is why this collection is important. The argument must be made again and again, and not just in the 1970s and 1980s but now in the 2020s too. Though it is difficult to identify future challenges – they will emerge. This is the work that must be done now in order that the next challenge will be understood fully and responded to with serious and critical pedagogies. Whether it is climate change, refugees, the rise of the far right or Donald Trump or another, we can be sure there will be another crisis. This collection places us in a powerful position to decipher current situations and with insight and imagination think of next steps, both big and small, that face education as it too evolves.

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