

Blue Collar Pedagogues: Democracy, “Vocational” Schooling and Antonio Gramsci’s Organic Intellectual

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Abstract

This article argues for the utility of a public pedagogy centered in a Gramscian notion of the organic intellectual. Implications for technical and career-based schooling are explored. Critical pedagogy, more specifically, a border-crossing-civic literacy, is presented as a model for the transformation of vocational education. A special focus is placed upon the work of Michael Apple and Henry Giroux and their emphasis upon the interrelationship between education, culture and contested publics.

Introduction: Pragmatism, Vocationalism and Critical Education

Academic freedom is a well accepted aspect of university tenure and the university’s status as an independent knowledge producing community. However, within the college system the relationship between institutional function and critical thought is much less clear. The granting of collegiate degrees, the increasing prevalence of inter-institutional transfers and the vocational nature of professional training makes distinguishing the functions of higher educational institutions increasingly problematic (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Skolnik, 2003, pp. 9, 11). Moreover, given the social, symbolic and cultural capital associated with colleges and their close affiliation with working and middle classes, the conventional vocational model makes it increasingly difficult to outline the precise relationship between vocational training and civic education (Coben, 1998; Santoro, 2005; Lakes 2005; Lewis, 1998; Pinto, 2007; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Rehm, 1989, p. 111; Tarrant & Tarrant, 2004).

In contrast to a narrow technical conception of education and the familiar tripartite division of educational institutions into public, college and university systems, there are significant practical and theoretical insights to be offered by an educative model which incorporates “technical” knowledge into a broader public framework (Jarvis, 2008; Rehm, 1989; Lewis, 1998; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1996; Kincheloe 2004). Primarily, this means creating a form of critical vocational literacy in opposition to the “functional and socially reproductive [educative] model” which has conventionally mediated learning in the collegiate context (Pinto, 2007, p. 193). Such a model is intended to address the serious issues surrounding vocationalism’s relationship to class and race-based forms of inequality, as well as the difficulties it poses for broader efforts to resuscitate critical thinking skills among the broader populace and within post-secondary institutions (Rehm, 1989, p. 111).

In this regards, some impetus for a critical vocational model can be found in Marxist Antonio Gramsci's conception of the organic intellectual, both in its original formulations, and as part of critical pedagogy's contemporary notions of "public" and "transformative" intellectuals (Giroux, 1999; Apple 2003, 2004; McLaren, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003). A key unifying theme – particularly as presented within the work of Michael Apple and Henry Giroux – is the notion of democratic citizenship which provides a means of relating knowledge to the hegemonic mechanisms of cultural and economic reproduction. For universities and colleges alike, then, civic education provides the basis for recognizing the importance of critical publics and the exigencies of a critical, civically-minded pragmatism (Kincheloe, 2004).

Rather than taking solace in critical pedagogy's newfound status as a discipline finding increasing acceptance within the Academy, the present paper seeks to undertake a critical assessment of the field's theoretical inheritance as a means of determining the types of collaborative projects consistent with its democratic, egalitarian principles. Among the key presumptions which inform such a position are: i) the idea that contemporary democracy is in a state of deep, protracted crisis; ii) the belief that corporate culture has infused authoritarian principles throughout the entire educational spectrum, at the expense of the civic conception of education as a public good; and, iii) the contemporary militarization and commodification of the public sphere and popular culture which requires that those committed to "deep democracy" pose concrete strategies as a means of resuscitating the conventional linkage between an educated citizenry and robust democracy.

If autonomy is derived from communal forms of organization, then, what kinds of solidarity are possible for intellectuals seeking to forge critical alliances across institutions, work places and learning cultures? To what extent has vocational education become a force for conformity and constraint as opposed to being "about treating individuals as adults and educating them so that they may mature and develop as responsible persons playing their full part in the world" (Jarvis, 2008, p. 5). In light of such challenges, the present paper undertakes a tentative exploration of possibilities for enhancing the viability of contemporary democracy through cross-cultural and inter-institutional allegiances as a means of reconceptualizing education as a public good. A central aim is to foster collaborative, integrative approaches to the perennial problem of dealing with the discomfiting reality of "two worlds of schooling, partly overlapping, one preparing for college and the other for jobs" as we attempt to forge a more pragmatic and principled conception of education which is skeptical of arbitrary distinctions between the pragmatic and the political (Goodlad in Rehm, 1989, p. 109).

Antonio Gramsci: Hegemony and the Organic Intellectual

Since knowledge is inherently social, a responsive comprehensive pedagogy requires that we consider the broader question of the integration of "technical control" and "intersubjective communication" in the areas of knowledge formation, application and transmission (Habermas, 1973, p. 8). In this vein, the work of Antonio Gramsci (1891 –

1937) is often taken up by those advocating a more democratic, far reaching critique of capital (Apple, 2003; 2004; Giroux, 1999; 2001; 2005; Kolakowski, 2005, p. 963).

From Sardinia, Gramsci was a journalist, writer and former leader of the Italian Communist Party (Kolakowski, 2005, pp. 964, 967, 965). Imprisoned by Mussolini's fascists in 1926, Gramsci spent the rest of his life completing a now famous series of posthumously published essays and fragments. Writing at the time of Italian modernization, Gramsci argued that seemingly progressive educational reforms of the Italian government were actually being used to marginalize the working classes and peasantry by denying them "rigorous" intellectual training (Giroux, 1999). Gramsci saw that rather than alleviating poverty, education (apart from enhancing mobility for the select few) served hegemonic aims. As such, schooling served contradictory functions since it supported hegemonic class structures, and yet, the intellectual training it provided was necessary to realize the working classes' revolutionary potential (Holub, 1992, p. 154).

Refining common place distinctions among elements of the intelligentsia, Gramsci argued that there were two broad categories of intellectuals, namely: i) traditional intellectuals such as members of the clergy, scholars and teachers who served the status quo by allowing education to reproduce the existing social structures; and, ii) organic intellectuals whom every class produces "naturally" and who serves its interests. While these categories are fluid and interdependent, for Gramsci they provided some means of conceptualizing and understanding the role of the intelligentsia in the creation and contestation of hegemony (Coben, 1998, p. 214). As one of the first modern thinkers to appreciate the pedagogical implications of mass culture (Coben, 1998, p. 213; Gramsci, 1971; Giroux, 1999; Holub, 1992), Gramsci believed that the invaluable part of the latter type of intellectual activity was that it was fundamentally public in nature and thus was not confined to the parameters of existing *bourgeois* institutions. In contrast, Gramsci argued that members of the conventional intelligentsia, "mediate between the owners of the means of production and those who do not own and organize the means of production, those who sell their labour power to the owners" (Holub, 1992, pp. 164, 165). Since the state's power was in large part premised upon the consent of the governed, social change could be effected by public re-education through the collective efforts of a vanguard of reformist intellectuals.¹

¹ "What are the "maximum" limits of acceptance of the term "intellectual"? Can one find a unitary criterion to characterize equally all the diverse and disparate activities of intellectuals and to distinguish these at the same time and in an essential way from the activities of other social groupings? The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations. Indeed the worker or proletarian, for example, is not specifically characterized by his manual or instrumental work, but by performing this work in specific conditions and in specific social relations (apart from the consideration that purely physical labour does not exist and that even Taylor's phrase of "trained gorilla" is a metaphor to indicate a limit in a certain direction: in any physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists a minimum of technical qualification, that is, a minimum of creative intellectual activity.) And we have already observed that the entrepreneur, by virtue of his very function, must have to some degree a certain number of qualifications of an intellectual

Thus, for Gramsci, understanding the ongoing “war of position” between oppressor and oppressed within society requires a critical examination of the ideological tendencies inherent in the commonsensical (Coben, 1998, p. 213). Within this process of cultural re-entrenchment, the function of the intellectual is to help the oppressed understand their own exploitative class positioning (Morgan, 1996; Kolakowski, 2005, p. 984). Accordingly, Gramsci argued, we should be reluctant to parse the practical and theoretical since “there is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9). Worker and industrialist alike, then, represent the need for a critical synthesis of technical knowledge and a facility with social organization (Gramsci, 1971, p. 3).² For Gramsci, the modernization of Italian society held the implicit promise of a new type of organic intellectual: a “critical specialist [who] participates in specialized forms of production, distribution and exchange, while simultaneously purviewing the place of this form of production and distribution in a system of relations” (Holub, 1992, p. 168).

Consistent with such theoretical eclecticism, a key organizing principle of Gramsci’s categorization is his belief that it is an error to look for “the criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore, the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 8). Despite the limited functions educational institutions purport to perform, their actual operation, Gramsci maintains, is inevitably historical and related to the surrounding structures of civil and political society (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9; Kolakowski, 2005, p. 969; Holub, 1992).

nature although his part in society is determined not by these, but by the general social relations which specifically characterize the position of the entrepreneur within industry.

All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.” (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 8, 9)

² “Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. The capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organizers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc. It should be noted that the entrepreneur himself represents a higher level of social elaboration, already characterized by a certain directive [*dirigente*] and technical (i.e. intellectual) capacity: he must have a certain technical capacity, not only in the limited sphere of his activity and initiative but in other spheres as well, at least in those which are closest to economic production. He must be an organizer of masses of men; he must be an organizer of the “confidence” of investors in his business, of the customers for his product, etc. If not all entrepreneurs, at least an *élite* amongst them must have the capacity to be an organizer of society in general, including all its complex organism of services, right up to the state organism, because of the need to create the conditions most favourable to the expansion of their own class; or at the least they must possess the capacity to choose the deputies (specialized employees) to whom to entrust this activity of organizing the general system of relationships external to the business itself. It can be observed that the “organic” intellectuals which every new class creates alongside itself and elaborates in the course of its development, are for the most part “specializations” of partial aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type which the new class has brought into prominence.” (Gramsci, 1971, p.3)

However, these structures evolve against the process of social struggle: namely, a kind of frontal war whereby competing hegemonic blocs vie for position. For Gramsci, although it uses both repressive and ideological means, hegemony's primary mode of operation is pedagogical (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 10, 12; Giroux, 1999, p 2; Holub, 1992, pp. 155, 156). Thus, socialist revolution must likewise proceed through an educative movement whereby the prevailing *doxa* of *bourgeois* society is replaced by a revolutionary ethos. Moving away from a cruder economic determinism, Gramsci emphasizes the importance of historical agency by which the oppressed contest the ideological mechanisms of cultural hegemony (Holub, 1992, p. 157).

Consequently, Gramsci believed that any pedagogy was inevitably political since it invariably effects the reproduction of capital and ideology or the revolutionary aims of the proletariat. Moreover, his unorthodox reading of Marx promotes a theory of power which is productive rather than repressive and which underscores the role of schooling in eroding individual autonomy through the creation of a false political consensus. As we shall see, far from being relegated to theoretical obscurity, these ideas play a formative influence upon critical pedagogy's engagements with official knowledge and popular culture.

Critical Pedagogy: Michael Apple, Henry Giroux & Gramsci's Organic Intellectual

At the risk of overgeneralizing, in many respects critical pedagogy represents a synthesis of Marxist critique and progressive democratic thought. As a discipline concerned with both egalitarian and emancipatory ideals, critical pedagogy holds that rather than being tailored specifically to the demands of the workplace, education should promote the critical skills which are required for learners to become active, reflective, political participants (Tarrant & Tarrant, 2004, p. 115). Towards such an end contemporary progressive pedagogies have explored such issues as the ideological influence of mass media, the mass disparities of modern globalization and the commodification of popular culture.

In particular, such themes resonate within the work of Henry Giroux, a leading figure in contemporary critical pedagogy. A prolific author, Giroux, has been a forceful, critic of the authoritarian legacy of conservative, corporate influences in public education. More specifically he has integrated the insights of cultural studies and critical theory in developing a comprehensive theory of the pedagogical importance of culture (Doyle & Singh, 2006, pp. 1, 13, 34, 39).

Though remarkably eclectic in his influences, Giroux characterizes Gramsci as an important theoretical resource for those interested in "defending education as a public good and cultural pedagogy as central to any discourse of radical politics" (Giroux, 1999, p. 2). In particular, by emphasizing what he terms the "politics of culture", Giroux emphasizes Gramsci's belief that "every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educational relationship" (Gramsci in Giroux, 1999, p. 3). As a result, in the hands of Giroux, Gramsci's ideas regarding hegemony and the public intellectual become important tools for analyzing the specific mechanisms by which the right has

outmaneuvered the left in inaugurating a “new authoritarianism” (Giroux, 2006). For Giroux, Gramsci’s concept of ideological hegemony requires an educative response which emphasizes the inter-relationship between culture and knowledge – power as a means of cultivating a critical, civic consciousness (Giroux, 2001, p. 197).

More specifically, from the standpoint of a transgressive critical pedagogy, Giroux argues that Gramsci’s work has “broaden[ed] the conditions for the production of knowledge and the range of sites through which learning for self determination can occur” (Giroux, 1999, p. 18). Giroux believes that such an emphasis is important since “it legitimates the call for progressives to create their own intellectuals and counter-public spheres both within and outside of traditional sites of learning as part of a broader effort to expand the sources of resistance and the dynamics of democratic struggle” (Giroux, 1999, p. 18).³

For Giroux, Gramsci’s focus on how ideology becomes embedded in commonsensical beliefs provides a means of decoding the historical, cultural and structural operations of power (Giroux, 2005, p. 163; Giroux, 2001, pp. 67, 151). However, more importantly, Giroux stresses Gramsci’s emphasis upon the fact that the success of hegemony itself is contingent upon the continued operation of competing, sometimes loosely constituted, historical blocs. Thus, unlike classical Marxism, Gramsci’s theory emphasizes the need to develop broad counter - hegemonic alliances as a means of fermenting a socialist reorganization of culture:

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony redefines the structuring principles that maintain relations between dominant and subordinate classes in the advanced capitalist societies. For Gramsci, the exercise of control by the ruling classes is characterized less by the excessive use of officially sanctioned force than it is through what he calls the struggle for hegemonic leadership. Hegemonic leadership refers to the struggle to win the consent of subordinated groups to the existing social order. In substituting hegemonic struggle for the concept of domination, Gramsci points to the complex ways in which consent is organized as part of an active pedagogical process on the terrain of everyday life. In Gramsci’s view such a process must work and rework the cultural and ideological terrain of subordinate groups in order to legitimate the interests and authority of the ruling bloc. (Giroux, 2005, p. 163)

³ “Gramsci’s work does more than challenge the reduction of intellectuals to corporate clerks; it also broadens the meaning and role of intellectuals in terms of their social functions and individual capabilities. Changes in the mass media, modes of production, and socioeconomic needs of the state have enlarged the role that intellectuals play in exercising authority, producing knowledge, and securing consent. For Gramsci, intellectuals play a crucial political and pedagogical role in integrating thought and action for subaltern groups as part of a broader project to assert the primacy of political education far beyond the limited circle of party hacks or university academics. Moreover, Gramsci is not just suggesting that marginal groups generate their own intellectuals; he is also broadening the conditions for the production of knowledge and the range of sites through which learning for self determination can occur. This is an important issue because it legitimates the call for progressives to create their own intellectuals and counter-public spheres both within and outside of traditional sites of learning as part of a broader effort to expand the sources of resistance and the dynamics of democratic struggle” (Giroux, 1999, p. 18)

Not surprisingly, the aforementioned link between hegemonic power and popular culture, becomes a formative influence upon Giroux's emancipatory, "border crossing", pedagogy. According to Giroux, "Gramsci...makes clear that pedagogy is the outcome of struggles over both the relations of meaning and institutional relations of power..." (Giroux, 1999, p. 14). Building on Marxist notions of ideology and hegemony, as well as Freirean *conscientization*, Giroux notes the importance of inter-disciplinary, transformative intellectuals in the struggle to contest and reclaim popular culture. Borrowing the insights of cultural studies, Giroux urges critical scholars to recognize that "by connecting the role of the intellectual to the formation of democratic public cultures educators can work to provide ethical and political referents for cultural workers who inhabit sites as diverse as the arts, religious institutions, schools, media, the workplace, and other spheres" (Giroux, 1998, p. 56).

In light of culture's educative function, Giroux questions the wisdom of limiting transformative pedagogies to conventional institutional spaces, given the interdependence of knowledge and power and the limitations of an educational vision enthralled with a simple "performative" legitimacy (Lyotard, 1988). Drawing on the fields of cultural studies and critical theory, Giroux emphasizes the way critical pedagogy has become a comprehensive critique of modern institutional cultural practices and capital's propensity to continually reinvent its own ideological positioning. In doing so, he, like other critical pedagogues, focuses on a "civics ...[informed by an] appreciation of the diverse ways economic, political, and social forces shape lives and structure unequal power relations" (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1996, p 72).

Though Giroux does take up many modernist libertarian themes, he is careful to note that, while early progressive educators have offered many important insights regarding the importance of civic education, they did not anticipate the extent of mass culture's infiltration of everyday life, a relationship, which, for Giroux becomes increasingly important "as conservative policies move away from a politics of social investment to one of social containment [and] state services are hollowed out and reduced to their more repressive functions" (Giroux, 1999, p. 3). As a result, critical educators, Giroux insists, must endorse a form of "cultural literacy" which tries to help students understand the myriad intersections of knowledge and power within popular culture (Doyle & Singh, 2006). Unlike its conventional counterparts, for Giroux, a critical cultural literacy "provides the capacities, knowledge, skills, and social relations through which individuals recognize themselves as social and political agents" (Giroux in Doyle & Singh, 2006, p. 13).

However, Giroux's approach is far from a simplistic acknowledgment of the contemporary relevance and pedagogical influence of mass culture. As part of a broader attempt to refine our practical ability to code and decode the complex workings of power within culture, Giroux differentiates between technical, hermeneutic and critical emancipatory forms of rationality and suggests that an effective response to ideological hegemony requires a form of citizenship training rooted in the latter (Giroux, 2001, p. 176). Unlike competing forms of literacy, such critical literacies are an indispensable means of exposing the adverse influence of oppressive ideological and social structures

(Giroux, 2001). In contrast to schooling which is “distinct from education in that it takes place within institutions which serve the interests of the state”, such forms of critical literacy are fundamentally public and transformative in nature (Giroux, 2001, p. 241).

Applying Giroux’s analysis of education and culture, then, we see that vocational training must recognize the need for reflexivity as organic intellectuals of all stripes examine the ways in which authoritarian aims have come to dominate vocational training across the full range of contemporary schooling cultures. Giroux reminds us that viewing technical knowledge as scientific or value neutral ignores the function such training serves in ideological dissemination and social reproduction. As such, for Giroux, critical pedagogy must look towards the model of the transformative organic intellectual as well as the specific intellectual described by Foucault, who is keenly aware of the particular exigencies of particular lives, local histories and truth regimes (Coben, 1998, p. 215). Rather than being entirely dismissive of practical knowledge, Giroux reworks a more nuanced view of technical knowledge which he inherits from Gramsci:

For Gramsci, the learning of skills, discipline and rigor were not in and of themselves valuable. They were meaningful when seen as part of a broader project and performative politics, one that embraced authority in the service of social change, and culture as the terrain in which such authority became both the object of autocritique and the basis for social analysis and struggle. (Giroux, 1999, p. 15)

Confronting such realities, for Giroux—as for Gramsci— requires recognizing that critical literacy is a capacity which cuts across class lines as it fosters egalitarian and dynamic democratic cultures (Giroux, 2001). According to Giroux this requires that “pedagogical approaches do more than make learning context specific; they [need] to challenge the content of the established canon as well as point to the need to expand the range of cultural texts that inform what counts as ‘really useful knowledge’” (Giroux, 1998, p. 49). Thus, the distinction between technical and liberal education, as well as the notion that civic education should be excluded from practical educational outcomes, risks depoliticizing education and represents a substantial setback in the struggle to ensure the continued viability of “strong” democracy.

Despite his theoretical acuity, however, Giroux has been subject to criticism for his lack of attention to concrete classroom contexts; his difficult language; and, his failure to integrate esoteric critique and real life teaching practice (Gore, 1993). Although he is clear about Gramsci’s contributions to our understanding of a public critical pedagogy, Giroux does not emphasize the capacity of his pedagogy to provide a model for crossing borders—not only between disciplines—but also, across diverse (e.g., collegiate and professional) educational settings. Thus, despite the enormous influence of Giroux and his invaluable contribution to a more sophisticated understanding of popular culture, we might begin to ponder the relationship of culture to specific—sometimes neglected—sites of schooling. Taking Giroux and his analysis of Gramsci to inform our discussion, how can transformative intellectuals contextualize their own participation in the knowledge

and socially reproductive practices which occur within “pragmatic”, technically orientated educational institutions?

In many respects, the work of Michael Apple, writing from a neo Marxist perspective, helps us to reformulate such questions in relation to the complex politics of official knowledge. If Giroux’s idea of culture as a text provides a basis for border crossing both within and between collegiate and university contexts, Apple’s work provides a much needed emphasis upon the ways in which cultural practices play out within specific historical, political, and socio-economic settings. Although not forgetting the broader pedagogical implications of culture, Apple acknowledges the need to examine the structural dynamics of public spaces as he attempts to define the tacit and formal limits of liberal ideals such as freedom and equality within democratic communities.

Primarily, Apple’s analysis is rooted in the idea of hegemony, which emphasizes the importance of political and economic factors without falling back into a reductive base-superstructure model. For Apple, examining an institution requires careful examination of both the micro-and macro-levels as its local effects and broader socio-economic function are assessed and compared. Apple maintains that Marxist critique requires careful critical analysis and “empirical” investigation alike, given that the alliances and outcomes fostered by ideology and capital are often unexpected, and, upon the surface, contradictory. What Apple terms a relational analysis, then, is sensitive to cultural hegemony but recognizes that hegemonic relationships are embodied in specific economic and political practices:

This process of explanation can be accomplished in two ways. One can explain the conditions of existence of X within an institution, focusing 'internally' on what supports or contradicts action in the immediate environment in which this X is found. Or, as I would like to do....one can focus on the relationship between this X and the 'external' modes of production and ideological and economic forces in which X is embedded. My focus, hence, will be structural. It will seek to uncover the connections between the creation and imputation of such things as certain kinds of deviance in schools and the unequal economic and cultural conditions that might give a number of the reasons for the existence of these kinds of conditions in these institutions. This is not to deny the importance of internalistic appraisals of schooling; nor is it to assume that structural analysis of school life....can explain everything. In fact, micro-social descriptions of our commonsense practices are essential for those who want to take a macroeconomic perspective, if only to make us remember what is brought out in the work of Gramsci and Williams. As they continually remind us, ideological hegemony, as a part of the actual workings of control, is not something one sees only on the level of macro-social behaviour and economic relations; nor is it something that resides merely at the top of our heads, so to speak. Instead, hegemony is constituted by our very day to day practices. It is our whole assemblage of commonsense meanings and actions that make up the social world as we know it, a world in which the

internal curricular, teaching, and evaluative characteristics of educational institutions partake. (Apple, 1995, pp. 36, 37)"

Through his emphasis upon the political role of educational institutions in effecting hegemony, Apple's work provides a comprehensive account of formal and hidden curricula and their respective influence upon social reproduction and individual mobility. In some sense, this requires us to distinguish between "substantive" knowledge, curricular practices and the state power which serves to legitimize select canons of cultural practice. Refining our understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge, Apple argues that the politics of official knowledge (that is, what knowledge is selected as being important or worthwhile and how it is taught) is fraught with social implications as educational institutions mediate human capital through their productive and allocative functions (Apple, 1995, p. 39).

Primarily, though, understanding official knowledge involves a consideration of global capital and its relation to the state as a complex site of struggle that forms and expands through conflict (McLaren, 2005; Foucault, 1980, p. 125; Pozo, 2007). Thus, within the context of the contemporary conservative modernization, a key role for the state is the "socialization of costs and the privatization of profits" (Apple, 1995, p. 49). This means that calls to keep schooling focused on the "practical" aspects of knowledge ignores the significant social investments made by the state in the very institutional structures which powerful hegemonic interests seem intent upon depoliticizing. Insisting on the efficiency of markets ignores the complex ways in which state power has been used to promote conservative values, and to discipline competing emancipatory ideals. In light of such structural realities, Apple cautions that dialogue alone cannot ensure effective praxis since dialogue in the absence of ideological critique can lead to hegemonic retrenchment. As he notes, "when people are (sometimes rightly) dissatisfied both with the ways the state is organized and the roles it establishes for them, the manner in which they interpret their dissatisfaction is often based on the ideologies which circulate most powerfully in a society" (Apple, 2003, p. 13).

More pertinent, perhaps, from a vocational perspective, is Apple's position that technical knowledge reflects the ways in which schooling functions to effect social stratification and to meet the demands of capital. Specifically, Apple contends that – all pretences of equality aside – schooling is indifferent to the distribution of technical knowledge provided that it is able to meet the demands of capital. However, this function must also be seen within the larger context of the relationship between capital, labour and a managerial class of technocrats and experts. According to Apple, this sometimes creates tension between competing ideological and economic functions since "the school does not only respond to the 'needs of capital', but must also preserve its own legitimacy to its other clientele" (Apple, 1995, p. 50). Indeed, understanding this tension requires assessing the "specific conjunctures of interests between the requirements of industry in the production of cultural capital and the interests of a large portion of the new petty bourgeoisie in their own mobility" (Apple, 1995, p. 50).

For Apple, the stratification of knowledge into liberal and vocational streams, then, ensures a concomitant hierarchical social ordering. And yet, because the educational system presents itself as meritocratic, schooling is seen as fair, and impartial even as students internalize the individualistic, competitive values vital to exploitative capitalist cultures (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1996, p. 81). Predominantly, then, the ideological aim of the conservative modernization is dependent upon a protracted political struggle aimed at “redefining the borders between public and private.....[and] demonstrating how a people’s common sense can be shifted in conservative directions during a time of economic and ideological crisis” (Apple in Zipin, 2003, p. 114).

Thus, given that the enacted curriculum reinforces the orthodox view that relations between capital and workers are premised on the principle of equality of opportunity, “official knowledge” tends not to value critical thought with its emphasis upon social solidarity, and struggle. Instead, within officially funded or sanctioned “educative” environments, the teacher’s role is cast—not as a facilitator of critical dialogue—but, as a transmitter of discrete technical knowledge, as teaching at all levels becomes increasingly intensified and deskilled. Rather than narrowly confining the role of educators to existing institutions, then, Apple argues that it is necessary to create allegiances between schools and communities, right and left, as a means of counteracting the powerful forces of neoliberal, neo conservatism, authoritarian populism, and their respective cadres of technical or managerial professionals (Zipin, 2003, pp. 112, 113).

In light of such ideological influences, Apple, like Gramsci and Giroux, maintains that, even when portrayed as exclusively technical, neutral and pragmatic, knowledge remains inherently political. This includes not only its allocative function, but also in the ways in which it tends to reinforce existing class structures by “helping maintain a distinction that lies at the heart of the social division of labor—that between mental and manual labour” (Apple, 1995, p. 46).⁴ This process is not confined to schools but continues within the parameters of vocational working places where technical knowledge serves to preempt the possibility of developing more egalitarian, democratic workplaces. Accordingly, the bifurcation of technical and administrative knowledge serves primarily to create “experts of various sorts at all stages of the production process help[ing] to legitimize the subordination of labour to capital, by making it appear natural that workers are incapable of organizing production themselves” (Wright in Apple, 1995, p. 47).⁵

⁴ “The focus on the production of technical knowledge allows us to see how schools help maintain a distinction that lies at the heart of the social division of labor—that between mental and manual labour. Those students who are identified as being able to produce—through their later surplus labor—important quantities of technical/administrative knowledge are increasingly ‘placed’ on the mental side of this dichotomy. This is done internally by the natural workings out of the curricular and guidance program of the school, a trajectory that allows surplus labour to be extracted from them later on in the form of service and/or manual labour.” (Apple, 1995, p. 46)

⁵ “In Wright’s words ‘experts of various sorts at all stages of the production process help to legitimize the subordination of labour to capital, by making it appear natural that workers are incapable of organizing production themselves. In essence, because of the extensive division between mental and manual labour, to a large extent workers are ultimately excluded from the knowledge necessary for both understanding and directing important aspects of the production process. The corporate accumulation and control of technical

The production and dissemination of technical knowledge, then, are closely related to the historical and economic forces of production and the fractured hegemonic alliances whose weaknesses and tactics can be glimpsed through their contradictory, often contingent, nature (Zipin, 2003). As a result, Apple maintains that “just as the economy is organized not for distribution but for accumulation, so too are schools in a complex and often contradictory way, roughly organized, not for the widespread distribution of cultural commodities, but, for their production and accumulation by a corporate class and the new petty bourgeoisie” (Apple, 1995, p. 52). Thus, a key strategy of an emancipatory pedagogy is to reveal the ways in which dominant cultural constructs emerge from and reinforce structural inequalities within society. Towards such an end, Apple follows Giroux in taking up the theme of the organic intellectual—which, as an organizing principle, has the potential to “open...up an entire terrain of questions concerning the ways in which struggles over social meanings are connected to the structures of inequality in society” (Apple, 2003, p. 6).⁶ Thus, Apple believes that critical pedagogy must renew its efforts to create concrete strategies of intervention (Apple, 2003; Zipin, 2003) through “critical literacy...which enables the growth of genuine understandings and control of all the spheres of social life in which we participate” (Apple in Pinto, 2007, p. 206).

However, Gramsci’s influence on Apple does not end with his concern with hegemony or his focus upon the relationship between ideology and the state. More recently, Apple credits Gramsci’s idea of the subaltern as the inspiration for his “attempt to trace encounters between elite and subaltern groups in the field of education with the intent of making more visible possibilities for transformative action” (Apple, 2006, p. 6). This consists of analyzing the prevailing social *doxa* to discern the ideological roots of specific class interests as a means of occasioning collaborative action by organic intellectuals (Apple, 2006, p.5). Significantly, such a critique troubles prevalent assumptions regarding the validity of conventional representative discourses which determine the “complex questions about who speaks and how they speak, who remains silent or is silenced, and who speaks for whom” (Apple, 2006, p. 8).

Such questions are unavoidable in an era in which technical education and vocationalism are increasingly emphasized, while an increasing number of employers seem wary about the relevance of “education and skill requirements” (Lewis, 1997, p. 481). Indeed, skepticism about conventional vocationalism garners further support in light of the fact

knowledge is tied in intimately with this division, a division that, as we have seen, is critical to the accumulation and control of economic capital as well” (Apple 1995, p. 47)

⁶ “The concept of hegemony...refers to the ability of dominant groups in society to establish the ‘common sense’ or the *doxa* of a society, the ‘fund of self-evident description of societal reality that normally go without saying; (Fraser, 1997, p. 153). Hegemony is both discursive and political. It includes the power to establish legitimate definitions of social needs and authoritative definitions of social situations. It involves the power to define what counts as legitimate areas of agreement and disagreement. And it points to the ability of dominant groups to shape which political agendas are made public and are to be discussed as possible. As a concept it has enabled us to ask how alliances are formed and what effects such as alliances have. It has opened up an entire terrain of questions concerning the ways in which struggles over social meanings are connected to the structures of inequality in society” (Apple, 2003, p. 6)

that, presently within America, “only about one in ten positions has been designed to require highly skilled workers” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1996, p. 80). In such an environment, critical thought, far from being superfluous, represents an important tool for the worker to discern the true nature of his or her own interests in a competitive, often exploitative, workplace (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1996).

For Apple, then, subaltern politics requires a reconsideration of our class and ideological investments given the ever present temptation of ideological imposition. Within the context of contemporary vocationalism this requires re-examining the conventional hierarchical relationship between university and collegiate institutions, as well as, the related distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge. For Apple, the contradictory ideological and socio-economic functions of educational institutions include “accumulation by producing both agents for a hierarchical labour market and the cultural capital of technical/administrative knowledge” along with the need to “legitimate ideologies of inequality and class mobility, and make themselves be seen positively by as many classes and class segments as possible” (Apple, 1998, pp. 52, 53).

More generally, perhaps, Apple’s neo Marxism requires us to consider the public importance of an expanded role for civic education in an era confronted with the economic realities of “extended adolescence” and “life-long learning” (Jarvis, 2008, pp. 5, 6). Drawing distinctions between secondary and postsecondary education in terms of their “voluntariness” (Lewis, 1997, p. 486) means little, once the coercive nature of globalism and contemporary corporate capitalism are understood – along with the types of false consciousness created by hegemonic institutions. Neither jobs nor the institutions which purport to educate students “about work” (Lewis, 1997), then, are creatures of accident, but, always represent some set of normative assumptions about the way wealth and opportunities to produce and share wealth, are distributed. In the words of Jarvis (2008), much of contemporary vocational education reflects the naked truth that “capitalism needs workers and consumers who can accept in an unquestioning manner its ideology and so it colonized the education and learning processes – both institutional and non institutional” (Jarvis, 2008, p. 5). Thus, it would seem appropriate that those most directly affected by such choices should be given the opportunity to examine the allocation of educational resources and the systemic influences which make such allocations appear to be in their collective interests.

Within Apple’s work, consequently, we see the Gramscian themes of hegemony and the organic intellectual being tied explicitly to the issue of knowledge production and political representation – both in relation to the state and civil society. And yet, despite his practice orientated pragmatism, at times Apple seems to lack the broad, often subtle cultural sense of the contemporary which, in Giroux, is so preeminent. What I am suggesting, then, is not a narrow partisan preference of one scholar over the other, but, rather that both contemporary theorists offer uniquely, and profound insights when read against each other. More specifically, from a dialogical, pragmatic perspective, Apple’s materialistic, historical analysis offers an instructive counter point to Giroux’s uncanny understanding of the seemingly innocuous, but politically charged, aspects of contemporary culture.

In some ways the aims of this paper have been predominantly political as critical pedagogues seek new ways of finding common grounds in the hopes of furthering an egalitarian, democratic social consensus. Looking at the work of Apple and Giroux collectively then, we see that critical pedagogy has taken up and redefined the relationship between intellectual activity, the personal and the political, in a number of complex, intersecting ways. Most notably, these include: i) its constructivist epistemology which situates technical knowledge within the context of intensely political, individual meaning-making practices; ii) the challenges it poses to reification of expert knowledge such that teachers as well as students become researchers and knowledge producers (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998); iii) its questioning of conventional schooling's rigid dichotomy between the personal and private spheres and a reluctance to treat personal experience as a pedagogical text; iv) its emphasis on the inter-relationship between power and knowledge which challenges methodological claims to neutrality or objectivity; v) and, finally, its notion of critical consciousness which sees conventional logic and technical rationality as closed to the possibility of the value-ladenness of knowledge and the social nature of human learning.

Taking our cue from critical pedagogy's diverse intellectual background, then, it is important that critical scholars remain wary of dismissing the need for practical or technical knowledge, despite the close relationship such epistemic practices have with capitalist modes of exchange and production. As Agnello and Lucey (2008) note in their recent critical study of economics education, many technical discourses present powerful opportunities for social change, meaning that to ignore their importance would be to forgo the benefit of tools needed to effect a far-reaching egalitarianism (Agnello & Lucey, 2008). More fundamentally, an openness to practical knowledge can and should be paired with the critical recognition that, "knowledge of skills and concepts lack meaning unless the learner can connect them with his or her background or environment or exercise agency" (Agnello & Lucey, 2008, p. 120).

Taking Gramsci's tactical syncretism as a model, the task that remains for critical pedagogy is to apply the theoretical tools provided by Apple and Giroux within concrete (and sometimes neglected) vocational contexts as we attempt to proliferate democratic ideals and critical consciousness. It is, as Zipin (2003) notes, an undertaking which requires us to reconstruct our own conceptions of who or what a critical educator is as the conception of organic intellectual, "circulates new ways of understanding our identities so as to radically alter who we think we are and how our major institutions are to respond" (Apple in Zipin, 2003, p. 113)

This means that, as responsible scholars we must consider how such pragmatic vocational discourses relate to schooling's propensity to "divert attention from the ownership and control of international, national and local assets, justifying inequality based on ownership as an earned right based on merit" (Agnello & Lucey, 2008, p. 124). In conventional academic settings this is perhaps an educational project that cannot be completed without substantial risk and considerable difficulty—but it is one, which is, for all that, necessitated by civic principles and the survival of vital democratic interests alike (Flecha, 2008).

Conclusion: Towards an Integrative Critical Vocationalism

How do educators formulate a democratic, pragmatic model of “higher” education in an era when the university is in crisis and colleges appear burdened by an increasingly narrow, regimented conception of their educative function? (Pinto, 2007; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005). Despite widespread assumptions there is no clear assurance that the availability of technical skills will enhance employment opportunities for such forms of employment within the relevant market nor that educational institutions can be sufficiently responsive to a rapidly changing workforce (Lewis, 1997; Rehm, 1989; Seinberg & Kincheloe, 1996). Following critical vocationalists such as Rehm (1989), we would emphasize that the parameters of work and social life are often not so readily parsed as many proponents of “practical” education would like to assume. Instead, along with other democratic pragmatists, we would insist upon recognizing that work is not simply an economic activity but one with significant existential, cultural and political aspects (Kovacs in Rehm, 1989, p. 117).⁷

The fact that work is both an individual pursuit and a social endeavor, then, raises complex questions about the inter-relationship between education, liberty and equality. In large part, answering this challenge requires us to recognize that a responsive pedagogy, in addition to fulfilling the dictates of particular institutions, must remain attuned to a society’s broader civic and cultural life. As noted by Stone (2004), “higher education is defined in relation to the culture that houses it, and, if it is to survive as a useful institution it has to be supple enough to shape itself to an evolving culture” (Stone, 2004). Increasingly, this means meeting the demands of students in a way which furthers the interests of both particular communities and democracy.

The nature of critical pedagogy’s conception of the intellectual forces us to confront our own positioning as scholars within bourgeois educational institutions as we recognize that, before, perhaps, we can claim that our work is “radical”, we must consider our own complicity in the commodification of knowledge and the proliferation of bourgeois values (Flecha, 2008). Taking this juncture as our starting point, the concept of the organic intellectual forces us to confront critical pedagogy’s position in relation to the university’s autonomy and its ongoing evolution in relation to sometimes conflicting interests of democracy and capital.⁸

⁷ “Work is neither a blind mechanical process nor a form of mere business as a means of distraction from existential boredom and despair; it is a way of self-creation and a mode of forming and transforming the world and nature. The individual is being socialized and educated through the performance of work; he [or she] learns discipline and acquires the regard for the will and needs of others. The nature of work is collaboration” (Kovacs in Rehm, 1989, p. 117).

⁸ It also raises a number of related and challenging questions. How are critical scholars organic intellectuals and what might such a status entail? To what degree can we expect post secondary educational institutions and/or individual teachers to deal with critical themes in the curriculum when many students may see such approaches as no more than an unwarranted—and unwanted—ideological imposition? Can we rely solely on a utilitarian justification our advocacy on behalf of critical perspectives or some other broader conception of civic duty? What does a conception of civic responsibility look like outside of the bounds of its conventional liberal underpinnings? Clearly these are difficult questions which require further analysis.

However, in defence of critical pedagogy's contemporary formulations, perhaps being "troubled" is not necessarily synonymous with ignorance or indecision but is a necessary state of tension if we are to move beyond the seemingly immovable and self evident nature of hegemonic knowledge. Thus, to view education as centered in the demands of either the state or the "consumer" (Skolnik, 1998, p. 643), ignores the need to balance competing interests in a manner which is pragmatic as well as civically responsive. Far from being a panacea, in many ways a critical pedagogical framework offers a means of supplementing vocational education with a much needed reflexivity just as university education can benefit from a less dichotomized conception of the relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge.

In addition to placing an emphasis upon functional literacy standards and scientific, or technical, knowledge, pragmatic education must also recognize the utility of a critical civic ethic (Pinto & Hyslop Margison, 2007). No longer can we see civic education as something which is the exclusive purview of university education or that can be relegated to the tattered margins of once autonomous bourgeois publics (Giroux, 2001, 2005, 2006; Kincheloe, 2004). From the standpoint of critical pedagogy, then, the project of reclaiming and interrogating "pragmatic" educational space must become a central focus of teacher education and critical citizenship alike (Kincheloe, 2004; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1996). Rather than naturalizing class stratification, which is in part a result of schooling, critical pedagogy seeks to dispel the myth of ideological neutrality as organic intellectuals confront the primary texts of power and culture.

Contrary to existing vocational forms of education centered in an ostensible epistemic neutrality, Gramsci's claim that "all men are intellectuals" requires us to re-evaluate the conventional categorization of postsecondary education. Thus, those concerned with the plight of contemporary democracy, must move beyond an outmoded conception of vocational education which sees the role of colleges as simply one of promoting "work-specific and performance-orientated" forms of training (Tarrant & Tarrant, 2004, p. 112; Skolnik, 2003). The assumption that it is possible to promote social mobility through pragmatic knowledge reinforces a false dichotomy between polity and economy which has become detrimental to contemporary democracy's continued viability (Pozo, 2007). This means that the cultural dimensions of hegemony require educators to appreciate the unique strategic positioning of vocational education as a space which can counteract the growing disjunction between narrow economic interests and an overarching conception of the public good.

As Giroux and Apple remind us, the public intellectual is someone who believes in the importance of critical dialogue as a necessary precondition to democratic life. This subject role is not tied to any particular institutional context except to say that it reflects the need for institutions which engender public discourse. Indeed, such values emphasizing the need for empathy, dialogue, freedom of choice and the respect of persons are inherently attuned to what Bell Hooks () calls "education as the practice of freedom" – or Rorty describes as a solidarity "grounded" in contingency. These are perspectives, then, which implicitly relate the issue of work to "questions of power

sharing and social justice” as opposed to a corporate model in which “the short term becomes the only future worth planning for” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1996, p. 82).

While positivists or modernists might see such an educational project as an ideological imposition, education which is decontextualized and insular itself represents “a[n] abstract form of estrangement that has real concrete effects on the lives of working people” (McLaren, 2005, p. 145). In contrast, critical pedagogues open to the transformative possibilities of vocationalism recognize that knowledge is diverse and socially constructed since “the education knowledge base involves the recognition of different types of knowledges....including but not limited to empirical, experiential, normative, critical ontological, and reflective-synthetic domains” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 52). Given this epistemological diversity and the dynamic nature of social needs, critical approaches provide a timely reminder that commodified educational institutions lack the ability to transmit critical literacy practices and democratic values as a means of coordinating competing social interests (Dewey, 1944).

Despite critical pedagogy’s aversion to positivism, effective counter – hegemonic movements require engagement with pragmatic, technical forms of knowledge as the discipline begins to see the potential inherent in transformational work within educational spaces situated outside of public schools and universities. In this vein, a critical vocationalism recognizes the need for a concerted response to the increasing inequality of globalism, which, for today’s youth, have garnered only spiraling debt and waning employment prospects (Lakes, 1998; Stone, 2004). As the work of Giroux and Apple suggests, through a reformulated exploration of the particular cultural, political and embodied aspects of vocation an imaginative critical pedagogy can provide the context for the contestation of corporatized commodified cultures and educational institutions. Without abandoning either pragmatic instruction or critical knowledge, an engaged critical vocationalism allows students to explore their respective selves and communities, thereby permitting the development of the type of situated critical knowledge which Dewey found to be so instrumental to the creation and maintenance of a healthy, vigorous democracy. Following the traditions of progressive and radical democracy in an era of “rationalization” within secondary education, then, (Skolnik, 1987), critical pedagogy lends us the audacity to propose a vision of education as a site of contestation and liberation that the organic intellectual strives, in solidarity, and with hopeful longing, to achieve.

FIGURE A: TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE, HEGEMONY & THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL

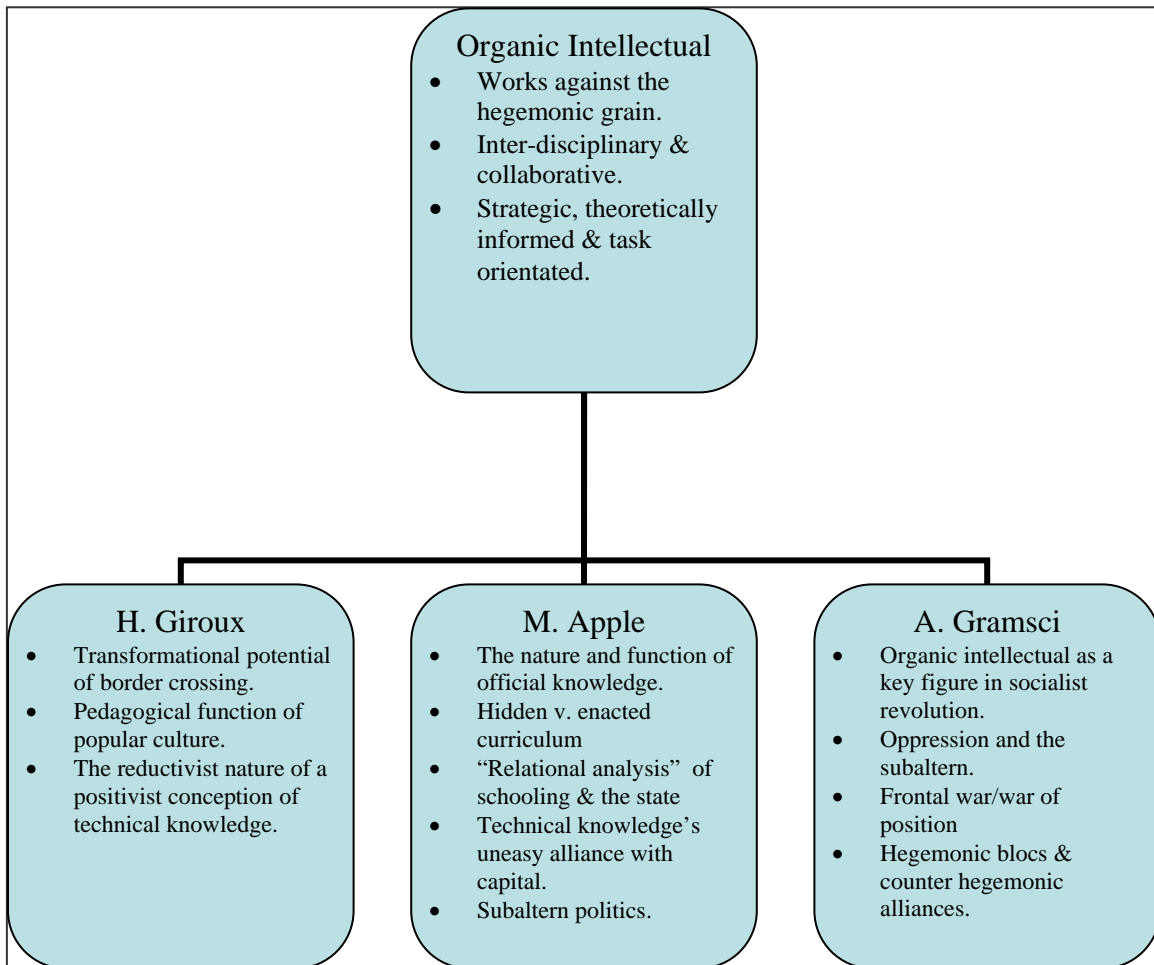
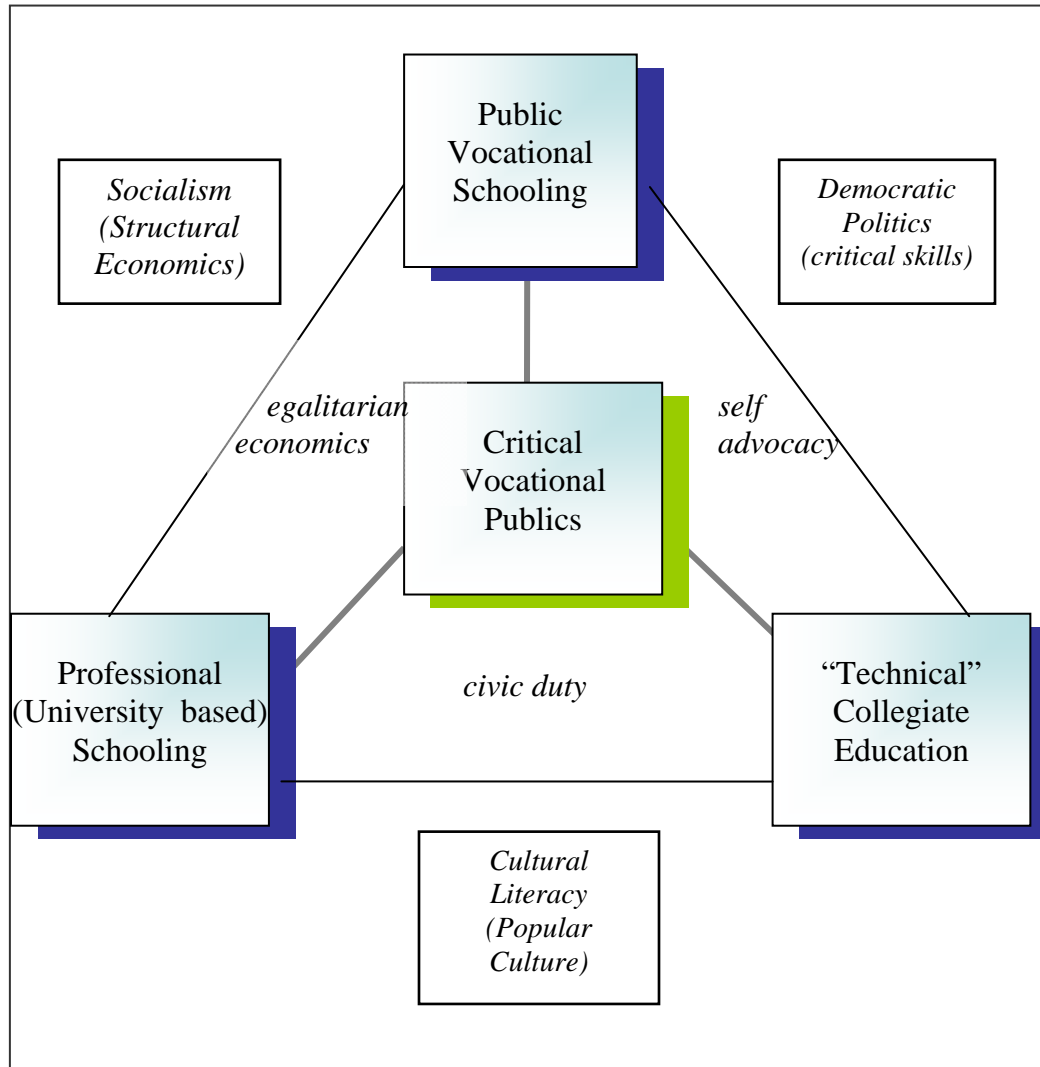


FIGURE B: ENVISIONING CRITICAL VOCATIONAL PUBLICS



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