

During the HH#1 'Critical Urgencies' workshop on 20 October, 2020, Ayesha Ghanchi offered an introduction to three important critical pedagogues. Below is an edited summary of her introduction.

John Dewey (1859–1952)

American pragmatist, educator, educational theorist

John Dewey was an American pragmatist philosopher and also an educator. Rather than understanding knowledge as factual and fixed, according to Dewey knowledge is there to be found, and therefore learning should be experiential. As we are social beings, knowledges are there to be co-constructed, rather than based on any true essence, and in this regard he worked against the logic of his time and preceded social constructivism. What are our experiences? Which events have influenced our lives? And how do these influence our learning experiences? 'Critical consciousness' implies a continuous relationship with our environment. How can we learn from the local, cultural, systemic context that we find ourselves in?

In *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* (1933), Dewey introduced the term 'metacognition': the ability to reflect on how we create the content of what we are thinking. In his book *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey addressed the importance of not removing art from everyday experience: he argued against canonising works of art and believed in the unity of theory and practice. For Dewey, critical pedagogy was crucial for a functioning democracy. He believed that if we enact democracy in the classroom, there won't be any new world wars. Influenced by Dewey, the Italian educator Loris Malaguzzi developed a pedagogy after WWII to combat fascism in the area of Reggio Emilia in Italy. In the Reggio approach, pedagogy is based on what the children want to learn and the environment is a 'third teacher'.

Paulo Freire (1921–1997)

Brazilian educator, philosopher

Paulo Freire departed from his own experiences of growing up in poverty and hunger, which made him reflect on the relationship between social class and (the lack of access to) knowledge. He developed methods for popular education, aiming to empower marginalised groups of people including illiterate peasants, but was banned from Brazil after the 1964 military coup. While in exile in Chile he published *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), in which he developed his vision for pedagogy; education should be 'problem-posing', helping students to understand how "they exist in the world" and how to "see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of

transformation". For him this meant investigating the needs of students and what they find meaningful through 'dialogical action' and dialogue, in order to establish 'generative themes', allowing for education "as the practice of freedom".

Freire opposed the 'student/teacher' opposition, and instead urged that both parties need to be simultaneously teachers and students. He also argued against the 'banking' concept of education, "in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor", as a practice of projecting ignorance onto the other. Instead, he urged for an understanding of the world through understanding power structures and everyday mundane events. Similar to the notion of 'metacognition', Freire emphasised the importance of a 'critical consciousness' (conscientização): understanding how we come to know, understanding politics and social oppression, and understanding how we are situated by our 'limit situation' – our concrete experiences in the world. To move beyond understanding, we cannot just become overwhelmed by knowledge; we need to identify what needs to be changed and how to become agentic to then go and change it.

bell hooks (1952–)

American author, academic, activist

bell hooks is an intersectional feminist academic and educator. She considered Paulo Freire as her mentor. She critically challenged his patriarchal tendencies while at the same time using his pedagogical paradigms to push the limits of feminist education. Besides using the term 'critical pedagogy', she uses 'radical pedagogy' to include feminist perspectives. In her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994) she draws on her own educational experiences. Having been taught both in an all-Black school and later in a desegregated school, hooks analyses what liberatory education – as opposed to education that reinforces domination – should mean. She reflects on class, race, and gender relations in the classroom, and how education often fails and alienates Black students and students of colour in particular. She urges for gaining a critical awareness of the dominant power structures, especially of white patriarchal power in the educational establishment, in order to understand that education is never neutral. She argues that "no gap exists between theory and practice" when theorising is used to analyse daily lived experiences and struggles, which can contribute "to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation". For hooks, excitement and pleasure in the classroom are fundamental to establishing a classroom community. Everyone's presence needs to be acknowledged and everyone needs to contribute: "Excitement is generated through collective effort". Another requirement for an engaged pedagogy is to work against the body/mind split fundamental to western education, in order to be 'whole' in the classroom.