La Guerra: Struggles in Living and Teaching Critical Pedagogy

Pruyn, Marc. (1999). Discourse Wars in Gotham West: A Latino Immigrant Urban Tale of Resistance and Agency. Boulder: Westview. 214 pp. Hardcover, $65.00. ISBN 0-8133-9067-2.

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Marc: How do adults best learn to read and write?

Gloria: The Sir puts words on the board, explains how to read them, and reviews them.

Marc: What is the role of the teacher, and of the student, in this process?

Juan: The teacher has to say what is right and what is wrong. The student has to pay attention.
(Pruyn, 1999, p. 103-104)

As my eyes scan across this short interchange between students in an adult literacy class, and a participant-researcher, my mind immediately begins to make all-too-familiar connections. The views articulated by Latina/o working class immigrant adult students in Central Los Angeles bear striking resemblance to the words of parents in a working-class inner-city neighborhood half-way across the world in Belfast, Northern Ireland. For many of these Northern Irish working-class parents, keen for their children to succeed in standardized schooling practices, my role as an elementary school teacher closely resembled Juan’s articulation of how a teacher should instruct. In my case, young children were the students, but the act was still one of passively drinking from the reservoir of academic and moral knowledge that I encapsulated in my role as teacher. That’s simply the way school operated! Geography, culture and language, may define and discriminate these two unique settings, yet both the undergirding and explicit messages are remarkably trans-national—‘learning’ and ‘schooling’ occupy fixed and uncontestable positions.

These positions are clear manifestations of a transmission model of schooling, predicated on Fordist/industrialist approaches that have conceived of schools and classrooms as factory assembly lines. My
role as teacher/automaton is to construct my students' minds at various work stations/centers, and fill them with 'sanctioned', 'true' facts/parts that must be unquestioningly received. Quality control management (QCM), in the form of regurgitation of the 'correct' facts through standards control, can then occur at numerous points along the assembly line, so that only the most rigorous students can be shaped into high quality products, whilst all others become labeled as inferior quality or 'damaged goods'. If we so choose, the 'factory assembly line' analogy can be continued to its ultimate destructive end. Alternatively, we can choose to conceive and practice teaching and learning through another, potentially more powerful paradigm. One conceptual and pedagogical attempt to harness the power of this paradigm constitutes the central thread of Discourse Wars in Gotham West.

**Historical and Philosophical Influences on Discourse Wars**

A wide corpus of literature has sought to problematize traditional conceptions of schooling. One of its central themes seeks to make more fluid and ambiguous the roles of students and teachers in the process of schooling, positioning both roles in more critical and questioning stances (McLaren, 1995, 1997; Giroux, 1994, 1997; Darder, 1995; May, 1999; Apple, 1993). The central criticalist orientation of this research, builds on mid-twentieth century neo-marxist writings of Horkheimer (1947), Adorno (1950), and Marcuse (1964) at the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, and later, on Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogical work in Brazil.

The late Paulo Freire's well-documented critique of the transmission or 'banking' model of schooling stands as one of the most strident assaults on the fixed and uncontestable notions of teaching and learning. In short, Freire notes that students and teachers are often positioned as diametric opposites, with students representing vacuous "containers...receptacles to be filled by the teacher" (p.53). The more competent the teacher is, the better she/he can fill the receptacles. "The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are" (p.53). Freire exposes the shortcomings and oppressive nature of such teaching and learning, exhorting us, rather, to engage in liberatory pedagogies that reject the uncritical transmission or transferal of information, and to encourage both teacher and students' mediation of knowledge through political and cultural lenses.

It is within this liberatory, criticalist tradition, that Pruyn's work in Gotham-West is conceived and conducted. Pruyn introduces his work by noting the influence of criticalist research on his own "pedagogy, philosophy and political/cultural groundings" (p. 3). His review of the extant corpus of literature in critical pedagogy spawn the questions and concerns that guide his work with students in an adult
Spanish literacy class in Central Los Angeles, which he poignantly likens to Gotham-West. Pruyn sets out to explore how pedagogy inspired by critical theorists can be successfully implemented in classrooms and other educational settings; whether it truly invites teachers and students to be more self-reflective; and fundamentally, does it encourage students to act in ways that run counter to 'banking' notions of teaching and learning? Hence, at the core of his exploration, lies the question: "what forms of social practice foster, or inhibit, the development of critical student agency in the classroom?" (p. 7).

**Critical Student Agency**

Pruyn defines the concept of agency as "[a] purposeful action taken by an individual, or group of individuals, in order to bring about change" (p. 4). Agency is explored from three converging yet distinct theoretical perspectives – first, from Gramscian notions of hegemony and counter-hegemony; second, from Foucauldian poststructuralist perspectives on subject positioning; and third, from Freirean critical pedagogical theory. In brief, Pruyn uses these three perspectives in the following ways.

Gramsci's (1971) primary contribution to the notion of agency is expressed in his elaboration of 'hegemony' and 'counter-hegemony'. Gramsci sees hegemony as the means by which those with power in society can impose their bourgeois ideologies and values over those in subordinate social classes. Schools, he contends, are one of the many cultural tools of the bourgeoisie, used to reinforce the existing social and economic order by presenting bourgeois norms and cultural practices as 'inviolable' and 'natural'. Other cultural institutions such as the press, political parties, and the church further strengthen and sanction these 'normal' practices. As a consequence, a cultural and ideological domination ensues that appears to operate by 'consent' within the framework of a seeming civil society. When 'consent' is questioned or made problematic, subtle forms of state-sanctioned coercion come into play to reinstate 'appropriate' and 'correct' ways of operating, so that the existing status quo may be perpetuated.

In comprehending how hegemony functions, Gramsci proposes that we endeavor to find oppositional ways of acting so that a counter-hegemony can be established. In those sites where bourgeois cultural norms and values are propagated, Gramsci asserts that a transformation can take place through working class intellectuals and their sympathizers questioning and challenging hegemonic values. An alternative way of viewing society and its cultural and political institutions can be encouraged, which will eventually supplant existing hegemonic practices. Within school sites, radical teachers and students can become the 'organic intellectuals' in Gramsci's process of transformation, acting as the central conduits for the emergence of a counter-
vision of schooling. Pruyn contends that it is in Gramsci's notions of counter-hegemony that *agency* can begin to develop.

The second major strand of Pruyn's notion of *agency* emanates from Foucauldian and poststructuralist theories. Pruyn astutely notes the significant contributions of poststructuralism to our understanding of how *agency* is discursively formed, yet paradoxically, "it [poststructuralist theory] represents a major theoretical challenge to the whole notion of *agency*" (p. 21. italics mine).

Poststructuralist theories highlight the nature of our 'split, multiple selves' that are created and produced as we position ourselves in differing discursive situations. Foucault, who might claim not to be a poststructuralist himself, but whose views resemble positions taken by poststructuralists, asserts that "power is everywhere local" (1977). Thus, in one discursive situation, a social subject may have power to act as an oppressor, whilst in another be powerless and thus oppressed. This ambiguity and fluidity thus make problematic the whole notion of *agency*. Pruyn notes, “when there is not a specifically pinpointable and unified “enemy” to struggle against….how do we resist, or act agentively? And against whom?” (p. 22). Given this dilemma, Foucault would posit that a resistance of oppressive social structures would be futile. Rather, it might be more rewarding to operate outside of existing structures. In essence, social subjects can then refuse to accept how others are positioning them as social subjects.

Pruyn admits to the problematic nature of the poststructuralist view of the diffusion of power and its concomitant forms of oppression and domination. It is particularly challenging when there is a desire and a need for individual and collective social action.

If identity, self, class, gender and race are no longer central issues in a project for social justice, because forms of oppression are hyper-localized, is there any possibility for individual or group agency? (p. 24).

For Pruyn, a “discourse of possibility and hope” (McLaren, 1994) does exist. If poststructuralist theories afford us descriptions of how processes of *domination* occur in discursive situations, Pruyn contends that it is possible to theorize how processes of *liberation* from oppression might also occur through discursive means. If the positioning of self and others in discursive practices is produced to dominate and oppress, how might this positioning help produce social subjects with liberatory perspectives? It is indeed these liberatory outlooks that Pruyn identifies as *agentive* or endowed with *agency*. Although he recognizes the central role of discourse in how individuals understand their lived experiences, Pruyn rejects the poststructuralist deterministic positioning of social subjects through discourse. (The inherent tensions in
Foucauldian post-structuralist notions of power and Pruyn’s notions of agency will be discussed at a later stage).

To counteract this predeterminism, Pruyn finds conceptual solace in a third theoretical perspective, namely Freirean-inspired critical pedagogy, which he posits as a vehicle for critical agency both within and outside of schools. Freire views education as inherently a political project (Giroux, 1988). Its end goal is to permit men and women not only to read and understand their lived experiences, but also to transform those lived experiences and the relationships that are constituted with broader society. Similar to Gramscian notions of “organic intellectuals”, Freire (1970) sees teachers as critical practitioners who can facilitate the development of a critical consciousness or “conscientization” in their students. In the development of a critical consciousness in both teachers and students, educational processes can thus begin to take a stand against oppression and hegemonic practices. For Pruyn, “the development of a critical student identity toward the world could then lead to critical student agency” (p. 31, italics mine).

**A Slice of Gotham-West in the 1990s:**

**Sociopolitical Context of Discourse Wars**

The adult literacy classes that form the setting for this book are an integral component of Siempre Adelante, “Always Forward”, a community-based organization that serves a predominantly Latina/o political and economic refugee community in Central Los Angeles. The remit of the organization is wide-ranging to include legal advice on immigration, residency and citizenship issues, the collection and distribution of food for poor neighborhood families, and the provision of ESL and Spanish literacy classes to interested adults in the community. Funding for the organization comes from multiple sources that include fund-raising events and foundation grants. The literacy classes supported by Siempre Adelante are an economic and social necessity given the pervasive existence of illiteracy in Los Angeles, and in particular, among the Latina/o population. Pruyn details the “grim state of affairs for the 6.25 million Latina/o children in public schools in the United States, a majority of whom live in California” (p.63). Citing factors such as disproportionately high rates of school dropout, nearly twelve percent of Latinas/os over twenty-five years old never finishing fifth grade, and fewer than ten percent of those over twenty-five receiving a bachelor’s degree, the adult literacy classes of the community-based organization become an important lifeline for many of the refugees living in the neighborhood.

The organization’s work has assumed heightened significance in Gotham-West, California, given the sociopolitical backdrop during the 1990s of Propositions 187, 209 and 227, all of which have dispro-
portionately effected the Latina/o population in adverse ways. The adult literacy classes have thus become a central arm of how the organization can combine the fostering of literacy skills with the raising of a critical political consciousness among its community, so that a just struggle can ensue against the hegemonic values and practices associated with this triumvirate of oppressive laws. This local and statewide sociopolitical context provides an influential and unsettling backdrop to Pruyn’s research.

Sharing the Lived Experiences of some of the Inhabitants of Gotham-West

Pruyn’s study focused on the pedagogical and social practices of three teachers, Guillermo Linares, Daisy Contreras and Nadia Monterey, and their one group of consecutively shared students. The ethnographic data at the center of Discourse Wars was collected over a thirteen-month period, and included field notes and video-tape evidence of classroom sessions, audio-taped interviews with students, teachers, literacy directors and coordinators, and the examination of archival documents such as project funding proposals, training documents, student workbooks and internal program reviews. Pruyn believed these multiple data sources would provide windows into the micro-, mid-range and macro-discursive practices of this Freirean-oriented literacy project.

From discourse analysis theory, Pruyn drew upon an IRE (initiation-response-evaluation) framework to analyze the teacher-student discourse that ensued in the classroom. Under traditional applications of this framework, teacher-student interactions were rigid, with the teacher asking a question, the student responding with a brief right or wrong answer, and the teacher evaluating the accuracy of the student’s response. Indeed, the author notes that using traditional IRE patterns in classroom interactions, tend to propagate the very forms of ‘banking’ teaching and learning against which Freire so adamantly railed. On a broad, generic level of analysis, Pruyn highlighted that IRE “was a very common and consistent discourse pattern across the practice of all three teachers” (p. 75). However, its usage was sufficiently fluid to produce variable manifestations of teacher and student positionings within the adult literacy class sessions.

The teachers either positioned students as active social subjects (discursively placing students in roles where they could co-construct classroom knowledge with the teacher and their classmates) or attempted to position them as the “objects” of instruction (following a hegemonic/banking/recitation model with students as receivers of knowledge). My set of codes evolved as this former set of teacher
acts was labeled “student subjectification,” and the latter set of teacher acts “student objectification” (p. 77).

These two differing forms of teacher discursive behavior caused the adult students to adopt ‘stances’ that Pruyn characterized as conformist, resistant or agentive. Students who assumed a conformist stance essentially complied with the traditional expectation of students as empty vessels waiting to be filled from the teacher’s fount of knowledge. Some displeasure may have been noted by the students, but there was no observable effort to resist or disrupt this expectation. Those students who followed a more resistant course chose to ignore or disobey teacher mandates and directives, thus “going beyond the potential displeasure demonstrated under conformism” (p. 78). Although such students offered resistance to hegemonic classroom practices, they did not collectively offer any alternative or counter-hegemonic actions to replace traditional classroom discourses. Those who did, Pruyn identified as acting in an agentive manner, able to “elaborate or act out a preferable set of counter-hegemonic practices” (p. 79).

“De Nosotros Sale Nada” (From us comes nothing)... Guillermo’s Classroom

The adult students’ first teacher was Guillermo Linares. A native of El Salvador, he had taught Kindergarten through 8th Grade for over fifteen years in his country before being forced to leave because of his stance on human rights and his leftist political views. Guillermo’s students were primarily with him to learn how to read and write in Spanish, and, subsequently, to progress to English in one of the program’s three ESL classes. Guillermo made sacrifices to be a teacher for the program, working a second job at a local store and sharing his one bedroom apartment with two roommates. Guillermo loved to teach, and he perceived the role of teacher as one of “bringing consciousness to those in our care” (p. 67). In his thoughts and words, he espoused fundamental tenets of Freirean-inspired pedagogical practices. However, data from literacy activities collected in his classroom revealed otherwise.

The discursive interactions between Guillermo and his students conformed to traditional hegemonic classroom practices, and permitted little space for critical student agency. Pruyn noted that the students had been positioned, and positioned themselves to ‘accept the word and the world’ of the teacher. The words and worlds of the students were barely visible, and when they surfaced, they were quickly supplanted by the more ‘authoritative’ discourse emanating from Guillermo. Pruyn cited a number of examples to reveal the hegemonic pedagogical practices of Guillermo’s class, presenting and interpret-
ing this data using discourse analysis. The following discussion on Salvadoran/Central American history exemplified the passive and conformist stances of the students in response to Guillermo’s positioning of himself and of his students.

_**Farabundo:**_ I have a strange question. Who were the enemies who destroyed our country?

_**Guillermo:**_ From inside and from without. Let’s look at the word “communism”. It comes from the word “common,” to share things in common. In this way, Salvadorans should be united. Maybe some of you suffered during these times, cutting coffee or something. My brother-in-law was a big owner. The workers worked and cut all day, and the bosses rob you.

_Students:_ (Are nodding their heads.) Yes, yes.

_Silvia:_ I remember working in coffee and cotton. The bosses always robbed you.

_**Guillermo:**_ There are always those who misinterpret about this. The military leaders—I had one in my family, a very high military official—could do whatever they wanted economically. They could buy and sell cars. They didn’t pay taxes. And they could cross the borders as they pleased. But it’s not that way anymore. The people are aware and struggling. There are still some abuses, but there are less... Teachers we can’t lie to our students. We have to tell them the truth. About everything. So the government labels us “guerrillas.” We told the truth. And that truth hurt the military, the rich.

_Students:_ (Nod their heads.) Yes, yes.

The students were receiving one interpretation of Salvadoran history. Although they may have been sympathetic to Guillermo’s views, there was little space created for students to agree or disagree with their teacher. Pruyn noted that the tightly controlled discourse patterns of Guillermo’s teacher-student interchanges served merely to objectify the students, despite Guillermo’s avowed belief in Freirean pedagogy. It was his reticence to change such discourse and positioning patterns that eventually led to his frustration when some of the students began to resist his hegemonic classroom practices. It was these very practices
that brought him into strong disagreement with Daisy Contreras, the
director of the literacy program, and finally forced him to leave and
pursue his teaching practices elsewhere. Upon Guillermo’s departure,
Daisy assumed the role of teacher.

"De Nosotros, Sí Sale Algo" (From us comes something)...

Daisy’s Classroom

The adult students’ second teacher was Daisy Contreras, an
Argentinean born and educated teacher. She and Guillermo shared a
similar teacher training background, but her wider sociopolitical in-
volve ment in issues of social justice had led her to rethink and reformu-
late her classroom pedagogy in ways that contrasted with
Guillermo’s approaches to teaching and learning. For Daisy, her lit-
eracy practices with the students were to provide them with the kind
of academic and political tools to help them “transform problematic
socioeconomic conditions in their lives” (p. 68). She posited that if
classroom activities were centered around the students’ economic and
social lives in central Los Angeles, then learning would naturally en-
sue.

Pruyn found that Daisy was viewed as an authority by her stu-
dents but not as an authoritarian. Pruyn noted that there was a feeling
in the classroom that the teacher and the students “are on the same
side of the table” (p. 112), and that a ‘counter-hegemonic pedagogy’
was beginning to take shape as the dominant form of social practice
in the classroom. In this form of pedagogy, Pruyn asserted that a criti-
cal student agency had begun to form and the students were for the
most part re-socialized into more egalitarian forms of classroom dis-
course. Similar to Guillermo, Daisy was seeking to incorporate issues
of Salvadoran history into literacy practices. However, the following
exchange highlighted the substantive differences in classroom dis-
course and practice in Daisy’s classroom. The students had constructed
a simple sentence detailing why the war in El Salvador had not been
good for the country. Daisy sought to allow the students opportuni-
ties to elaborate on the sentence. These were the same students who
had participated in the discursive exchanges highlighted in
Guillermo’s class.

Daisy: We could talk for months on this reality.

Students: (Begin to share personal stories about their ex-
periences with the war in El Salvador.)

Gloria: We were out in a car. With my sister, I was eight.
The soldiers threw a bomb at the car. All the people died
including four children. They took me to the hospital. I
still have this mark here. (She indicates a scar on her head just above the hair line.) I was all bloody on my face. My sister lived. The driver was yelling at the soldiers, ‘Don’t throw bombs at me, I’m...(xx)...(xx).’ But they did it anyway.

Students: (Talk about the death squads, the differences between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government, and the military’s practice of ‘forced conscription’.)

Gloria: It’s getting worse again. Everyone is armed.

Daisy: People have had to re-arm to protect themselves. There are ongoing skirmishes, even though the elections are approaching. There are personal stories, but I think we have to look at the larger processes. Before the semester is over, we’re going to get an update from Siempre on the Salvadoran situation. Using your ideas, and discussion, we’re going to develop this.

Daisy tried to make her curriculum engage with the everyday social, cultural and political experiences of her students. In so doing, she began to develop an academic critical agency in her students. This sense of critical agency found further expression through Daisy and her students’ participation in wider social justice issues. With much encouragement, she persuaded Gloria to serve on the Siempre student council. Another one of her students, Veronica, accompanied Daisy to a community organized pro-immigrants’ rights march.

As with any transformation from passive conformist modes of learning to ones imbued with critical agency, Pruyn noted that some of the students found the process of change more difficult than others. Guillemo’s classroom had provided a comfortable framework, where roles had been clearly defined and notions of teaching and learning had been rigidly configured. In interviews with the students, Pruyn candidly highlights the tensions that students feel when hegemonic literacy practices are replaced by more egalitarian practices. Some students believed that the rhythm and pace of learning might have slowed in Daisy’s classroom and the students wanted more dictation as a literacy practice. Pruyn leaves the reader to draw her or his own conclusion on the degree to which such tensions are salient in his interview data. His only assertion is that the development of critical student agency in the Siempre literacy classes is not a “linear, fully successful, or completed process” (p. 134).
“De Nosotros, Sí Sale Mucho” (From us comes a lot)...
Nadia’s Classroom

With the students in Daisy’s class progressing at various paces, it was decided to split the students into two classes. The majority of the students who had been with Guillermo and Daisy moved into Nadia Monterey’s class. Nadia was born in El Salvador and had been both a teacher and principal. Nadia’s colleagues, including Daisy, thought of her as a traditionalist and Nadia frequently expressed doubts about Freirean pedagogy, expressing her preference for phonics and skill-based instruction. Pruyn found that despite Nadia’s partially hegemonic practices (she dictated the subject of the lessons), the students had become sufficiently agentive in their positions as learners that they were able to co-construct with Nadia counter-hegemonic discursive practices.

Pruyn found that Nadia’s hands-off approach to lesson planning, classroom time and discursive interactions, left substantive gaps or spaces. Students thus assumed agentive stances by filling those gaps and spaces with their own discourse and social practices. Nadia may have selected the topics and activities, but Pruyn noted that it was the students who ran most of the discursive interactions in the classroom. This particular section of Pruyn’s book highlighted multiple examples of students helping each other with the pronunciation and articulation of certain Spanish phrases in passages dealing with basic economic knowledge of how banks operate with customers’ money. There was much student-student collaboration on assigned tasks, much help offered by students if another student was struggling with vocabulary or pronunciation activities, and much encouragement when a student was successful in the struggles of learning.

Pruyn also noted that during Nadia’s class, critical student agency was taken to a wider level with the formation of a cundina or cooperative. Nadia’s class had been studying a unit on the theme of community. The students cited cooperatives as excellent examples of effective forms of community. With further discussion and help from personnel who worked in Siempre, the students and Nadia formed their own version of a savings and lending cooperative. Each member of the class assumed a rotating responsibility for its management and its funds were used to benefit members of the class.

This group of poor, working class, formerly illiterate, largely undocumented immigrant students, who had months earlier felt as if “from us comes nothing”, now saw themselves as active social subjects...By forming, maintaining, and enlarging the cundina over time, these students were taking a concrete action on a problematic socio/ political/ economic situation in their lives (p. 157).
The transformative process that had led to the establishment and development of both academic and wider political student critical agency, manifested in the *cundina*, represented for Pruyn one significant example of the critical agency espoused by Gramsci and Freire.

**Strengths of Discourse Wars: Lessons for Social Studies Education**

The problematic challenges and gratifying successes of engaging curriculum with the social, cultural and political experiences of teachers and students, find thought-provoking and careful articulation in Pruyn’s work. For those of us engaged in teaching and learning in social studies education, this work warrants a detailed reading. Our field of study lends itself naturally to the contextualized pedagogies that Pruyn’s work advocates. More importantly, however, *Discourse Wars* provides a framework for the examination of pedagogical ideologies that may foster or inhibit one of the fundamental goals of social studies education, namely, the promotion and strengthening of genuine forms of democracy through collective critical agency.

For social studies educators interested in developing critical student agency in our classrooms, we might wonder at the nature of teacher-student and student-student discourses that would lead us and our students to assume conformist, resistant or agentive stances. In this respect Pruyn’s work becomes an invaluable source, a looking glass into which we can peer to explore the complexities of teacher and student positionings, to observe the obstacles to critical and liberatory pedagogies, and to be informed of the potential of socially-just schooling practices. Moreover, Pruyn’s presentation of Guillermo’s classroom reminds us that employing the language of critical and liberatory pedagogies is insufficient in-and-of-itself to foster critical student agency if teaching practices retain their hegemonic characteristics. His case reminds us that in our social and discursive relationships in the social studies classroom, we must ‘walk the walk’ if our students are to position themselves as active social subjects who contribute to critical forms of democracy and agency.

Another strength of Pruyn’s work of potential interest to social studies educators centers on his ability to address one major criticism of linguistic and discursive analyses of text, namely, that they often do not extend to an explication of how discourses evidenced in local contexts have political and ideological consequences (Gee, 1990). Pruyn’s attempt to examine the discourse—the sayings, doings, thinkings and feelings—of his latina/o adult immigrants and their teachers, affords us such an opportunity. We witness the capacity of classroom literacy and social practices to empower learners so that their learning becomes inherently tied to a struggle for equity and social justice in Central Los Angeles. In an era in which social studies education is often seen as politically and ideologically driven by
Fordist/industrialist notions of schooling, it is affirming to see and hear of what might be possible if we choose another paradigm of thought and practice.

Significantly, as a former elementary school teacher and current teacher educator interested in developing critical and liberatory pedagogies in my classroom, Pruyn’s work causes me to shift my thinking regarding my role as teacher in the construction of critical classroom pedagogy. Discourse Wars is a testimony to the need for the focus of critical pedagogy to move away from the teacher and toward an acknowledgement that students and teachers must co-construct critical discursive relationships in the classroom. Without doubt, teachers can set the tone for agentive behaviors in their social studies classrooms, but as in Nadia Monterey’s class, it was the co-construction by students of critical agentive stances that caused substantive changes to result in more student-centered pedagogies that connected to the lived experiences of all participants. Nadia and her students’ co-construction of classroom social and discursive relationships, and the implications of those relationships for broader issues of agency, may constitute one shift in critical theory and its liberatory pedagogies. My interpretation of the discourses in Nadia’s classroom reflects a refocusing of one central facet of critical theory. There appears to be a shift from an allegiance to the legitimacy and primacy of the intellectual (as espoused by Giroux’s notion of the ‘transformative intellectual’) to a more collective understanding of how critical agency expresses itself when it is democratically co-constructed by all participants. I leave the reader to make his or her own judgement with regard to this interpretation.

Questions Raised by Discourse Wars:
Is Agency Attainable in Schooling Practices?

One of the major vexing questions raised by Pruyn’s work concerns his central notion of critical student agency. The author’s use of Gramscian and Freirean notions of individual and collective agency appear to sit very uncomfortably with poststructuralist notions of power. I am not fully persuaded that the acceptance of Foucauldian notions of power do not in some measure negate the possibility of large-scale agency as advocated by Gramsci and Freire. For Foucault power is “everywhere local”, and thus resistance rather than large-scale agency becomes the only tangible possibility. Hegemonic practices in school settings are so embedded and enforced by ideological apparatuses that we ultimately discipline ourselves to stay within the apparatus, venturing only small acts of resistance to reflect our sense of individual and collective agency. Pruyn candidly admits that he has been selective in his use of poststructuralist notions of power as they relate to discursive practices. However, it is this very use of
poststructuralist notions of power that I believe neutralize, if not negate, the sense of critical student agency that Pruyn advocates is possible in classroom practices.

The author reconciles this tension in his own mind by concurring with his second teacher, Daisy Contreras, that large-scale critical agency may not be the singular way to effect change in the social, political and economic lives of students and teachers. Small changes within the classroom context might represent the transformation and revolution advocated in Gramscian and Freirean pedagogies. Reaching this conclusion, Pruyn’s work aligns itself with other critical and liberatory pedagogies that note that “solutions to complex problems such as racism, sexism, classism and other forms of prejudice are lived and taught in small daily increments, and not through any one grand event” (Rehak, 1998). This recognition thus becomes the framework inside which an agentive discourse of hope and possibility can be realized in classroom practices. The implications for social studies education are thus made real and attainable.

One major limitation of Discourse Wars is the lack of analytic exploration by Pruyn surrounding issues of gender, class and nationality of both students and teachers. Agentive behaviors occurred more frequently in both classrooms taught by females. How might this influence the co-construction of student agency in similar or dissimilar settings? Given the cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the classrooms studied, how might critical student agency manifest itself in multicultural classrooms? In our current ‘accountability-obsessed’ educational climate, with increasing demands for standardized measures of teacher and student performance, how might public schools and colleges of education create the spaces and gaps in which critical student agency can be fostered? Pruyn’s work certainly offers us a glimpse of what is possible in terms of resistance and struggle. Might these very same manifestations of dissent permeate to influence local schooling policies and practices to open up the necessary gaps for tangible, critical agentive behaviors?

Pruyn’s articulation of a slice of life in Gotham-West is refreshing in that he does not cast himself in the role of a Batman or Robin in his candid and easy-to-read ethnographic tale, although his astute observations and thoughtful analyses on the world of classroom discourse would very well parallel the intense gaze of ‘Catwoman’! Despite some philosophical and methodological questions, Discourse Wars offers social studies educators an understanding of how we might co-create classroom practices that aid the development of both teacher and student agency. This is of significant import to social studies educators who take seriously the charge of promoting and strengthening egalitarian forms of democracy, both on a small-scale level in their
classrooms, and on a wider societal level as they participate in the struggles for equity and social justice.

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In his recent book, The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand, Howard Gardner presents a thoughtful synthesis of much of his own earlier work in an attempt to develop a somewhat comprehensive vision for American schooling. The work is well organized and thoughtfully written, though it breaks little new ground. In fact, the title and the central theme, whether intentionally or unintentionally, borrows from a critic of education from an earlier era, Arthur Bestor, who wrote, “The disciplined mind is what education at every level should strive to produce.” (1953, p. 64) Though not as sharply critical of our schools as Bestor, the vision of schooling in the disciplines that Gardner weaves may be, in some respects, just as conservative.

Gardner argues that the focus of schooling should be education for understanding, a “virtue-filled” education in the disciplines. What he brings to the quest, going far beyond Bestor, is a thorough synthesis of much of the best available scholarship in educational psychology and state of the art thinking about instructional planning that applies his own work on multiple intelligences. Predictably, though in an illuminating fashion helpful for teachers, parents, scholars and others interested in the improvement of schooling, Gardner provides thoughtful examples applying his concept of multiple intelligences to schooling for understanding the disciplines.

The work is interesting and accessible and provides a broad look at a number of educational matters in some depth, setting a context for the argument Gardner makes for a thoughtful education in the disciplines. However, the case he makes for the disciplined mind is substantially weakened by a failure to carefully examine other alternatives in a meaningful way. Like many in today’s educational world, he barely mentions social studies, arguing instead for the primacy of history as the social discipline of choice. Yet, in making a case for history (and a discipline-based approach) he barely scratches the surface of the longstanding battles over the curriculum, in social studies or any other field (Kleibard, 1986). It is as if he is unfamiliar with the broad field of social studies and ignorant of our century long turf war over its definition.
One substantial acknowledgement he does make to potential critics is to state, early and fairly frequently in the text, several of the potential objections of postmodern critics to many of his arguments and recommendations. An objection he predicts is that postmodernists will criticize his allegiance to the disciplines as the most powerful tools for understanding the world and the eternal questions. Another is that his selection of curricular examples from the scientific, artistic, and historical legacy of Western Europe (Darwin, Mozart, the Holocaust) and his statement of an admittedly classical purpose for education (pursuit of the true, the beautiful, and the good) will be criticized. The examples he chooses and the purpose he develops can and rightly should be criticized. Yet, to be fair, he not only acknowledges many of the points that might be made by a postmodern critic, but offers an explanation and defense of his choices.

In this essay, I shall focus primarily on his choice to recommend an education in the disciplines as the best possible education we can offer. Alongside his rhetoric and examples favoring the disciplines as the best possible grounding for a thoughtful education, I notice examples suggestive of integrating and going beyond disciplinary boundaries. He provides little discussion of the contextual issues of race, class, and gender or the systemic structure of schooling, little mention of practical matters of financing educational reform, and a cursory discussion of the current status of schooling. He doesn’t comment in much depth on the standards movement in education, though he is not supportive of the movement as a whole and favors a more individualized approach.

**Gardner’s Vision**

Gardner’s hope for education, the education that he would like for all humans, is in essence a conservative approach to schooling combined with mildly reconstructionist rhetoric and state-of-the-art discipline-based curricula. He writes:

> It is important that a culture identify the truths, beauties, and virtues that it values, and that it then dedicate resources to inculcating their understanding in young learners... If we spend time on important topics, we can approach them through several entry points; we can draw a variety of analogies; and we can even capture the core ideas of such topics in a number of model languages. The result of such a multi-pronged education should be that most students have attained deep- or at least deeper-understanding. And, what is equally important, they will have a sense of what it means—of how it feels—to under-
stand consequential topics. They will have at least a taste of a disciplined mind. (p. 244-245)

In short, Gardner calls for an enhanced traditional education, capable of actualizing the longstanding goals of acquiring literacy with notations and mastery of disciplines. Yet his call for meeting these goals goes far beyond the traditional in uses of the disciplines, at least in the examples he provides. He calls for a pedagogy that, while aimed at conservative goals, could be quite liberatory in practice.

In the introductory chapter of his book, Gardner argues that education for all human beings needs to “explore in some depth a set of key human achievements captured in the venerable phrase, ‘the true, the beautiful, the good.’” (p. 16) Gardner believes that education must continue to confront virtue, in full awareness of its problematic nature. For the ancients, the classical ideal of virtue was the ultimate goal of education. Acquisition of knowledge and skill were seen as the necessary handmaidens for the attainment of moral virtue—the highest good—in the service of one’s society. Gardner asserts that study of the academic disciplines remains the best way to pursue this mission.

From my perspective, this is a questionable assertion. It is, for Gardner, more an assumption than a thesis, though he makes an effort to support it. He does not, however, address the broader questions: What means of constructing the curriculum can best lead to the purpose of individual growth and societal improvement? What is the most appropriate field of study for the education of the young citizen? In making his case for a discipline-based approach, he not only fails to consider the pros and cons of many other alternatives, he ignores the historical evolution and purposes of the disciplines. Until recently, historians and their discipline marginalized the struggles of oppressed peoples. In schools, a fact-myth-legend approach has dominated history teaching. Recent evidence suggests that this approach continues (Loewen, 1995). The curriculum focuses on socializing, but not counter-socializing (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). Questions of social justice are but a faint echo in the meta-narrative that has been planted in most of our minds.

The Human Mind

Prior to making a sustained case for the value of disciplinary study, Gardner devotes a chapter to what we know about the human mind, synthesizing much of the literature in educational psychology and its evolution, and making recommendations for practice. In this chapter, and in a few others, one gets the feeling that Gardner is really on his turf, after all, this is his area. Furthermore, he recommends that we draw on knowledge from psychology, neurology, biology, and an-
thropology as warranted in re-shaping education. He reviews the development of educational psychology, from the "olden days" of the competing behaviorist and trait views through the cognitive revolution and the rise of developmental perspectives. He discusses at least two important concerns of interest to social educators, how to excise misconceptions and replace them with more accurate mental images, and the lack of attention to motivation and emotion.

The latter portion of this chapter summarizes new research on education and the brain and offers important findings for educators, among them, that mental stimulation is necessary for growth; that action and activity help the brain learn best and retain most; that the brain has specific zones and networks linked to specific abilities and talents; and that emotional coding can lead to retention and use of new knowledge. One wonders how "new" some of these findings really are. Several are reminiscent of progressive theory, especially findings related to the importance of mental activity and emotion.

Another chapter describes effective school alternatives from other settings and explores the cultural underpinnings of education. Perhaps the most interesting passages of this chapter are those describing the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and its progressive-style integrated curriculum. Gardner cites additional examples of promising educational practices, each revealing cultural underpinnings, along with what Gardner views as a negative example, an E. D. Hirsch cultural literacy curriculum. The chapter concludes with the commonplace, that good schooling can arise from different cultures, but that educators must have a clear vision of what they want to achieve. This conclusion is complicated, Gardner admits, by ideological disagreements, cultural difference, rapid technological change, and by the fact that much of the most important curricula is hidden.

**An Argument for the Disciplined Mind: Some Reservations**

The balance of the book examines the role of the disciplines in teaching for "deep understanding." In chapter six Gardner begins the core of his argument for an education that "inculcates" students in an understanding of major disciplinary ways of thinking, and singles out science, math, the arts, and history. Gardner defends his choices with the mantra of needing to make selections and the importance of going for depth. Students should "see how one thinks and acts in the manner of a scientist, an artist, an historian," and will draw on these modes of thinking in understanding the world.

Gardner goes on to discuss obstacles to understanding in the disciplines. As for history, he notes that theories developed early in childhood persist, including a view of the world divided into good guys and bad guys (a "star wars script"); evolution as teleological with humans the crowning achievement; rampant presentism; and
atemporality. Naturally, with a focus on history, he ignores other equally damning misconceptions that fall under the purview of other disciplines such as the naive view of power held by most Americans, and the general assumption that capitalism is the only natural and effective economic system. Teachers, he suggests, are unwittingly complicit in the survival of inadequate representations and misconceptions because of the text-test contest, short answer tests, the low standards bargain, and "coverage," the old devil. These are aspects of what Tyack and Cuban have described as "the grammar of schooling," linked to systemic factors that do not change easily (1995).

Gardner's answer for these dilemmas is to develop in students the disciplinary expertise to "think like a historian," to "immerse oneself deeply in the specifics of cases and develop one's disciplinary muscles." (p. 126) These recommendations come from one who is steeped in academia. I agree with his disdain for cultural literacy and his prescription for in-depth study, and he makes many useful suggestions for enhancing disciplinary understanding. Yet, his prescriptions leave me wondering whether he has ever heard of social studies.

One of the touchstones of issues-centered social studies is the quest for relevance, for contextualized learning. Gardner addresses questions of interest, motivation, and emotional connection when discussing educational psychology, but does not build these into his curricular prescriptions in a powerful way. He is correct when he suggests that generative topics and essential questions help establish interest and relevance, but he glosses over their centrality. Part of the power of the Reggio Emilio school is that the curriculum begins with student interests, then connects to relevant bodies of knowledge. Gardner seems to recognize value in this, yet argues for beginning with the disciplines as the source, then attempting to connect to students. This is a much different approach precisely because it places the disciplines in a hierarchical relationship to students' lives and asks them to adopt the ways of the discipline. On the other hand, Reggio Emilio and other examples of good progressive education place students in the center and draw on multiple and relevant sources of knowledge to assist in answering students queries. One lesson of this approach is that rather than being handed down from above, knowledge is socially constructed. The decision to limit the study of a problem or topic to those situated within a discipline serves to decontextualize the curriculum, to draw a veil between student lives and school subjects. Schooling too easily becomes a technology by which certain ways of seeing and knowing are imposed on students (Marcuse, 1964). Imposing the disciplined mind, as the entire project, does not respect the student’s mind.
Of course there is value in giving students insight into the processes and concepts of history and other disciplines. However, the amount of time to be devoted to this approach is an open question. In recent years I have come to see the wisdom in the words of Kahlil Gibran. On teaching, he wrote, the purpose should be to lead the student “to the threshold of your own mind.” (1923, p. 64) Perhaps learning to see through the lens of a discipline can help in this endeavor, but it is not essential, and may even prove detrimental.

Gardner also addresses the “interest groups” approach to curriculum, the idea that because there are so many sciences and social sciences we must touch on all, and argues that it “proves devastating in the curricular area...” (p. 117) The segmentation of knowledge can more realistically be viewed as an artifact of the modernist-industrial mind-set that dominates our universities and our lives. Many factors went into the evolution of the academic disciplines. In the 19th century, history and the social sciences were part of a larger project then known as the social sciences and were aimed at scholarship for social improvement. Through the impact of the new scientific history, and the scramble for status in the emerging university, historians separated from the community of social scientists. Other social science disciplines followed suit, preferring to claim the special status of “discipline” and the respect and professional benefits that went with it. Most scholars became, at least for some time, detached from the social and political fray, in the interest of developing “unbiased” knowledge and research. In time, the quest for unbiased knowledge was exposed, yet the disciplines remained, though with signs of some blurring of boundaries in recent years. I mention this to point out that there are reasons for caution when studying the disciplines. If we want students to develop their own minds, disciplined approaches to knowledge are helpful but insufficient. We must help students learn to grapple with decisions around life’s important questions, and that requires a synthesis, drawing on but going beyond the disciplines.

Subsequent chapters illustrate the kind of education in the disciplines that Gardner has in mind, developing three “puzzles” as examples of the exploration of topics for “deep understanding.” In chapter seven Gardner offers further justification for his theory of the disciplined mind and his claim that the disciplines are the best way of approaching the great questions. He is aware that most questions can be “approached from a variety of disciplines,” yet he submits that, “The disciplines represent the most well honed efforts of human beings to approach questions and concerns of importance in a systematic and reliable way” (p. 144). The disciplines, he suggests, are “civilizing,” and offer practiced methods of dealing with issues and questions.” Moreover, he argues, the disciplined thinking of the historian is crucial if individuals are to draw inferences, make analogies, and
"express opinions and cast votes on issues of import in terms of reasonable criteria rather than sheer whim." (p. 152) Much of what he says in these passages is not only true for history but for the social sciences and other sources of knowledge. There is no question that history is of value and that the disciplines have created a good deal of usable knowledge. The discipline of history is of great importance for the education of youth. However, Gardner’s arguments ignore the limitations that a focus on any one discipline as the core of social studies may erect.

Gardner misses the fact that the disciplines are concerned primarily with the creation of new knowledge, and secondarily, if at all, with the purposes of teaching or learning. These are markedly different purposes. Much of his commentary on the discipline is accurate, yet it does not add up to a strong case for the discipline of history as the best means for educating youth. Interestingly, the examples he draws belie his narrower vision, and call for broad study related to in-depth investigation of cases. Moreover, they imply ranging far beyond the limitations of any one discipline, following an issue where it leads.

**Multiple Intelligences Applied to History**

Gardner also provides a description and application of a multiple intelligences approach to deep understanding, and gives examples of thoughtful curriculum planning implementing his vision. This is a useful application of theory with excellent examples that any social studies teacher would find helpful in improving students’ conceptual understanding. Gardner suggests application of his theory through multiple entry points using engaging approaches to generate interest; use of powerful analogies and metaphors; and presenting multiple representations of core ideas. He notes, “Variety is the message of the day.” Each of these suggestions is appropriate and helpful, yet they offer little that is new, and have appeared previously as attention grabbers, the jurisprudential model, and concept teaching.

More troubling is the way he frames the goal of deep understanding around striving to, in his words, “inculcate understanding of what, within a cultural context, is considered true or false, beautiful or unpalatable, good or evil.” Passing on our understanding of the true, beautiful and good can easily devolve into simple cultural transmission. Whose understanding will be promoted and prized? To what extent will dominant voices remain dominant? Will the oppressed find a place? Whose truth will reign? Whose mind will be developed? Gardner’s vision is a middling one, deeply wedded to the disciplines. This is a thoughtful approach to schooling, however, it places too much emphasis on understanding, which must rightly be seen as a step, albeit an important one, toward decision-making and action.
Defend the Disciplines?

In the closing portion of the book, not only does Gardner discuss how to achieve his vision on a large scale, but he offers further justification for a discipline-based approach and some of his reservations about thematic and “interdisciplinary” teaching. Gardner describes himself as “a defender of the disciplines...” and writes that the disciplines provide us with “privileged ways into phenomena,” and “the most sophisticated means for addressing the questions that preoccupy human beings... The rationale for studying the disciplines should be enhanced access to and stronger purchase on the major questions of human life” (pp. 218-21). Jonathan Kozol once wrote of the amazing lack of purchase and emotional distance that schools create around human suffering (1975). The disciplines typically contribute to this by distancing subject from object, placing the topic to be studied under glass, for unbiased investigation.

There are, from my perspective several problems with the disciplines as the structural force in the curriculum. The real world, Gardner admits, is not framed by the disciplines. Issues and problems reflected in perennial questions require us to look beyond the confines of any one discipline. Use of the disciplines as the structural foundation for curricular reform may be doomed from the start because of the decontextualization that typically accompanies their study. Gardner seems to accept that a good deal of decontextualization is acceptable, even necessary for creating the disciplined mind. On the contrary, I believe that a far more powerful vision for the improvement of social studies can be built around the notion of a curriculum that is richly contextualized, that starts with the learners own life experiences, that explores issues, problems, and dilemmas in local, national, and global settings, and that draws on disciplines and multiple other sources of knowledge. Moreover, our past experience with educational reforms built around the disciplines has been unfulfilling. The Brunerian vision of an inquiry-oriented approach to the disciplines was attempted, heroically, but with minimal success in the 1960s and 1970s. We would do well to take that previous failure into account when considering new reforms.

Gardner is wise enough to know that not everyone will share his vision. Accordingly, he describes alternative pathways, which could lead to development of multiple prototypes: the canon pathway, the multicultural pathway, the progressive pathway, the technological pathway, the socially responsible pathway, and the understanding pathway (his vision). He admits that these are to be read as instructive rather than definitive. Yet, Gardner’s work demonstrates too little depth of study on curricular and philosophical alternatives. To write about curriculum and to develop a strong philosophical stance one needs to be fluent with the fields of curriculum, curriculum history,
and philosophy of education. Gardner provides little evidence that he has done thorough background work in these areas.

**One Damn Thing after Another**

In *The Disciplined Mind*, Howard Gardner argues for a particular vision of schooling, one rooted in our educational traditions and dedicated to making those traditions more functional. He wants to develop students who can make use of the disciplinary lenses of the historian, the biologist, and the artist. While these are worthy aims, they are not broad enough to encompass the possibilities that must be embraced in developing the educated citizen. Unfortunately, the work is limited by the author’s disciplinary allegiance, and the equation of the disciplined mind with the educated citizen’s mind and heart.

Though *The Disciplined Mind* is likely to be read by many influential educators, it will make little difference in the larger struggle to overcome the banking approach, which, in a history class, becomes “one damn thing after another” to cover superficially and forget. Like many other prescriptions for school improvement, Gardner’s is likely to change the institution of schooling very little, marginalized by structural characteristics that determine which reforms will last. The socio-political and economic context of schooling suggests that schools resemble a machine-like technological apparatus in which the grammar of schooling persists; a reform effort that points toward thoughtful, in-depth study is worthy, but costly in terms of teacher time and workload. *The Disciplined Mind* is a must read for E. D. Hirsch, other advocates of cultural literacy, and for anyone involved in the movement to impose standards and high stakes tests. We can only hope that Gardner and other scholars will contribute to a critical mass of opposition to the runaway train of standards-based reform.

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Creating a Space that Challenged and Changed the Social Order

Crocco, Margaret Smith, & O. L. Davis, Jr., (Eds.). (1999). *Bending the Future to Their Will: Civic Women, Social Education, and Democracy.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 291 pp. Paperback. ISBN 0-8476-9112-8.

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Margaret Crocco and O.L. Davis, Jr. have created an engaging collection of biographical sketches of women who took leadership roles in social education from the late nineteenth century through the 1980's. These are women whose teaching, scholarship, and civic activism were focused on education about democracy and citizenship, rather than the narrower field of K-12 social studies. Eleven women are presented in this book, authors are in parentheses: Mary Sheldon Barnes (Author: Frances Monteverde); Lucy Maynard Salmon (C.H. Bohan); Jane Addams (Petra Munro); Mary Ritter Beard and Marion Thompson Wright (Crocco); Lucy Sprague Mitchell (Sherry Field); Bessie Louise Pierce (Murry Nelson); Rachel Davis DuBois (Davis); Hilda Taba (Jane Bernard-Powers); Alice Miel (Elizabeth A. Yeager); Hazel Whitman Hertzberg (Andrew Mullen).

These eleven women portrayed in *Bending the Future to Their Will,* provide a picture of the challenges faced by women to gain an education, a place in the academy, and a space to challenge and change existing social, political and educational paradigms. The authors point to the early development of some of the more contemporary components of the social studies: the use of primary sources in addition to textbook history, intercultural education, service learning, inquiry methods, community “backyard” history, women’s history, and social history.

There are several ways to approach this book. At first, temporarily skipping over the beginning chapters, I read about Hilda Taba and Jane Addams, women whose work I knew and often used in my teaching. I was prepared to compare my understanding of their work with the ways the authors portrayed them in each chapter. Each chapter is approximately twenty pages, followed by a brief excerpt from their published works. As I finished a chapter, I was wishing for more; the chapters seemed too short to capture the tremendous body of work and many contributions of these women. In reading Petra Munro’s chapter, “Widening the Circle: Jane Addams, Gender and Re/Definition of Democracy,” I was once again reminded of the radical nature of Jane Addams work: her support for economic democracy and social justice, her criticism of Marxism with its emphasis on class struggle
and conflict, her view of democracy as a collective, not an individual act.

The chapters that offer glimpses into the lives and work of these women are not true biographies, so we might ask the purpose of such a collection. Why were these individuals chosen? What is the tapestry created by their stories? In the introduction Crocco presents the book as an examination of civic women who have been neglected by the mainstream, given only superficial treatment. Although most of the authors in Bending the Future to Their Will do not claim that these women’s views were “naturally” female, they do vividly reveal the tremendous impact of gender on their lives and their work. As Andra Makler argues in the concluding chapter:

For each woman discussed in these chapters, the choice to be herself in the public world was a deliberate moral choice, an ethical stance taken and held despite personal hardship, pain, and frequently, public scorn. (p. 254)

This approach to the book using the lens of gender is compelling. If we look at this collection from the perspective of the challenges faced by educated yet excluded women who worked for various societal reforms, we can gain fresh insights into the role of citizen. These civic women, denied access to more traditional and formal power structures, made vital contributions to build a more democratic society.

It is difficult today to imagine some of the barriers they faced. Marion Thompson Wright concealed her marriage and two children in order to attend Howard University in the 1920’s. The university prohibited married or divorced women from attending the university and from teaching there. In 1900, Lucy Sprague Mitchell was among the first female faculty members at the University of California, Berkeley. She found that the female students faced ridicule on campus and began a series of initiatives to improve women’s housing, self-governance, and interconnections through social clubs. In the 1870’s Mary Sheldon Barnes began a scholarly career at the University of Michigan in a new coeducational program, choosing a career in education rather than marriage and motherhood. After completing her education at the University of Chicago and Columbia, Hilda Taba was denied a faculty appointment in her home country of Estonia, perhaps because of gender. In 1933, she took a position at the Dalton School in New York; academic positions for women were very limited in the United States as well.

Many of these women lived during a time in which they were denied the right to vote, yet they challenged the restrictions from laws and social norms that reinforced male superiority. Some were fortunate to find husbands who supported their work and collaborated in
their efforts. O.L. Davis reports that when Rachel Davis DuBois married in 1915, she developed what she considered to be a 50-50 marriage that lasted two decades, then ended in divorce (p. 172). In the chapter written by Margaret Smith Crocco, she points out that unlike other scholars, Charles Beard insisted on recognizing his wife as co-author of several widely used history textbooks. Mary Ritter Beard wrote to a friend of her influence on her husband and their collaborative work:

History is in fact the whole story of humankind including literature, philosophy, biology and everything else. This is the way I see it and having thus seen it, I have in my collaboration with CAB [Charles A. Beard], from its beginning widened politics, war and law and political economy to cover more aspects of human development. CAB has accepted my wide interest and done everything he could to work with me as I have done everything I could to work with him (p. 106).

As I read through the lives of these women, I searched for the resources they used to successfully obtain an education and to influence their society. Some of the women had definite economic and social advantages compared to less affluent women during this period of time. Lucy Salmon had a well educated mother and a strong extended family who supported her entrance to the University of Michigan in the 1870's. Lucy Sprague Mitchell came from a wealthy Chicago family at a time of great cultural growth in Chicago. In the 1900's, she was educated at an exclusive boarding school, followed by higher education at Radcliff and Teachers College, Columbia University.

Others had the benefit of a mentor who provided support for a highly educated woman in a male-dominated society. Murray Nelson points to the positive influence of historian Arthur M. Schlesinger in connecting Bessie Louise Pierce to American Historical Association. In 1926, she became the first female president of the National Council for the Social Studies. As the role of women in the academy began to change, there were new opportunities within the established university structures. Alice Miel chaired the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College from 1960 to 1967. Hazel Hertzberg served as chair of the Social Studies Department at Teachers College from 1957 to 1988.

The account of the lives of these women offers an alternative to the view of civic education dominated by individual rights and the political processes and structures of government. If the field of social studies is to be inclusive, we need a variety of role models and examples of many forms of participation in a democratic society, includ-
ing the local community and voluntary associations. At the close of the book, Makler suggests that the goals of social education should be expanded to prepare young people for “participation in multiple forms of associative living – learning communities, voluntary social occupational, religious, and other groups; as well as the political caucus, the policymaking forum, and the legislature (p. 270). There are references throughout the book to John Dewey’s view of democracy as “associative living,” a way of life, a way of living with others requiring continual nurture and development (1916, 1927). Makler proposes an approach to social education in which the curriculum is organized around relationships that connect the personal life to the communal life, building on some of the ideas of the caring school community of Nel Noddings (1992). Education can strengthen the quality of democratic life and in turn enhance the quality of our own life.

Crocco states that Bending the Future to their Will “is the first book to bring these subjects together to review their ideas about social education, to highlight their attention to the implications of individual and group differences for education, and to make a claim for their status as educational theorists” (p. 2). The authors in this book bring a welcome perspective to the conversation about public schools as well as the goals of social studies, a conversation that, as Michael Apple (1993) and others have described, has a long history dominated by competing interest groups. In the many analyses of social studies textbooks, researchers have often found a lack of social conflict and a dearth of stories about the dissenters (Popkewitz, 1977, Anyon, 1988). Voting is emphasized as the most important democratic process, sufficient to bring social consensus and progress. These stories offer a different perspective.

This collection offers valuable insights into new possibilities for social education reaching beyond schools to include settlement houses, women’s clubs and other voluntary organizations. It helps us to glimpse the lives of civic women who contributed ideas, theories and practices to social studies and the broader field of social education. Through the lives and work of these eleven women, we are again connected to John Dewey’s view of democracy as community life, and to a consideration of the kind of education that enables all individuals to participate and live in such a community.

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