Transformative Education

## An Integration of Theology and Theory in India

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# Introduction

“Teaching the children is one of the best ways to spread the gospel in India,” Dr. Varghese Thomas, founder and director of Mission to the Unreached, disclosed when explaining why his NGO focuses so much on education. Advocating for access to education has been intertwined with the movement of the church all throughout history and continues to be today. In order to better understand education as a transformative vehicle for the church in India, I will examine perspectives of two Christian educators, highlight relevant educational theories, and demonstrate the transformative potential through the integration of theology and theory of education.

# Christian Educators’ Perspective

In order to understand the perspectives of Christian educators and their commitment to education, I interviewed Dr. Varghese Thomas and Sister Alka Hammid. Dr. Varghese Thomas founded MTU by teaching slum children under a tree because they did not have access to an education. Sister Alka Hammid began teaching as a means of mobility as a woman and an opportunity to serve the Lord.

Dr. Thomas immediately acknowledged the traditional view of educating people as a means to enable them to read the bible. This is a commonly known theory for why the church would practice teaching people to read throughout history. He attributed this as one reason for educating as a Christian leader.

In the same regards, Sister Alka’s motivation to be a teacher is from the Christian discipline to be a servant. When Sister Alka described the difficulties she faces as a teacher, she reminds herself that she was called to teaching because she is God’s servant and serves his people.

Sister Alka said that she views her students as “formless mud.” She said that the potential these students have is in her hands to form and become future doctors, teachers, or pastors. Dr. Thomas also mentioned the requirement, as a Christian educator is to not just develop children to be ministers in the church, but to foster a culture of learning that produces successful experts in various disciplines.

An interesting aspect that Sister Alka included as part of her educational experience is her chance to build a relationship with the community. She said that her and her co-worker, Sister Sonia, are often able to bring in donated clothes for the families of the students, and at that time are able to witness to the community. A unique support system that was raised in this emphasis and throughout the conversation is her reliance on her fellowship with other Christian educators. In multiple occasions she explained how her companionship with other Christian educators has made her a better teacher.

Dr. Thomas concluded the discussion of Christian education with a story: Three men were doing the same job. When asked, “what are you doing?” the first man said, “I am laying down bricks.” The second man said, “I am building a wall,” and the third man said, “I am building a cathedral.” There are many reasons for the commitment to education from Christians, but ultimately it is about building God’s kingdom.

# Education Theories

In order to highlight transformative educational theories in which are most culturally relevant to India, I will focus on critical race theory (CRT) as the primary framework. The basis of this theory is questioning who’s and which knowledge matters. In a hierarchical system, it is said that the knowledge of the upper and middle classes are considered valued capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977); therefore, the lower classes “’lack’ the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. As a result, schools most often work from the assumption in structuring ways to help ‘disadvantaged’ students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities and cultural capital” (Yosso, 2005, p.70).

CRT captures the belief that if it is theories in which have oppressed these marginalized groups, like blacks in the US and Dalits in India, then it can be theories in which empower these groups. In hope of addressing empowering theory, supportive of Christian education, and relevant to India’s educational hardships today, I will present the concept of *community cultural wealth* in response to Bourdieuean cultural capital theory and *critical consciousness* as an empowering pedagogy.

**Community Cultural Wealth**

The traditional, Bourdieuean cultural capital theory is “narrowly defined by White, middle class values, … - one’s accumulated assets and resources” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). However, CRT expands this view to the accumulated assets and resources of the experiential histories and lives of minority groups. CRT reframes the theory of cultural capital to community cultural wealth.

CRT sees the ability to foster community cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital, despite racial background.

1. ***Aspirational capital*** refers to the resilient ability to maintain hope and dreams for the future, despite the present circumstances and present barriers.
2. ***Linguistic capital*** refers to communication experience in various languages and styles (i.e. storytelling, parables, proverbs) resulting in intellectual and social skills.
3. ***Familial capital*** refers to the cultural knowledge built from community history, memory, and cultural intuition in which is taught through *familia*/kinship.
4. ***Social Capital*** refers to a network of people and community resources that can provide support to navigate through society’s institutions.
5. ***Navigational Capital*** refers to skills required for the ability to maneuver through social institutions that were created without minorities in mind.
6. ***Resistant capital*** refers to the knowledge and skills learned from oppositional behavior that challenges the inequalities faced in society.

These six forms of capital presented do not exist or work independent of each other, instead each contribute to each other as community cultural wealth. For instance aspirational capital is often developed within social and familial context, through mother tongue language and cultural storytelling, and teaching the skills to maneuver around and overcome oppressive systems. In other words, Aspirational capital often includes social, familial, linguistic, navigational, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005).

Often the education system is designed to build on the dominant, sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, thus fails and marginalizes minority groups. The traditional cultural capital theory often views the minority as in a deficit because of the primary assumptions being: “(a) students enter school without normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). CRT offers a positive alternative view, recognizing and building on the capitals of community cultural wealth that does preexist when the minority student steps foot into the classroom.

**Critical Consciousness**

How can education systems build on community cultural wealth in the classroom? Paulo Freire believes this requires the goal of education to be critical consciousness. He believes that the education system will either conform students to the present social system, meaning conform to the dominant culture, or bring about transformation by liberating through critical consciousness (Yosso, 2005; Mithra, 2014).

If an educator views minority students as having a deficit of normative knowledge and skills, it will lead to a banking method of education (Yosso, 2005). The banking method is teaching to store information in students - simply depositing information because of the presumed deficit of knowledge and skill. This method does not recognize the capitals of community cultural wealth in which the student obtains; therefore it is not addressing the realities of the student, preventing critical consciousness, and disallowing transformation from occurring.

Conscientization is a process towards achieving liberation. Critical pedagogy says, true liberation is not through making a deposit in a person; it is “the action and reflection of people, upon their worldview in order to transform it” (Mithra, 2014, p. 104).

Freire proposed new terms for the common education system in order to fit the theory of critical pedagogy and reach critical consciousness. He renamed “school” as a “culture circle,” “teacher” as “coordinator,” “lectures” as “dialogue,” “pupils” as “participants,” and “syllabus” as “learning units” (Mithra, 2014, p. 101). School, teachers, lectures, pupils, and syllabus all formed together to enable the banking system with students as depositories and teachers as depositors. Students are only receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They are only mere spectators in their reality, not re-creators of their society (Mithra, 2014, p. 106).

The alternative approach – critical consciousness – is an active, participatory, dialogical educational method “that helps a person to become consciously aware of his or her context and condition as a human being and empowers him or her to transform it where education then, becomes an instrument of choice for liberation” (Mithra, 2014, pp. 102-104, 106). In an effort to practice these principles in the classroom, Freire provides four steps of teaching methods.

The first step is to *name the world* as they experience it. In this practice, learners are not just examining their experience and view of the world, but learning about others’ views as a process of collaborative learning. In this step, learners will be able to understand the world in their context, and identify their oppressors and oppressive forces. According to Freire, to name the world is the practice of transforming the world in according to his or her reflection.

The second step is *to discern the meaning in those words.* Learners are encouraged to discern what their perspective and others’ perspectives mean in revelation of the social structures and vast dimensions of the world. They will be challenged to discern the meanings in their local context as well as a global context.

The third step is *to define the problems in the social structures.* This step of defining the problems is meant to account for the multifaceted aspects of a problem(s), while acknowledging the constant changes in the world. Learners must be very tentative to the perspectives discussed as they have many interrelated aspects that cannot all be identified, but should be addressed.

The final step is *to formulate strategies of actions and to act.* Freire’s *conscientization* theory is motivated by the belief that critical pedagogy will lead to critical consciousness, requiring critical action, and resulting in social transformation.

# Transformative Integration

I would like to demonstrate the transformative potential in India from an integration of theology and education theories by sharing real examples and observations of the educational system.

Every morning since I arrived in India, a shouting of school children counting at the school next door wakes me up. There is always one student leading and the rest of the class repeating, “1,” “1,” “2,” “2,” until they reach 100. This is an example of rote learning. From my experience this is often used as the primary education theory for learning in India.

Such theoretical practice of rote learning is what Freire identified as the banking method. The teacher is depositing a sequential order of numbers, in English, for the students to recite. This type of participation in a classroom does not reach towards critical consciousness. The first step Freire takes towards critical consciousness is having the participants ask questions – accessing the information the participants already know.

Unfortunately, my first time teaching in a Indian school, it was difficult trying to engage the class to ask questions. After the class ended, one student approached me and said that he is scared to ask questions because he was made to feel dumb by other teachers when he asked questions. The students have been conditioned to operate in school only as depositories.

Christian theology recognizes that everyone is created in the image of God, thus everyone has value. Creating a collaborative learning environment through critical pedagogy is operating off of the Christian principle that everyone has value and therefore is valued in the learning process.

Yosso said that the education system is inclined towards banking methods when they view the student in a deficit. Deficit thinking of minority students is often rooted in the belief that “students’ enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (2014, p. 75). In slum communities it is common to hear teachers explain that their students are “naughty” because they come from the village and their parents are illiterate. This view is very damaging but it is a common view.

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

Richard Shaull’s introduction to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

(Mithra, 2014, pp. 99-100)

 Sister Alka said she viewed her students as formless mud that God has entrusted to her to form. This theological view is much healthier as an educator because it can include the multiple capitals of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Students are not “the containers into receptacles to be filled by the teachers” (Mithra, 2014,p.106). Students are mud, they already have substance – cultural capital – that can be formed by critical pedagogy.

Ultimately the theology of education is focused on building God’s kingdom, as Dr. Thomas stated earlier. Transforming communities to reflect God’s kingdom is the ultimate goal. These will be communities that reflect human worth and equality. Critical Race Theory recognizes the inequity in education systems that are designed to benefit the upper and middle class communities. CRT uses concepts like community cultural wealth and critical consciousness as a transformative agent for the marginalized in hierarchical societies like India.

References

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**Life in Schools. An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education. ISBN:** ISBN-0-8013-1771-1

McLaren, Peter

This book describes one individual's reinvention as an educator, from a liberal humanist to an advocate of critical pedogogy. It examines relationships between schooling, the wider social relations that inform it, and historically constructed needs and competencies that students bring to schools, focusing on the social conditions of disaffected students living in public housing units under oppressive circumstances and addressing the needs of inner-city teachers. It uses the concepts of critical pedagogy to analyze the failure of inner-city schools and suggest a vision for changing schooling. The story begins with the publication of a journal documenting the individual's teaching experiences at an inner-city elementary school. Part 1, "Broken Dreams, False Promises, and the Decline of Public Schooling," documents the nature of crises in schooling and society. Part 2, "Cries from the Corridor: Teaching in the Suburban Ghetto," presents teachers' and students' daily struggles in an inner-city school. Part 3, "Critical Pedagogy: An Overview," examines the tradition of critical pedagogy and introduces general terms associated with the critical educational tradition. Part 4, "Analysis," presents additional categories and theoretical perspectives from the critical tradition, concluding with an essay on the role of teachers as social agents. Part 5, "Looking Backward, Looking Forward," provides context for furthering the analysis of critical pedagogy with respect to more recent analyses of schooling and social and political struggles, emphasizing critical multiculturalism and the politics of resistance and liberation. Its central thesis deals with the abolition of "whiteness." (Some sections contain references.) (SM)

Critical pedagogy developed by [Henry Giroux](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Giroux%22%20%5Co%20%22Henry%20Giroux) and others as a [praxis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Praxis_%28process%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Praxis%20%28process%29)-oriented "educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop [consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_consciousness%22%20%5Co%20%22Critical%20consciousness) of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action."[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_pedagogy%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-2)

## Exploring Theory and Theology

Foucault says “Knowledge is power”. Is empowering those without knowledge a Biblical theme?

Context? What is the *culture of silence* of the poor? What brings liberation? A voice?

Theology? Is that a Biblical motif? Liberating a voice? What kind of voice?

What was Franz Fannon’s impact on Freire? The term *conscientizacao* originally derives from [Frantz Fanon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frantz_Fanon%22%20%5Co%20%22Frantz%20Fanon)'s coinage of a French term, *conscienciser*, in his 1952 book, *Black Skins, White Masks*.

Fannon was an advocate of rage as catalytic to transformation. IS that a Biblical theme? If so when and how? When and how not?

The process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming part of the process of changing the world."[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_consciousness%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-2)

 Mustakova-Possardt, M (2003) ["Is there a roadmap to critical consciousness? Critical Consciousness: A Study of Morality in Global, Historical Context."](http://onecountry.org/e152/e15216as_Review_Consciousness_story.htm) *One Country. 15*(2).

 [Creative Communication](http://www.newvillagepress.net/pub_newCreativeComm.html) *New Village Press*.

## Differentiate critical thinking from critical pedagogy

The prime tools of Critical Thinking are the skills of formal and informal logic, conceptual analysis, and epistemology. The primary preoccupation of Critical Thinking is to supplant sloppy or distorted thinking with thinking based upon reliable procedures of inquiry. Where our beliefs remain unexamined, we are not free; we act without thinking about why we act, and thus do not exercise control over our own destinies. For the Critical Thinking tradition, as Harvey Siegel states, critical thinking aims at self-sufficiency, and "a self-sufficient person is a liberated person...free from the unwarranted and undesirable control of unjustified beliefs" (Siegel, 1988, 58).

The Critical Pedagogy tradition begins from a very different starting point. It regards specific belief claims, not primarily as propositions to be assessed for their truth content, but as parts of systems of belief and action that have aggregate effects within the power structures of society. It asks first about these systems of belief and action, *who benefits*? The primary preoccupation of Critical Pedagogy is with social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations. At some point, assessments of truth or conceptual slipperiness might come into the discussion (different writers in the Critical Pedagogy tradition differ in this respect), but they are in the service of demonstrating how certain power effects occur, not in the service of pursuing Truth in some dispassioned sense (Burbules 1992/1995). Indeed, a crucial dimension of this approach is that certain claims, even if they might be "true" or substantiated within particular confines and assumptions, might nevertheless be partisan in their effects.

### From

### Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy:Relations, Differences, and Limits

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http://faculty.education.illinois.edu/burbules/papers/critical.html

## Sourcs of Critical Pedagogy

1. Feiere
2. 2. The Frankfurt School: Critical Theorists believed that Marxism had underemphasized the importance of cultural and media influences for the persistence of capitalism. Systems of education are among the institutions that foster and reinforce such beliefs, through the rhetoric of meritocracy, through testing, through tracking, through vocational training or college preparatory curricula, and so forth (Bowles & Gintis 1976; Apple 1979; Popkewitz 1991).
3. Critical Pedagogy represents, in a phrase, the reaction of progressive educators against such institutionalized functions. It is an effort to work within educational institutions and other media to raise questions about inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity and merit for many students, and about the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life. Some of the authors mostly strongly associated with this tradition include Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Ira Shor. In the language of Critical Pedagogy, the critical person is one who is empowered to seek justice, to seek emancipation. Not only is the critical person adept at recognizing injustice but, for Critical Pedagogy, that person is also moved to change it. Here Critical Pedagogy wholeheartedly takes up Marx's Thesis XI on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Marx 1845/1977, 158).
4. One important way in which Giroux develops this idea is in his distinction between a "language of critique" and a "language of possibility" (Giroux 1983, 1988). As he stresses, both are essential to the pursuit of social justice. Giroux points to what he sees as the failure of the radical critics of the new sociology of education because, in his view, they offered a language of critique, but not a language of possibility. They saw schools primarily as instruments for the reproduction of capitalist relations and for the legitimation of dominant ideologies, and thus were unable to construct a discourse for "counterhegemonic" practices in schools (Giroux 1988, 111-112). Giroux stresses the importance of developing a language of possibility as part of what makes a person critical. As he puts it, the aim of the critical educator should be "to raise ambitions, desires, and real hope for those who wish to take seriously the issue of educational struggle and social justice" (Giroux 1988, 177).

http://faculty.education.illinois.edu/burbules/papers/critical.html

A critique of conscientizacao

From the perspective of Critical Thinking, Critical Pedagogy crosses a threshold between teaching criticality and indoctrinating. Teaching students to think critically must include allowing them to come to their own conclusions; yet Critical Pedagogy seems to come dangerously close to prejudging what those conclusions must be.