



The Qualitative Report

Volume 3 | Number 4

Article 1

12-1-1997

Reflective Critical Inquiry on Critical Inquiry: A Critical Ethnographic Dilemma Continued

Barry Kanpol

Pennsylvania State University Harrisburg, bxk13@psu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

 Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Kanpol, B. (1997). Reflective Critical Inquiry on Critical Inquiry: A Critical Ethnographic Dilemma Continued. *The Qualitative Report*, 3(4), 1-12. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol3/iss4/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Reflective Critical Inquiry on Critical Inquiry: A Critical Ethnographic Dilemma Continued

Abstract

This manuscript argues that there is an intimate connection between a "critical" ethnographer's personal history and the data collected. The author traces elements in his personal life, such as school, religion, immigration and forms of discrimination, and connects dominant values within the above to the various studies he has conducted over the last decade. The author reflects back on how he may have unconsciously been seeing the everyday experiences of subjects he was studying as a reflection of his own personal experiences at various times in his life - all which relate to forms of institutional and cultural political resistance. The author argues that the educational Left can only be caught in a theoretical and cynical "catch 22" logic if the interpretation of "critical data" remain at the structural level. Moments of joy and emancipatory possibility, the author maintains, becomes a possibility particularly when the critical ethnographer's personal voice is entered into the whole ethnographic picture. That in mind, the author argues that school change on any level of liberation can only occur when the researcher and researched can attain a level of intersubjective compromise, where both their personal voices and relationships to structure are better understood.

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Reflective Critical Inquiry on Critical Inquiry: A Critical Ethnographic Dilemma Continued

by
Barry Kanpol[±]

The Qualitative Report, Volume 3, Number 4, December, 1997

Abstract

This manuscript argues that there is an intimate connection between a "critical" ethnographer's personal history and the data collected. The author traces elements in his personal life, such as school, religion, immigration and forms of discrimination, and connects dominant values within the above to the various studies he has conducted over the last decade. The author reflects back on how he may have unconsciously been seeing the everyday experiences of subjects he was studying as a reflection of his own personal experiences at various times in his life - all which relate to forms of institutional and cultural political resistance. The author argues that the educational Left can only be caught in a theoretical and cynical "catch 22" logic if the interpretation of "critical data" remain at the structural level. Moments of joy and emancipatory possibility, the author maintains, becomes a possibility particularly when the critical ethnographer's personal voice is entered into the whole ethnographic picture. That in mind, the author argues that school change on any level of liberation can only occur when the researcher and researched can attain a level of intersubjective compromise, where both their personal voices and relationships to structure are better understood.

Introduction

"Critical" education theory, research and practice faces major dilemmas. Despite the often brilliant critical theoretical analyses (Apple, [1996](#); Darder, [1995](#); Giroux, [1992](#), [1996](#), [1997](#); McLaren, [1993](#), [1997](#); Purpel & Shapiro, [1995](#); Willis, [1977](#)) and countless others over the last two decades or so), I have over the last few years or so begun to ask these problematic questions: To what end do critical educators theorize? Why is theory so devoid of personal narrative? What relationship has critical theory to the everyday life-world of those who work in the trenches, such as teachers, administrators, students and researchers? Why doesn't critical analysis and practice seriously find its way into public schools? The search to the answers of these particular critical questions and dilemmas fuels my inquiry into this paper. Rather than cynically theorize over what is wrong in teacher education today, or in urban schools, or in public schools in general, or construct an alternative postmodern version of partial truth, or even present another case study relating more of the same, this paper calls for an immediate subjective interpretation and further critical analysis of my specific role in the field of critical theory both as a participant in theoretical construction, as well as a critical ethnographic researcher in the conduits of public schools.

Critically, the subjective-objective (Guba, [1990](#); Phillips, [1990](#); Roman & Apple, [1990](#)) debate as a part of qualitative research continues, and is vitally connected to critical practice and the prior questions I posed. Given the qualitative paradigm I have embraced and the critical ethnographic approach within the qualitative paradigm I have adopted over all my case studies (Kanpol, [1992](#), [1994](#)), one thing is certain. Little of this research would have been possible *without* the intrusion of my own subjectivity, personal history, biases or hidden and/or overt political agenda¹. Given this statement, as a critical ethnographic researcher one may or may not be aware of the often times political climate or incursions one is making into the research site. No political, or counter-hegemonic invasion into schools can be made without eventually understanding one's relationship to social structures. This necessarily embraces one's personal history - a reflective work for sure, ensuring utmost honesty and a high amount of integrity.

With the above in mind, the first part of this paper is devoted to personal stories/narratives. I will then summarize how these micro-narratives have "subjectively" affected my critical ethnographic studies. Next, I will theorize how a better understanding of these personal stories today have allowed me to move from the position of what I shall term *critical cynicism* to *critical joy*. Finally, I will posit suggestions for critical ethnographers that would tap into a 'critical' paradigm that has been historically cynical and lacking the joyful possibilities of a counter hegemonic agenda²!

A Personal Journey: And There I Was - Establishing a Criticality

Arguably, a defining moment for most critical theorists is their personal understanding of the oppressive structures they formerly or presently live in, be they related to race, class, gender, religion or any form of stereotypes or discrimination, etc. Perhaps my childhood should be divided into at least two significant areas where personal understanding of oppressive structures existed: school and religion. As a criticalist, as for any other researcher, honesty is paramount, especially when reflecting back on one's relationship to structural elements of the social.

School

I vividly recall attending a private Jewish day school in Melbourne, Australia. Two pronounced things happened to me during that time. School was both boring and extremely competitive. Tracking into subject areas that was gender inflicted was predominant - girls to take humanity courses and boys to take science courses. Teaching methodologies were technical in the Freirian sense, and thereby not conducive to creative learning. And, often, friendships were defined by either who received school achievement awards or who was popular regarding sporting accomplishments.

Fear was instilled into those who didn't compete well. Both students as well as parents were excessively competitive, where it seemed that one's personal worth was based on accomplishment. Stereotypes were abundant, and I was guilty of conforming to and reproducing them as anyone was in the school culture. Teachers were often authoritarian and dogmatic, in short, they were technocratic. They (male teachers anyway) were also sexist. I was usually afraid of them. At best, I recall some teachers taking a personal interest in me, usually pointing out my sporting prowess, but not my academic achievements, mainly because there weren't any to write

home about. My principal despised me and in my mind he was the sole reason I dropped out of high school in the 11th grade. I was so scared of this authoritarian regime that as one unfortunate outcome, I often lied to my parents about grades I received or tests I had taken. I was a cheating expert, living on the edge when it came to exam time. I was just *not* a regimented learner, as the system demanded. There was no freedom of expression. Perhaps this is why I often fell asleep in class, listened to music through ear plugs when I could, or build fantasy football teams.

School was a far cry from the kind that Dewey ([1902](#), [1938](#)) and other progressives envisioned. The curriculum was clearly not connected to personal life experiences and/or interests. Democracy, it seemed, was thwarted by authoritarianism and patriarchal control³. There was no substantive vision for why we were to receive an education, only that it would land a more prestigious job one day, thus providing upward social mobility. Indeed, much of my class time was spent dodging boredom through various individual and collective student pranks designed to get on the teachers' nerves.

As I write this, I am not particularly proud to be a part of those eventual dropouts who for want of a more meaningful life in school made some teachers pay for the school's deficiencies. With the advent of my dropping out, I felt doomed. And, even though my parents immigrated to Israel (and I followed suite), and despite the fact that I completed an American diploma in a highly priced American International School in Israel (it seems like my parents bought my diploma as I never had the "correct" or credits to graduate especially without one passing math course), I was determined, despite my basketball scholarship to Tel Aviv University, to overcome my jock stereotype, and academic ineptness, and complete my B.A. I did so, ironically in the subjects I had failed in the 11th grade in Australia - English Literature and History.

As a teacher, more of the same systemic nonsense occurred. I was fairly incensed with a school system that was similar to the one I grew up in. There was little if any connection of curriculum to experience, an amazing amount of competition, tracking, Darwinian survival of the fittest mentality, worth based on achievement, fear of tests (now a particular fear of the principal holding me accountable to every syllable on the curriculum), and so on. It was all quite repetitive and historically constructed. There wasn't any substantive vision - especially in my teacher education program which was purely bent on reproducing teaching robots with a technical mastery of skills. I was totally deskilled as a teacher and not prepared to deal with the social and cultural affairs that go on in all schools⁴. How ironic, or should I say, *historic* and sad that the same technocratic mind-set doggedly persists in many teacher education departments today.

Religion

Even though I grew up in a traditional Jewish home, little mention or personal analysis and scrutiny was made of this impact on my life. Much like some religious schools (McLaren, [1993](#)), religion was (as I felt at the time) forced on me through prayer and ritual, particularly in school. Hand in hand with an authoritarian school system, religion on some levels also represented forced authority and control.

One could read personal bitterness and resentment into school and religious dogma. Yet, within my religious upbringing, there were some fine memories, especially around traditional Passover

times, where family gatherings were the norm, Bible stories and their heroes often came to life, my introduction to Jewish manhood through a barmitzvah ritual and so on. My major problems with religion were socially constructed. Why should I atone on the Day of Atonement (only one day a year and not the other 364 days!) when I felt that a system was full of institutional sin? In my mind, little sense was made over mandatory services. Why was I challenging these school and religious traditions. These questions could not be answered then, but as a part of what Sharon Welch describes as (1985) "dangerous memories," these feelings, ideas, and experiences must be interrogated for further explanation, understanding, interpretation, and reconfiguring, so as to view personal oppression, alienation and subordination, with the intent to challenge a system that allowed what seemed to be injustices occur. This is a part of a critical reflection process that is a necessary condition for the critical ethnographer.

Discrimination

As a part of this critical reflection process, I was met with a fair amount of anti-Semitism growing up. "Dirty Jew" and "Jew boy" were often flung at me in discriminating and often humiliating ways. Playing competitive sports for non-Jewish teams was never easy because I often felt left out, different and at times "less than" others. I would try to hide my identity. And, although I did not go out of my way to tell my non-Jewish friends who I was, somehow everyone knew I was Jewish. Relatedly, but just as important, I grew up in a closed Jewish community who also discriminated against non-Jews. I would often hear the words "Those Goyim (non-Jews) as a statement of Jewish retaliation to anti-Semitism. And in the street where I lived from 8-17 years of age, many children were not allowed to play with me simply because I was Jewish. I was depicted as one who had some sort of disease, I guess, and definitely one not to socialize with. Until today, I *despise* both forms of discrimination!

During my formative years I learned that Truth was supposedly a Jewish thing. There was no mention of meaning beyond the Old Testament, for instance. There was no mention of what being Gentile or Christian was about, for instance, except that it was a dangerous thing. Joy, love and solace was supposedly a Jewish thing, which, according to my personal experiences in and out of school were remote given the realities of forced religion and authoritarianism in school.

Since those days, life's experiences have humbled me. As a struggling immigrant to Israel, I often met the discriminating forces of people. As an immigrant I was not made to feel a part of a country⁵. Dangerous memories will remind me of a failed marriage: patriarchal domination, lack of sensitivity, and issues of control, and power on both sides. These dangerous memories will also remind me of a career that often sits entrenched in theoretical nihilism and despair, which has rendered me quite sarcastic, hopeless and sorry in the face of social, cultural and structural nightmares - and this despite my privileged social position.

My politics has often been confusing. No wonder. Despite the postmodern insistence on multiple realities and never-ending deconstruction, I have often wondered what meaning I can take from my youth and present life that makes story telling and narrative so powerful, so profound and so real that a politics of hope can indeed rear its head. What can I learn from, for instance from both the Old and New Testament that would make stories of Moses, Abraham, David and Jesus real without being dogmatic, hopeful without being cynical, and democratic without being

authoritarian? With the above in mind, the connection between this skeleton of a personal story can and must be made to past critical ethnographic studies so as to make sense of how the cynical and "critical" me can present a joyful possibility and hope for ways out of the structural nightmares public schools find themselves in today.

And There I Was - In the Trenches Again!

From 1985 until 1990 I was officially the visitor of three public schools at places where I was professionally located - in Columbus, Ohio where I completed my doctorate, and in Orange, California where I was on my first professorial assignment. One thing is certain. I wasn't told in my graduate studies on qualitative research that to enter a school site was both political and very personal. What I was told in my graduate qualitative research classes was how to technically conduct a qualitative research study. This in itself reminded me of my teacher education days, where I was to become the deskilled practitioner rather than a reskilled, thoughtful critic of who I was in the surroundings I entered. Thus, the qualitative research courses I had taken, despite the eye-opening knowledge bases, had become, quite ironically and sadly, another form of student deskilling!

Rather than take readers now into the research sites I entered (Kanpol, [1992](#), [1994](#)), perhaps a summary of how the interplay between my earlier narrative and the research venues effected me is in order, given the title of this paper.

Hillview Middle School

I entered Hillview as a conscientious graduate student bent on getting all the information needed and following exact methodological procedures to satisfy my doctoral committee, perhaps even myself! During the time I was researching a group of eighth grade teachers, I was heavily into Willis's *Learning to Labor* ([1977](#)). There was no doubt a significant influence on Marxist readings, particularly as it was related to the research site and past personal experiences.

Perhaps even more importantly than the connection of qualitative research to the data, was the *unconscious* interpretation of events in this middle school that were influenced by my past schooling experiences, in short, my personal history and narrative. As a naive qualitative researcher, I saw similar themes of my own past in the actions of the subjects (particularly teachers) under study. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was learning at least as much about myself as I was about the teachers I was researching. Following this group of cynical eighth graders (and they certainly had reasons to be cynical given their perception of administration ineptness, particularly the principal), I was viewing what I believed to be a counter-hegemonic agenda. For the main though, I described their coping strategies as forms of **institutional political resistance**. These forms of resistances had little substance and were mainly concerned with breaking rules, use of oppositional language and developing survival mechanisms that would challenge authority - **all of which I as a student and a teacher would engage in on a daily level in prior years** to the doctoral experience. There is no doubt in my mind, that given my past relationship to my school principal, and my deskilled public school teaching career, this research venue provided a locale to vent my own anger at a system that often dehumanized me through its deskilling processes! To support this notion further would be to understand that in

this particular research venue there was what I believe to be a true form of counter hegemony or **cultural political resistance**. In this sense there were notions of female teachers struggling against structural discriminatory forces. Lo and behold, given the description of discrimination in the first section of this paper, had an idea of what this struggle was about.

Parkview Elementary School

It took two years after my dissertation to finally reenter public schools. During those years, I read much feminist literature. I also realized that in terms of a counter-hegemonic agenda, my Hillview study was theoretically weak. I often asked my students, which of the four teachers of Hillview do you identify with? What I was really commenting on was that how all four had elements of my own personality, and my own teaching habits, etc. I was determined at Parkview Elementary to be more distant, bracket more, and **not** be so emotionally involved - as well as less cynical about the administration. Nevertheless, in my introduction to the school climate, the principal commented of this "working class" school dominated by Hispanic Americans: "I don't know if we can give them what they want here. They are vocationally bound." I was thunderstruck. This comment reminded me of my principal in the school I attended as a teenager, who told my parents when I was twelve that "your son should be a barber!" It was at that moment that I realized that qualitative research is far more personal than I could ever have imagined. That, yes, despite the need to perform what my professors taught me (the need to **bracket** one's life in an effort to seek a semblance of the "truth" or a different reality), there would be difficulty in keeping my own values and experiences away from the research site. I also fully then realized that any research site has a political agenda, where dominant and subordinate values prevailed. Moreover, given the nature of the research I was to conduct at Parkview Elementary, it was indubitably skewed on some level by my own history and by former research reports (Anyon, [1980](#)) that were supporting the kind of work I was doing.

In short, counter hegemony was both a personal and social concern. I was to record and view how a teacher fictitiously named Betty was to challenge the principal's stereotypical comments about students. I observed how Betty challenged dominant values of rampant individualism and excessive competition, etc. Importantly, I witnessed how Betty created a counter-hegemonic platform that I had unconsciously accepted both long ago as a resistant student growing up in Australia, as a teacher in Israel, and as a researcher in her classroom. Even more importantly, I recounted how Betty resisted with **love, kindness and tolerance**. On an unconscious level I was now witnessing the cynical me moving to a joyful counter-hegemonic possibility, although I wasn't aware of it at the time - being caught in a poor marriage and an Education Department bent on totally deskilling its faculty members and pre- and in-service students didn't help matters either.

I had learned one thing certainly. A one time qualitative effort like my dissertation was not enough to justify "research" expertise. I wanted to go beyond the study of Betty or even a group of disgruntled eighth grade teachers. I wanted inner-city schooling and more action. I wanted to view teacher resistant struggles in their highest forms and better understanding of the theoretical and practical intricacies I had gotten into. These were the reasons for the next study.

Chapel High School

How ironic it is that in this study a group of E.S.L. (English as a Second language) teachers volunteered to participate with me in my research effort. I say ironic, because in Israel I was an E.S.L. teacher in both private institutions and public schools. Ironic, because these teachers were teaching immigrants and I had been an immigrant in Israel and was now one in the United States. And who says the choice of research venue or the topic to be researched is devoid of past personal experience? It seems, then, that to reflect on my subjectivity - my whole historical and political being, was totally involved in this research effort as well, even if I didn't realize it totally at the time.

I recall teachers struggling with those students who couldn't speak English - I glibly recall me being illiterate in Hebrew in Israel. I am reminded how students resisted any learning that teachers had in mind for them. I too resisted all forms of teaching authority (especially learning Hebrew) in Israel for I didn't want to be part of the dominant culture! I recollect these E.S.L. teachers trying so urgently to challenge stereotypes. I was stereotyped a "jock" and "dumb" during my school years. I fondly recall an Egyptian teacher (fictitiously named Sarah) who understood her subjectivity so well, that she became a "resistant" role model for students to view and learn from. She understood the subordinate role of females and the discord and strife inherent in leaving an original home. I learned from Sarah too!! She taught me that I was like the students (in my past an immigrant) and that she was me (a teacher) . On this level, our roles were confusing. She further taught me that counter-hegemony is a compromise between the dominant structure and an alternative and liberating vision! That said, I learned that any counter-hegemonic struggle is a form of self-reflection on the "dangerous memories" of your own particular struggles and conflicts, particularly as related to one's personal history.

I would argue that the three studies I conducted were about this form of struggle. The studies and/or my personal struggles were **not objective**. These ultimate conflicts with dominant modalities were mired in one's own particular history and interrelated with others' struggles and histories. Indeed these counter hegemonic clashes with structural elements of society were I believe to be intersubjective in nature, producing what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) term, a "democratic imaginary" - a challenge to all forms of oppression, subordination and alienation, despite the time and place of their existence, and across time and place.

I have not done justice to the three case studies I conducted a few years ago. I have merely tipped the iceberg. What I have shown to date though, is the inevitable connection between my history as a student, teacher, immigrant, resistor and male, to the choice of research venue. In the following section I will travel beyond the venues themselves and theorize more about how I believe a critical theory in education must be seen in more than just a cynical light. I will also argue that this is a very personal matter as well.

And here I am

Critical theorists in general, and myself in particular have carried an air of cynicism into their work for many years now. For me, cynicism, or the cynic, is one who is inclined to investigate the sincerity of people's motives, or the value of living, one who highly questions the material interests of both individuals and the social structures in which individuals live. Let me be clearer here. I am **not** arguing that cynicism, as defined above is necessarily a bad or evil thing. Critical

theorists in education and/or critical ethnographers have known for some time that there are some very good reasons to be cynical of a society whose institutions like schools claim democratic virtues, yet in the everyday life-world often espouse a confusing contradictory capitalistic market logic (Shapiro, [1990](#)), resulting in rampant race, class and gender inequities (Apple, [1996](#); Kozol, [1991](#), [1994](#)).

The cynicism I am talking about grows out of a "catch 22" logic that educational theory has found itself historically mired in. Put differently, how does one escape the dialectic? This was highly questioned in Willis's now notorious work in education and in my own studies. Here, the inevitability of cultural reproduction weighed mightily against the backdrop of the culturally productive aspects of counter-hegemony within a capitalistic framework and resultant structural inequities. In my educational foundations classes for instance, teachers are at pains to counter damning oppressive structural constraints imposed on them by the state mandated curriculum, intensification of labor, and other forms of personal and structural oppression, etc. When they do see emancipatory and counter-hegemonic hope, hegemonic forms often raise their ugly heads. Thus, my in-service teachers are at once cut back by other constraints and forced into some form of perceived, and I would argue, oppressive conformity. Because of this one-step forward, two-step backward syndrome, they many times become cynical. They find little solace in ways out of the cultural and structural nightmares they find themselves in, despite the sincerity that structures their original criticisms. No less can be said of those criticalists who argue that it becomes impossible to become the "other" - those who are marginalized and oppressed (Ellsworth, [1989](#)). This dualistic and oppositional logic, also cynical, while sincere in intention, and often but not always correct in the everyday life world (Kanpol, [1990](#)), denies the theoretical and practical possibility for fusion with the "other" in an intercommunicative dialogue of emancipatory struggle and possibility. **Indeed**, as a critical ethnographer, in order to "get at" the voices of those oppressed teachers, I had to become much more than the critical cynic. I had to reach beyond the cultural reproduction and cultural production theoretical logic in order to communicate within an intersubjective dialogue of hope and possibility OUT of the structural nightmares these teachers found themselves in. In short, my history had to align in some way with the teachers. To remain the critical cynic, while a necessary but not sufficient condition for social transformation, it seemed that I had to travel beyond my own cynical historical past so that a space could be opened for what I have termed elsewhere, as "joy" to occur (Kanpol, [1997](#)). Here I could see, feel, and be the 'other,' understanding, acknowledging and accepting the connection between the "other of the researched and the "other" in me.

It is within the dialectic of cynicism and joy that I as a critical ethnographer have found myself and renewed my enthusiasm for critical ethnographic research. As a politics of meaning, **joy** is politically loaded to mean alliance, commonality, and what Lerner ([1994](#)) describes in his own work as "renewal." He comments, more spiritually, connecting joy to ethics:

Reclaiming a sense of celebration and joy at the wonders of creation is another sense of the Jewish renewal . . . what is unique about Judaism is that it entwines the sense of awe, wonder, amazement, and this spiritual reality that surrounds us, with a vision of God who not only created the universe but also the force that makes possible an ethically guided universe. (p. 96)

For Lerner as well as West (1993), joy connects ethically to renewal as a form of Politics of Meaning in which liberation from oppressive forces becomes a guiding motif - despite their absolute differences in faith. Joy, thus understood, is both a healing and "critical" process. The bond of commonality entered by Lerner and West, as an act of solidarity has immense philosophical connotations and is the kind of solidarity that I as a critical ethnographer entered with some of my subjects in the research venues, but was unaware of it at the time.

The way I am using cynicism and joy should not be seen as a static dialectic but rather as a personal crusade of **here I am** in the context of being a critical ethnographer. As a process of common democratic struggle, joy must be seen within cynicism and growing out of cynicism as a necessary condition for human liberation and emancipation. For example, in his book on Deleuze, philosopher Michael Hardt (1993) argues for commonality as a basic form of joy. He relates how workers in the novel by Nanni Balestrine *Vogliamo tutto* (We want everything) is interpreted by Deleuze as an

attack on their essence as workers. They arrive at moment when they are able to go beyond, to discover a terrain of creation and joy beyond the worker. (p. 46)

Hardt's emphasis that workers in this novel recognize their commonality and,

Their expression in collective action take the form of a spatial or social synthesis, composing an expansive and coherent body of desire. As the body of workers expands, their will and power grow. The synthesis involved in the workers' collectivity is an integral return of the will . . . precisely when the workers actualize their critique, they pass into action in the factory and in the streets, they achieve the constructive moment of joy and creation. The actualization of the workers is a practice of joy. (p. 47)

Hardt's central point here, I believe, is to locate a philosophy of joy which is necessarily tied directly to a philosophy of practice, a suggestive argument linking commonness to common behavior and/or common desire to a practice of joy, an intersubjectivity of sorts. Commonness or intersubjectivity can and should also be related to what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) term, a "democratic imaginary." Here, political struggles and/or antagonisms are connected by their commonness to dismember various forms of alienation, subordination and oppression within the structure.

Cynicism that leads to joy as commonness within solidarity is a part of what I as a critical ethnographer underwent in my personal investigation at public school sites, in the quest to understand "otherness." Mired in the cynicism of "catch 22" theoretical logic of cultural reproduction and cultural production, joy and affirmation were rewarded when it was realized that "Here I am" had become as ethic of affirmation and one of democratic political practice. This ethic of joy as critical practice becomes a fleeting moment in time that is captured by combining the researchers history and dangerous memories with that of the researched and the researcher's "other." Joy rears its head when there is a commonness of political struggle, an intersubjectivity of pain for instance, or a common bond that is nurtured by critical ethnographers and their subjects under investigation. That bond seeks common oppression, alienation and subordination as a marker to challenge the critical cynic and move to a joyful

position of emancipatory possibility, where critical ethnographers and their subjects move unitedly with collective democratic ground in an effort to rise beyond otherness. To me, this is a starting place for a counter-hegemonic platform!

The above short theoretical treatise has suggested that cynicism and joy can be a part and parcel of a critical ethnographic position, *particularly mine* as I have indicated earlier. My politics has certainly been informed by my own particular history, ultimately my personal multifarious identity - my relationship to schools, parents, authoritarianism, religion and other discriminatory forces. How this affected my critical ethnographic studies is quite obvious to me. It **did**, only I wasn't aware of it at the time.

Conclusion - Where Do We Go From Here?

The role of the critical ethnographer cannot be underestimated. Indeed, from my personal experiences and reflections, that role is multi-fold. Surely the critical ethnographer is to seek knowledge of the structure under investigation - in my case schools. However, what underlies that structure becomes the gut of the critical ethnographer and his/her relationship to that structure. As a result, I have adamantly contended that an additional role of critical ethnographers is self reflection on their relationship to oppressive structural elements of society, particularly. In my mind, without this personal investigation, there is little possibility to overcome the cynicism that underlies much of critical educational theory. My argument for self reflexivity is certainly not a new one. However, self reflexivity has some additional components that perhaps haven't been argued before. Self reflexivity is indubitably connected to one's personal history. One's history is tied into the research site on some conscious or unconscious level. The move from critical cynic to emancipatory joy becomes a moving dialectic between researcher and researched and "our" otherness - an ongoing process of etching out common democratic threads as an intersubjective understanding. Moreover, as critical qualitative researchers (or critical ethnographers), our dilemma on how we intrude on knowledge doesn't end. It continues. We must be, however, more refined in how we use it in the pursuit of knowledge.

If anything, my three case studies briefly described earlier have convinced me of the need for even far more personal reflection. I have been encouraged to pursue the blend between the deeper personal aspects of my critical personality (and the cynic in me) with the reasons as to why I pursue a research agenda. Thus, a "critical" research agenda isn't only about attaining knowledge of the structural elements of schools, for instance. A research agenda as I am delineating it, is a committed understanding of where one fits into the structure while conducting critical ethnography, while concurrently negotiating critical social inquiry. That understood, joy becomes an emancipatory viability for the critical ethnographer *only* if the researched and the researcher can attain an intersubjective compromise, where histories intrude on each other in their often multiple and contradictory ways. It is to this confusing sense of inquiry that knows no boundaries that I head into as the years progress.

References

Anyon, J. (1980). Social class and the hidden curriculum of work. *Journal of Education*, 162, 66-92.

Apple, M. (1996). *Cultural politics and education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Darder, A. (1995). *Culture and difference: Critical perspectives on the bicultural experiences in the United States*. Westport, CT: Bergin Garvey.

Dewey, J. (1902). *The child and the curriculum*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.

Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering: Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59(3), 297-324.

Giroux, H. (1992). *Border crossings*. New York: Routledge.

Giroux, H. (1996). *Fugitive cultures: Race, violence & youth*. New York: Routledge.

Giroux, H. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture and schooling*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Guba, E. (1990). Subjectivity and objectivity. In E. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education* (pp. 74-91). New York: Teachers College Press.

Hardt, M. (1993). *Gilles Deleuze*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kanpol, B. (1990). Reply to Ellsworth. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60(3), 363-365.

Kanpol, B. (1992). *Towards a theory and practice of teacher cultural politics*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Kanpol, B. (1994). *Critical pedagogy: An introduction*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Kanpol, B. (1997). *Issues and trends in critical pedagogy*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Kanpol, B. (1998). *Teachers talking back and breaking bread*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities*. New York: Crown.

Kozol, J. (1994). *Amazing grace*. New York: Crown.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and the socialist strategy*. London: Verso.

Lerner, M. (1994). *Jewish renewal*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

McLaren, P. (1993). *Schooling as a ritual performance*. London: Routledge.

McLaren, P. (1997). *Revolutionary multiculturalism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Phillips, D. C. (1990). Subjectivity and objectivity: An objective inquiry. In E. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education* (pp. 19-37). New York: Teachers College Press.

Purpel, D., & Shapiro, S. (1995). *Beyond liberation and excellence: Reconstructing the public discourse in education*. Westport, CT: Bergin Garvey.

Roman, L., & Apple, M. (1990). Is naturalism a move away from positivism? Materialist and feminist approaches to subjectivity in ethnographic research. In E. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education* (pp. 38-73). New York: Teachers College Press.

Shapiro, S. (1990). *Between capitalism and democracy*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Welch, S. (1985). *Communities of resistance and solidarity*. New York: Orbis.

West, C. (1993). *Prophetic thought in postmodern times*. Monroe, MN: Common Courage Press.

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labor*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath.

Footnotes

¹By political I refer specifically to values - be they dominant, subordinate, as well as oppressive.

²For an in-depth theoretical treatise of the dialectic of cynicism and joy, refer to Barry Kanpol's (1998) *Teachers Talking Back and Breaking Bread*.

³See Shapiro (1990) for an in-depth analysis on the contradictory nature of the values of capitalism and democracy that school are faced with.

⁴For an in-depth description and many examples of schooling experiences as a students and teacher, please refer to Barry Kanpol's (1997) *Issues and Trends in Critical Pedagogy*.

⁵*Op. Cit.*

Author Note

⁺Barry Kanpol, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at Penn State Harrisburg. He has published a number of books and numerous article on the role of teachers in the social order, particularly involving critical pedagogy and its many strands as a form of theoretical inquiry. He can be reached at 717-948-6300 (o) 717-732-6763 or by e-mail at bxk13@psu.edu.

Barry Kanpol
1997 copyright

