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CHAPTER 22

Intersectionality: *Scaling Intersectional Praxes*

Gregory Martin and Benjamin "Benji" Chang

Keywords

activism – BIPOC communities – Black Lives Matter – social class – critical pedagogy – community organizing – ethnic studies – Paulo Freire – geography – Kimberlé Crenshaw – intersectionality – Marxism – oppression – open Marxism – spatiality – scale – social movements – patriarchy – popular education – sexism – White supremacy – Whiteness

I. Introduction

Around the globe, Marxism has provided an eclectic and rich pool of resources for praxes that is responsive to place-based manifestations of exploitation, oppression, power and injustice. Despite the crimes of some communist and socialist states, representative of cult ideologies such as Stalinism, Maoism, and Kimilsungism, Marx's critique of capitalism continues to inspire praxes toward a broad range of alternative futures. As a dynamic socio-spatial project, open forms of Marxism have displayed a generative capacity to learn from failure, mistakes and shortcomings. Similarly, encompassing many different positions and tendencies, Marxist educational theory and practice has learned from its missteps and shortcomings. Yet, recurring blindspots in Marxist educational scholarship presents an opportunity to engage in dialogue and learning with a broader range of disciplines and contexts.

A well-established, and still growing body of Marxist educational scholarship has explored the relevance of education to diverse activist contexts, from traditional labour organisations to new social movements, with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour) communities. For the most part, this research has privileged demonstrative, highly visible elements of these phenomena. Forced into the shadows are vital forms of education that are embodied and embedded in activists' daily lives and practices (Martin et al., 2007; Ollis, 2020). Contributing to this oversight, some theoretical contributions have fetishised

particular educational sites, approaches and scales of achievement, e.g., revolutionary critical pedagogy. Taking inspiration from intersectional theory and a broad range of disciplines and contexts including Geography and Ethnic Studies, this entry will explore how socio-spatial biases have contributed to the devaluing of everyday, relational and intersectional approaches that are central to the scaling of educational praxes. In this context, the plural form of praxes is privileged because it shines a spotlight on the varied forms and goals of critical education (e.g., critical hip-hop pedagogy, popular education, theatre of the oppressed, youth participatory action research), from the every-day and mundane to the grand and spectacular and their relational and scaled intersections. Since its inception, intersectional theory and practice have insti-gated new forms of analysis and activity that offer to renew and reassert the relevance of Marxist inspired educational praxes.

II. Marxism and Intersectionality

Spanning anti-systemic movements such as the worldwide fight against aus-terity, racism, and sexual violence, Marxism continues to have currency as a source of activist enchantment and animate grassroots community praxes. Even if Marxism does not predominate in theory or practice, grassroots and social movement activists have drawn upon this broad and rich tradition to inform interconnected praxes of problem-posing dialogue, learning, knowl-edge production, and action. While far-Right conspiracy theories attribute far more influence to Marxism than it probably deserves, it has provided an eclec-tic pool of shared resources and inspiration both within and across diverse activist formations.

Marxism holds that theory and practice should be equally valued and that the relationship between the two unfolds dialectically through praxis. How-ever, the implications of this dialectic for praxis are understood very differ-ently across the wide spectrum of Marxist standpoints, which is inclusive of economic determinist and class reductionistic conceptions of Marxism to more expansive or open-ended orientations. It is important to note that ideologically and organisationally restrictive standpoints still hold sway in some sectarian groups and tendencies, which are typically isolated from each other and much of the activist world. In such contexts, Marxist praxis may remain closely tied to questions about the mode of production, class conflict and anti-capitalist praxis, as guided by a vanguard party or smaller group of professional revolutionaries. In these contexts, the question of class is highly privileged as it is central to the overthrow, rather than the reform, of capitalist relations. The

logic of this kind of Marxism tends to dictate an emphasis on Party-directed praxis – entailing educational activities, entryism in other groups and organisations to disseminate Marxist ideas as well as organising and propaganda – as a means to gain support, including through influence on the outlook and actions of popular movements.

Yet, some advocates and strands of Marxism have developed ideologically and politically through an embrace of intersectional politics (Bohrer, 2019a). Importantly, the theory and practice of intersectionality has proven to be a powerful tool for understanding complex, interlocking convergences of inequality that can be rendered invisible by centring the concept of class. Indeed, Marxism has enjoyed a shared history with intersectionality and its precursors, which has been characterised by mutually beneficial engagement, even if the relationship between them has been occasionally fraught with conflict and disagreement. For example, some strands of Marxism have been critiqued for subsuming multiple, intersecting forms of "micro-level" oppression to class and questions of strategy related to it. The prioritisation of class exploitation and struggle is perceived to have had the effect of rendering multiple forms of oppression and inequality as "incidental" (Bohrer, 2019b, p. 15). In this context, some traditions of Marxism have been accused of relegating gender and other sources of difference and lived oppression to a series of peripheral issues, such as through the essentialisation and oversimplification of sexism and patriarchy (Dunayevskaya, 1981; Gaido & Frencia, 2018; Luxemburg, 2004). In addition, other intersecting identities and experiences of oppression sometimes appear to be ignored or not taken seriously.

For some Marxists the concept of "intersectionality" is an annoying buzzword. On a deeper level, it has been accused of promoting a liberal "identity politics," which has had a divisive effect on the struggle of workers and class unity (Foley, 2019; Bohrer, 2019a). In this context, Foley (2019) has argued, "intersectionality can usefully describe the *effects* of multiple oppressions, I propose, it does not offer an adequate explanatory framework for addressing the root *causes* of social inequality in the capitalist socioeconomic system" (p. 11, original emphasis). Yet, intersectional Marxists, such as Bohrer (2019b), have responded to such criticism by suggesting it represents a mis-reading of the work of intersectional theorists and activists. Bohrer (2019b) finds it difficult to locate the source of this mis-understanding because "Nearly all of the foun-dational theorists of intersectionality … treat capitalism and exploitation as central to an intersectional analysis" (p. 14). This runs counter to charges that intersectional theory is imbued by a post-modern politics focused on acknowledging "individual and experiential elements of oppression" that limit change to matters of "language and discourse" rather than a more ambitious targeting

of power in all its manifestations, including structural and institutional (2019a, p. 106). She asserts that "the strongest versions of intersectionality" (2019a, p. 117), which connect exploitation and oppression to a critique of capitalism, provide "incredibly helpful tools to offer Marxist academics and activists, even if intersectionality is not itself a theory of capitalism" (2019b, p. 15).

III. Intersectional Theory & Practice

Intersectionality should not be equated simplistically with a bourgeois identity politics that re-inscribe the hegemony of capitalist power. Bohrer (2019a) takes issue with Marxists who argue that theories of oppression compromise class analysis, unity and praxis. For Bohrer (2019b), exploitation and oppres-sion are analytically distinct and should not be conflated or "reduced to one another" (p. 14). Yet, some Marxists appear to dismiss and/or mis-characterise theories of oppression, perhaps as a consequence of dogmatism and/or intellectual laziness. Whatever the reason, the result is a failure to acknowledge how "capitalism is mutually constituted through oppression and exploitation" (2019b, p. 15). For Bohrer (2019a):

> both Marxism and intersectionality are ways of understanding the world that are irrevocably linked to activism; they both came out of deep, embedded politics among exploited, oppressed, and disenfranchised groups and continue to be mobilized most often in community organizations, coalitions, marches, campaigns, and myriad other forms of real, embodied resistances. (p. 26)

Bohrer (2019a) moves beyond a tendency for one-sided theorising to map the "shared history" of Marxism and intersectionality, and their "reciprocal influence" on praxis (p. 1). For Bohrer, this history provides evidence of the generative potential of new solidarities, which should not be premised on a commonly shared "master" identity (Warner, 2008, p. 457) or sameness, but rather upon a relational praxis grounded in "shared interests" (Cole, cited in Bohrer, 2019a, p. 256). She points to opportunities for "pluralizing the potential sites for anti-capitalist mobilization and leverage" through an embrace of a coalitional politics that is grounded in "the experiences of multiple histories of struggle" (2019a, p. 256). Herein resides the opportunity for a deepening of analysis that is the expression of shared interests that can scale solidarity and praxes.

The concept of intersectionality is most commonly traced back to the work of Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term in

the US during the late 1980s. When considering the common suppression and exclusion of Black women within feminist and anti-racist politics and praxes, Crenshaw identified sources of the problem within single-axis frameworks of oppression that were unable to account for multiple interacting oppressions. In 1989 she called for intersectionality, or an analysis of interlocking oppressions, with the concept becoming widely utilised across disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, physical sciences, and pop culture. In 2013, she and her co-authors elaborated on intersectionality's international uptake:

> Implicit in this broadened field of vision is our view that intersectionality is best framed as an analytic sensibility. If intersectionality is an analytic disposition, a way of thinking about and conducting analyses, then what makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term "intersectionality," nor its being situated in a familiar genealogy, nor its drawing on lists of standard citations. Rather, what makes an analysis intersectional – whatever terms it deploys, whatever its iteration, whatever its field or discipline – is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power. This fram-ing – conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power – emphasies what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is. (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795)

Bohrer (2019a) contends that many activists and theorists of intersectionality draw upon wider sources of knowledge and inspiration, for example, the work of Indigenous communities and feminists in the global south. This explains how the concept has come to encompass multiple meanings and projects, as well as the tensions that can come to exist between them. For Davis (2008) and others, the lack of clarity, or "vagueness and inherent open-endedness," surrounding the meaning and goals of intersectionality is perhaps the reason why it has become "such a success" (p. 77). Consequently, the concept of "intersectionality" has become increasingly in vogue. As a result, some fear that the analytic and embodied power of intersectional praxis has become co-opted and diluted.

In response to a number of unfounded fears and assertions, Bohrer (2019a) reminds us that, "Many of the intellectual precursors of intersectionality were committed Marxists and/or socialists" (p. 1). What is more, the work of a new generation of theorists and activists illustrates why intersectionality is crucial for a relational praxis that addresses the question of "what is to be done?" For example, Patrisse Cullors, one of the three co-founders of the Black

Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the US, is quoted as stating that she and co-founder Alicia Garza:

> We do have an ideological frame. Myself and Alicia, in particular, are trained organizers; we are trained Marxists. We are super-versed on, sort of, ideological theories. And I think what we really try to do is build a movement that could be utilized by many, many Black folks. (cited in Monson, 2020)

Cullors does not shy away from acknowledging the influence of Marxism on her praxis. Yet, many who are drawn to the Black Lives Matter movement might not be aware of Marxism's influence or identify with it as a political project. Certainly, the so-called "cultural Marxism" of BLM has been a target of conservative critique. However, Marxism has come under sustained attack from other quarters too, including for its Eurocentrism and stubborn epistemologies of ignorance around issues such as White supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, and heteronormativity. Such blindspots are enfolded into the homogenising universalist logic of Marxism's theorising of its praxis as catalyst for grand change (Satgar, 2019). Undoubtedly aware of this, Cullors' praxis has many sources of inspiration which have paved the way for a movement that has produced new and creative expressions of intersectional solidarity. Indeed, BLM has given rise to a political opportunity structure that has amplified diverse voices through "homegrown movements" in other parts of the world, e.g., Aboriginal Lives Matter (Armitage, 2016).

Lorde's concept of "the house of difference" is productive for re-imagining and reworking the relational politics of Marxist educational praxis (cited in Bohrer, 2019a, p. 254). In particular, the "house of difference" exposes how systems of power actively construct modes of exclusion and privilege, but in ways that are both contradictory and promising. Conceived in this way, multiple, intersecting relations of difference can be the basis for a coalitional politics that is based on group unity, rather than demands for political discipline and group conformity (Bohrer, 2019a). Aligned to this, Cullors contends that the concept of "Intersectionality should always be at the center of our movements" (cited in Younger, 2018). That is because lived experiences of oppression and exploitation do not fit neatly into fixed, standardised boxes. Instead, they are categories of lived experience that unfold objectively and subjectively in complex, fluid, intersecting and mutually-constituting ways, and which can only be understood in relation to broader socio-spatial structures and their dynamics. In the context of Black Lives Matter, Cullors states:

> We're not just talking about every category that someone lives under, we're talking about the intersections in which people are oppressed; Being Black, being Queer, being Trans being a woman; the places we see where people are the margins. That's what we mean when we talk about intersectionality, and it's so important and critical that we have the folks at the margins because when we center people at the margins we actually get everybody free. (cited in Younger, 2018)

Against a backdrop of increased authoritarianism, inequality, prejudice and oppression, it is no wonder that the appeal of intersectional theory and practice has gone global.

IV. Educational Praxes

The concept of praxis is central to the theorising of Marxist educators. For example, key scholars in the Marxist tradition have singled out the importance of "a philosophy of praxis" for achieving "permanent human liberation" (McLaren, 2020, p. 1245). However, Marxist educators have not always taken up the opportunity to learn from intersectional theories and practice. Despite its open mindedness and noble intent, Marxist educational theory continues to be critiqued for being too limiting. This is not to diminish important contribu-tions to activism and debates represented in Marxist educational scholarship, including by lesser-known scholar-activists (Sculos & Caputi, 2019). However, a troubling lack of care is paid to the complexities of embodied lived experience and activist work and their implications for scaling praxes.

Some contributions in the field of critical pedagogy have attended to the affective and emotional dimensions of lived experience, including in relation to navigating the complexity and tensions that accompany "difficult" and "troubled knowledge" (Zembylas, 2013). This includes addressing how to work with individuals who deny or express guilt about their complicity or "possessive investment" in interrelated structures of power and privilege including capitalism, settler-colonialism and White supremacy (Lipsitz, 2006). Despite this, a tendency exists to engage in theorising that remains disconnected from diverse, embodied experiences of privilege and oppression, which are inti-mately connected to structural power relations, and have clear implications for place-based praxes. Instead, some Marxist scholars continue to privilege demonstrative, grand, if not spectacular forms and scales of educational accomplishment, e.g., revolutionary pedagogies and transformative learning.

Thus, intended or not, Marxist educational theory has been critiqued for its romantic elitism and oppressive effects. We suggest that such critique points to the need to make visible the epistemic and political value of the everyday, "invisible(d)" educational and relational work of intersectionality (Motta, 2021, p. 477), which is key to scaling Marxist political praxes.

Marxist praxes have found educational expression in many different forms, including critical pedagogy, popular education and participatory action research. This entry's title itself both acknowledges and seeks to be inclusive of these multiple forms (and the standpoints that inform them), by employing the plural form of praxis. Various iterations of these forms of praxes have caught international attention, particularly since the translation of Freire's philosophically eclectic, but inherently Marxist-inspired works some 40 years ago. Freire expressed disdain for recipe books or templates for praxis, arguing instead that critical forms of education must always be open and make room for multiple experiences and stories of oppression, which are reflected and acted upon through problem-posing. Central to the process of problem-posing is listening and dialogue that empowers the oppressed to "*name* the world" (Freire, 1993, p. 69, original emphasis) despite a "culture of silence" (Freire, 1985, p. 73) that envelops issues and problems which are deemed controversial or taboo by the powers that be. Following on from this, we suggest that intersectional theory and practice provides a way for the oppressed to name the sources of their oppression for the purpose of re-defining or renaming their worlds. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire puts it like this: "… people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 64, original emphasis). For us, Freire's work is illustrative of how intersectional theory and practice can help to empower "the oppressed" to identify and challenge the many different sources of oppression that intersect as a result of specific situational contexts and broader power relations.

Despite Freire's distaste for authoritarianism and static lockstep applications of his ideas (i.e, his dislike for the term "The Freirean Method"), two common tensions within critical teaching and organising pedagogies are an over-privileging of militant mass social movements in the streets as the best or most preferred strategy, and an under-operationalizing of critical consciousness and its process of conscientisation. Here, a rather autonomous view is employed on how conscientisation moves from political awareness to activism, which is highly rooted in Marxist theories of false consciousness. These two tensions concerning social movements and conscientisation may unin-tentionally promote a lack of humanising relationships, dialogical discourse,

and community-building between the marginalised communities that different forms of Marxist educational praxis are supposed to serve, and the teachers, community advocates, union organisers, and other constituents who are supposed to help facilitate it. In such contexts, Marxist activists and scholars have something to learn from intersectional praxes to address existing toxic movement practices and their legacies which have concretely led to a loss of commitment to socialist ideas and influence in coalitional efforts.

Unfortunately, we have found these problems in our own efforts at praxes in different regions and communities of Australia, the US, and Greater China. For example, over the past 20 years in New York and California, there have been dozens of Marxist organizing spaces with leadership by people of colour in working class communities that address issues such as gentrification, immigrant worker exploitation, the military industrial complex, environmental racism, and criminalisation of youth (i.e, by systems of schooling and law enforcement). Despite some of the organisations' explicit efforts in cadre and leadership education, dialogue, and decision-making, a not uncommon issue that has emerged is the privileging, centring, and/or enabling of male (typically cisgender) voices, including ours. Unfortunately, at times these spaces have reproduced issues of machismo and other forms of male chauvinism which have been well-documented such as in the US Civil Rights Movement, labour unions, and Power Movements of the 1960s-1980s (Ho, 2000; Kelley, 2002; Payne, 1995; Pulido, 2006). Part of the problem has been a limited analysis that focuses on class and/or race, which is unable to account for the ways in which gender and other issues intersect and overlap with race and class. From empirical studies and biographical accounts with leadership and cadre, it seems clear that sexism and patriarchy have been relatively common in some Marxist organisations despite their overt attempts at practicing critical pedagogy through lenses that considered race, class, and gender. In such organisations, an intersectional lens could have provided a more generative and inclusive way to uncover and disrupt the contradictions and other issues at hand.

In another example, we have served as cadre, organisational researchers, and/or steering committee members in social justice organisations which included Marxist analysis, but also applied some degree of intersectional lenses to pursue community organising. We observed a common trend of outside activists wanting to get involved after seeing the organisations at highly-visible activities such as a mass Mayday march, a benefit event with popular artists, or a civil disobedience action that was covered by network news media. When further conversing with the interested activists, we would mention the everyday work of the organisations such as building community trust and

relationships, critically educating members, and maintaining other on-going efforts to sustain and grow the work of the organising (e.g., literacy classes with working parents, health and arts workshops for children). It was at that point where many of the activists would lose interest, with some of the more vocal ones explaining that they were more "frontlines," "in-your-face," or "direct action" types of activists and organisers. While there is not anything wrong per se with just wanting to engage in civil disobedience and marches, it is important to note that this privileging of the more grand, spectacular, and hyper-masculine forms of social justice work has been shown to be problematic in the literature, from critical pedagogy to Third World Liberation Front histories. For example, Black Panther Party (BPP) women leadership have often pointed out that the most important and lasting of their tactics were not the brandishing of firearms while marching clad in black berets and leather jackets, and selling copies of Mao's "Little Red Book" (Brown, 1992; Kochiyama et al., 2009). Instead they discussed initiatives such as the free breakfast and educational programs that had far greater impact in getting masses of community involved and continually developing new members and leadership. While this particu-lar example pre-dates intersectionality theory, it can be clearly observed that BPP women leadership had a significant understanding of the multiple and simultaneous forms of oppression that were present, and that this understanding was grounded in flexibly recognising and building upon the everyday experiences of the community.

For educational Marxists, an intersectional perspective can help shift the spotlight to include activities and relations rendered insignificant in traditions that privilege "in-your-face" and "direct action" pedagogies. Intersectional theory reminds that in the context of social movement organising, a hidden curriculum of power operates, even in seemingly inconsequential, mundane, routine, and/or interpersonal acts and commitments that constitute what is sometimes referred to as "everyday activism." Indeed, a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship, from fields such as feminism and geography, has con-ributed to a broader and more inclusive understanding of what is considered to "count" as activism (Horton & Kraftl, 2009, p. 217). All too often, a wide spectrum of essential everyday work is devalued and relegated to the bottom-end of activist-education hierarchies, including the emotional labour and creativity required to enact and sustain it. For feminists, this points to how activism is gendered, and how othering and exclusion in social movement theorising and practice, can inhibit the possibilities for solidarity and praxis (Dombroski et al., 2018).

Conventional ways of thinking about space contribute to such exclusions and oversights. For example, Soja (1989) argues that space is not simply

container or descriptive backdrop for social action. Such common-sense conceptualisations reflect a privileging of the social at the expense of the spa-tial, and have contributed to the obfuscation and reification of geographical concepts such as scale. Scale, as geographers such as Howitt (1998) point out, should not be reduced to a descriptive category that is conflated with hierarchical formations or units of measurement, e.g., size or level. Instead, scale exists in dialectical relation to other diverse socio-spatialities, for example, of identity, knowledge, place, exclusion and oppression (Howitt, 1998; Leitner & Miller, 2007). Thus, diverse socio-spatialities are understood to co-construct scale through processes that are inherently dialectical, relational and power-laden (Leitner & Miller, 2007). Consequently, while it might seem intuitive to privilege the accomplishment of a grand scale of activist success, this can have the effect of rendering invisible a broad range of emotional and relational work that enacts and scales it (Horton & Kraftl, 2009; Pottinger, 2017).

Despite a wide-ranging and complex body of Marxist educational scholarship, the role and significance of different kinds of educational work is often decentred. For example, some Marxist activists and scholars express preference for particular educational forms and goals, e.g., revolutionary critical ped-agogy, critical consciousness, transformative learning. Yet, evidence of their practical possibilities remain disconnected, understudied, or just missing. For example, despite a few notable exceptions (Chang, 2015; Foley, 1999; Ollis, 2020), the complicities and opportunities of informal and incidental learning, which are embedded in many everyday, routine activist activities and inter-actions, continue to be overlooked. As indicated, we suspect this tendency toward abstraction and oversight draws from masculinist ideals and discourses about what counts educationally as activist, critical, participatory, transformative, or revolutionary. This masculinist bias has contributed to the occlusion and exploitation of strategic work required to enact and scale praxes. In short, a narrow non-intersectional focus on demonstrative and/or grand educational forms and outcomes is problematic as it overlooks the relational and intersectional work required to prefigure the changes we wish to see in the world.

V. Scaling Marxist Educational Theory and Practice

Marxist and intersectional traditions have had an uneasy but productive relationship. Misunderstandings and misgivings between the two have tended to arise as a result of dogma rather than dialogue. In this context, open forms of Marxism have benefited from mutually beneficial dialogue, collaboration and learning with intersectional activists and traditions, which has translated into

an invigorating influence on the *doing* of praxes. Many of these socio-spatial experiments in collective solidarity have come up short or been suppressed. Yet, this continually bubbling cauldron of combustible ideas, relations and creative expression has also thrown up movements that have changed the world. In this combustive mixture, education has an important role to play in facilitating processes that expose and critically engage with complex experiences of lived oppression and privilege that result from structural exploitation and intersectionality.

Yet, recurring blindspots and shortcomings of Marxist educational inquiry suggest an opportunity exists to learn from a more diverse pool of traditions and sources of activist inspiration. Dogma and abstract theorising will not do much to prefigure new futures. Various forms and contexts of activism point to the creativity, dynamism and transformative power of intersectional praxes and its significance for making and re-making both education and the world it helps to prefigure. What this also implies is a collective rethinking of the scale at which education is deemed to count in activist contexts. All too often, everyday forms of relational labour and educational care work required to negotiate the tensions and possibilities that exist at the interface of specific intersections of multiple identities in different contexts are devalued or overlooked. While far from perfect, Marxist educational theory and practice can add value to the doing of anti-systemic, coalitional work by making this invisible(d) work more visible, collectively-owned and intentional. In this context, dialogue, experimentation and a willingness to be inclusive of difference and possibility based on shared interests is required to scale intersectional praxes.

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Suggested Readings

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Boggs, G. L., & Kurashige, S. (2011). *The next American revolution: Sustainable activism for the twenty-first century*. University of California Press.

Brenner, N. (2001). The limits to scale? Methodological reflections on scalar structuration. *Progress in Human Geography, 25*(4), 591–614.

Martin, G. (2017). Scaling critical pedagogy in higher education. *Critical Studies in Education, 58*(1), 1–18.

Robertson, S. L. (2009). Spatializing the sociology of education: Stand-points, entry-points and vantage-points. In M. Apple, S. Ball, & L. Gandin (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of the sociology of education* (pp. 33–44). Routledge.