

# RADICAL LOVE: LOVE ALL, SERVE ALL

SARAH E. COLONNA  
DARA NIX-STEVENSON

## *Abstract*

A quick scan of any major news outlet will show America's unending fascination with crisis. We are engulfed in information about these events, yet we continue with our lives as usual. If the problem is a patriarchal system, as Johnson (2004) suggests, that is interested in maintaining a status quo of existing understandings of social and power relationships, then the solution we suggest is one of radical love to love all and serve all. The love we speak of is more than an individual or even familial feeling. This idea of radical love is love over force, fear, and apathy. This love should not be conflated with altruistic generosity since the intention behind this action is motivated by sincerity. Radical love has the potential to happen individual-to-individual, individual to group, as well as between groups and institutions. It looks like simple acts of kindness, balanced policy making, and honest concern for all of those around us. This radical love is the power for change.

*Keywords:* critical theory; education; feminist theory; ecology

A quick scan of any major news outlet will show America's unending fascination with crisis, large or small, under a 24 hour a day manic urgency that demands our momentary attention until the next catastrophe usurps its importance. Whether it is the real estate bubble, natural disaster, or the latest celebrity couple break-up, we are riveted to the screen – be it TV, computer, or smartphone – for all of the minute details and endless commentary. We are engulfed in information about these events, yet we continue with our lives as usual. We see heartbreak, disease, dysfunction, and corruption all around us, but we often fail to make the connections to our everyday reality. The misuse of natural resources combined with feeling that our environment is someone else's responsibility results in parts of our earth being polluted with people living unsustainable lifestyles. We have access to a world of information and at best we donate to a relief telethon; at worst we offer fleeting words of condolence before we are distracted by the next "crisis."

Writing this seems to be painting us all with large brushstrokes; there are those who feel deeply and work hard to help others while acknowledging the power and material imbalances that create crisis. For many, however, those imbalances are hard to see, and without a vision of the world as a system of unearned privileges, mixed with limited access to an education that fragments knowledge into separate spheres of importance, it can become virtually impossible to decode. Ideally, we would understand our society as a system that works on hierarchy and thus be able to distinguish our contrived differences based on power from our genuine differences that make us human. It is this space that offers a place to explore alternative ways of knowing and being in our world and ways to make authentic connections between our individual lives and meta-structural issues like patriarchy. This space recognizes the human in all of us by understanding that "we" cannot be fully ourselves until "everyone" can fully be themselves. It is acknowledging that connection and community are integral that opens this space wider to know one's own humanity and thus the humanity of others. "Humanity can be understood as the totality of experience of existing as a human. Existing as a human is undeniably tied to the concept of power, since power struggles define and influence our notions of humanity" (Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, and McLaren, 2009, pp. 135). As Freire states:

It is not those whose humanity is denied them who negate humankind, but those who denied that humanity (thus negating their own as well). Force is used not by those who have become weak under the preponderance of strong, but by the strong who have emasculated them. (Freire, 1972, p. 55)

If the problem is a patriarchal system, as Johnson (2004) suggests, that is interested in maintaining a status quo of existing understandings of social and power relationships, then the solution we suggest is one of radical love to love all and serve all. Moving beyond an idea of love that is simple and discrete to the kind of love

that is “spontaneous and unmotivated...not based on merit or value. This kind of love uplifts the beloved and their capacity to act while being communal and not sexual or romantic in nature” (Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, and McLaren, 2009, p. 140). The love we speak of is more than an individual or even familial feeling. It is a “force that enhances our overall effort to be self-actualizing, ...it can provide an epistemological grounding informing how we know what we know” (hooks, 1994, p. 195). hooks (1994) continues saying love is the foundation for those that strive to unite theory and action, those that want to see the world change for the better. Audre Lorde (1984) wrote of love as a force that “empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives” (p. 57). This idea of radical love is love over force, fear, and apathy. The noted radical aspect of this kind of love does not make it imbalanced or marginalized, but rather this kind of love does not speak the “language of competition and violence, but in that of cooperation and compassion” (Cunningham, 37). This love should not be conflated with altruistic generosity since the intention behind this action is motivated by sincerity. Radical love has the potential to happen individual-to-individual, individual to group, and also between groups and institutions. It looks like simple acts of kindness, balanced policy making, and honest concern for all of those around us. Victoria Cunningham (2004) tells us this can be as simple as an offered glass of water. “There is power in love and unity... if we can offer someone a glass of water, we should do it. If we can smile, laugh, listen, pray, and plate together, we can add a little more love to the system. We can change the world. Little by little, action by action, real love will change the world” (p. 37). This radical love is the power for change.

## Critical Pedagogy

One route for understanding this idea of radical love is through critical pedagogy. Drawing on authors and educators like Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, Donaldo Macedo, Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, Joe Kincheloe, Leila Villaverde, and Rochelle Brock, we ground an understanding of teaching that is problem-posing. Indeed, the roots of critical pedagogy are deep and far reaching. The first textbook use of the term critical pedagogy is found in Henry Giroux’s (1983) *Theory and Resistance in Education*. In North America, individuals shaping critical pedagogy included Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. DuBois, John Dewey, Leonard Covello, Harold Rugg, Septima Clark, Myles Horton, and Charles Cobb. In Latin America, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is considered one of the most influential critical pedagogues because of his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which expanded upon other key influences to critical pedagogy, including the Frankfurt School, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Julia Nyerere, Amical Cabral, and Franz Fanon (Ryoo et al., 2009, p. 134). Criti-

cal pedagogy, as described by Peter McLaren (2003), is not made up of one uniform set of ideas (p. 185-186). It unfolds through dialogues between teacher and student (and student and student, as well as student and community) about the world around them in ways that highlight experiences and perceptions while challenging the borders of what we know. Within this larger understanding of the world, “we have responsibility not only for how we act individually in society, but also for the system in which we participate” (McLaren, 2003, p. 189). With the addition of self-reflection to the action of teaching and learning, praxis, the belief is this helps to understand our complex world in terms of power and material imbalances and offers a way for us to design our own understanding of truth. This critical reflection asks us to do more than be aware of their social location, but to lead an “investigation of their social location in the world as well as their relationship with the world” (McLaren, 2003, p. 46). Ultimately, critical pedagogy provides teachers and students space- space to resist being a foregone conclusion, to think about intricate theories and everyday encounters, and to imagine, as well as act on, different possibilities of existence. Critical pedagogy thus becomes a space for learners to act as agents for social change.

While the field of critical pedagogy is inclusive, as we think of radical love, one area we would like to emphasize is critical spiritual pedagogy. The authors Ryoo, Crawford, Morreno, and McLaren (2009) introduce critical spiritual pedagogy as a ternion of the central concepts of spirituality, humanity, and power, that comes together to be a place where,

students can understand how resistance to an oppressive status quo and how critical consideration of complex relationships within society leads to a greater empowerment of the community beyond the self. Thus spirituality in education strengthens praxis between thought and action, self and community, to heal Othering experiences (p. 139).

This idea of spirituality is not tied to one specific religious tradition or particular canonized way of thinking; rather, we have seen many authors tackle spirituality and critical pedagogy in tandem in ways that benefit educational experiences and understand spirituality as part of the wholeness of the human condition.

Rochelle Brock (2005) speaks to this when she says critical pedagogy does not go far enough in the area of education and the Black community. “Instead, something more is needed, a spiritualness connecting self to something deeper in the education of oppressed peoples” (p. 19). She intentionally crafts a “*pedagogy of wholeness*.” This pedagogy she states, “...should work at the whole person. When education targets wholeness of being and spirituality, individual and collective transformation happens” (p. 94). She works from a base of critical pedagogy, but the inclusion of the whole person, including implicit placement of race and spirituality, into the mix locates the pedagogy of wholeness in alignment with critical pedagogy while at the same time demanding more from it. She critiques the

individualism and decontextualization often found in critical pedagogy. Her additions, including an emphasis on the spirituality found in learning communities, aim to make pedagogy, critical readings of the world, and connections between different learning spaces more accessible to students and educators alike.

Svi Shapiro (2006) references his Jewish faith as an elemental source of his pedagogy and love as an integral part of teaching. He speaks directly about the connection between love and social justice saying,

A concern for justice in our world means that we have become aware, and challenge, the way that institutions and social practices have ‘encoded’ into them [students/teachers] processes that maintain and regenerate harmful, oppressive relationships that damage and destroy human lives. Love without social justice, I tell them, is sentimentality; it is the Hallmark card that offers sweet words but leaves human lives and relationships pretty much the way they were before the card was delivered (p. 120-121).

This love draws on faith to do more than treat one another nicely to a space that calls on education to move beyond the “individual achievement and personal success” to re-envisioning a world “that excludes so many from the possibility of decent and secure lives, free from debilitating oppression of material want” (p. 121). He links together pedagogy, spirituality, and love to allow for the space to connect ideas about who we educate and what we see as the ultimate purpose of education.

Another author offering a critical spiritual pedagogy perspective is bell hooks. She frames it as *engaged pedagogy*, highlighting the idea that this kind of pedagogy requires us “to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks, 1994, p. 13). Her engaged pedagogy involves a teaching style rooted in the care and understanding of her students as whole people and explicitly names her spirituality as integral to her teaching. She sought out ways of knowing and teaching that demand the integration of the mind, body, and spirit often referring to this as “the process of self-actualization.” Her practice is grounded in *praxis*- action and reflection as the educator Paulo Freire would name it and practice in conjunction with contemplation, as the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh would understand this work (p. 14). It is because of this wholeness of self and her embodied educative process that her classrooms are allowed to remain “a location of possibility” (p. 207).

## Why Do We Need Radical Love?

Critical pedagogy and critical spiritual pedagogy are important tools in the process of education for a greater good, but the role of radical love offers a different perspective for understanding others and ourselves while at the same time know-

ing the necessity of putting that understanding into action. Radical love is critical pedagogy and critical spiritual pedagogy enacted. Radical love is rooted in the idea of service to others that directly serves the community as a whole. This service is not about helping others so they will come to think like you or seeking accolades for what you provide to others. Even though it feels good to help others and you can get praise for doing it that does not become the reason for service.

It is also not about providing the exact same thing to everyone. This idea of absolute equality can mask what individuals may need for their situation. The conversation around equality often gets reduced to meaning the exact same thing for everyone. When we talk about equity we try to understand what different individuals (or groups) need to open up access and space at the table for all to have the opportunity to achieve. To do this critically, we must interrogate the theory on which we base our actions. To understand that without critique of meta-narratives, like patriarchy and pedagogy, the equal opportunity to speak in the classroom still relies on the raced, classed, and gendered unspoken narratives inscribed in the universal subject, the generic student-citizen. Carmen Luke (1992) uses feminist theory to liken this allusion to critical thought saying, “to democratize the classroom speech situation, and to encourage marginal groups to make public what is personal and private does not alter theoretically or practically those gendered [and raced and classed] structural divisions upon which liberal capitalism and its knowledge industries are based” (p. 37). She continues dismantling this idea of equality by highlighting “the imaginary equality presupposed among subjects in public speech contexts such as schools is premised upon liberal notions of disembodied, dispassionate subjects capable of equal and impartial (perspectiveless) normative reasoning” (p. 39). Adding the context that race, class, and gender can offer allows us to better understand the nuance that makes up individual students and teachers.

This idea of radical love calls for a reworking of our understanding of equality and drawing it closer to an idea of equity while further still demanding a theoretical critique of “a patriarchal system that writes their positions and possibilities for them” (Luke, 1992, p. 38) As educators, we sometimes do this in our classrooms. For example, two students, Terry and Pat, have a research assignment and are given 30 minutes on the school computer. That is equal time on the computer, but is it as equal when you know that Terry has a computer at home with parents that will offer assistance on the project and Pat does not have a computer at home? Giving Pat more time for research on the school computer may not be equal in the truest sense, but it is equitable. This allows each student the time and access to the computer they need to complete their assignment. This notion of equality versus equity plays a large role in the importance of radical love as a way to interact with the world.

## The Willingness to Engage in the Conversation

To fully explore the potential of this idea of radical love as critical pedagogy and critical spiritual pedagogy enacted, we must wrestle with its connection to Brock's *pedagogy of wholeness*. This requires us to ask some questions of one another. But in the piece "Radical Love," Cunningham vividly paints the concept as "simple and straightforward," "two people reaching out across language, borders, and cultures," and not being complicit by going about our business as usual. Paired with the spiritual aspect of the Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, and McLaren piece, this conversation is a starting place for two strangers to come together and be truly collaborative. As such this peer relationship compels us as urged by these authors (and those on [www.frieproject.org](http://www.frieproject.org)) to go further in our exploration of radical love and critical spiritual pedagogy (CSP). Conversation is the place for us to figure some of this out in order to break down the patriarchal ways in which women are complicit in interacting in competitive ways that can be read as non-collaborative and dispassionate. Again, Cunningham instructs our engagement with this kind of love, a love that values the language of cooperation and compassion and has the potential to be "the demise of the patriarchal-capitalist system" (37). According to Allan Johnson:

If we see patriarchy as nothing more than men's and women's individual personalities, motivations, and behavior, for example, then it probably won't even occur to us to ask about larger contexts – such as institutions . . . . Without us, patriarchy doesn't *happen*. And that's where we have power to do something about it and about ourselves in it (pp. 25, 29)

**Sarah:** The human spiritual side is more important than I ever realized. What informs your spirit? What refreshes it? What brings it down?

**Dara:** I have always relied on my spiritual side, more than a religious side. Even though I was christened Methodist and my grandmother was a practicing Episcopalian, I was raised to see the world as my church. My spirit is informed by love, filial and familial. I have to sense a connection with a person for my spirit to resonate. Music and reciprocity refresh my spirit. Without music, I would not be able to make it through my day. On any given day, you are likely to find me listening to tracks like Sade's *Soldier of Love*, John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, or Sweet Honey in the Rock's *Are We a Nation*. Tracks like these prepare and replenish me as I attempt to do my part. The reciprocal part of my spirit gets me in trouble a lot because I have gone through life practicing the ethic of "treating people the way I want to be treated" and "leaving things, conditions, people, and environments better than I found them." While I don't always receive the same treatment and am sometimes misunderstood, this should not shift the person I strive to be in the world and mirror for others. On this point, I am reminded of a quote by author, activist, and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston (2000) stated, "Sometimes I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me



angry. It merely astonishes me. How can they deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me" (p. 97). Hurston's assertion of "how can they deny themselves the pleasure of my company?" is steeped in radical love as she chose to see the racial marginalization she experienced first-hand as an invitation to engage in conversation with people more deeply instead of choosing to be read in the world as deficient for being black, college-educated, female, and queer. Hurston's love of the bigot embodies the simple idea that we have the ability to choose and live lives with what we need for a quality existence.

**Sarah:** Critical pedagogy acknowledges the mind/body connection. We are not bodiless minds standing in front of our students. We live in the world, thus we feel in the world, with our students. There are threads of conversations about our bodies throughout critical pedagogy with authors using words like struggles and uncomfortable. McLaren (2003) acknowledges the physical body, saying, "the battle to save our children will never be won as long as we sit back comfortably and let history take its course instead of actively taking part in creating history" (p. 179). While our minds, thoughts, and ideals are important, they must be attached to our bodies with all of the politics that can be ascribed therein. Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, and McLaren (2009, p. 133) speak of bodily reactions to oppression. Do you have gut, bodily reactions to oppressive actions? How do you react?

**Dara:** I do have a visceral reaction to human suffering; as such, I expend some mental energy pushing back hopelessness and helplessness. But if you dwell in this mental place long enough to sense some light; this light is critical hope, which is integral to combating hopelessness, helplessness, and oppression. This subject sits with me a lot at the moment as I am trying to push through writing the subject matter of my dissertation that centers around the appropriation of Henry Giroux's biopolitics of disposability (2006) and is titled *A Query Into the Social Construction of Un(natural) Disasters: Teaching (About) the Biopolitics of Disposability*. My spirituality allows me to be the vessel through which voices are channeled to speak for all of those who cannot speak for themselves. This notion of spirituality is described in Rochelle Brock's *Sista' Talk: The Personal and the Pedagogical*. What I find particularly relatable, relevant, and invitational is Brock's emphasis on agency as a tool "to act on and change our world/environment" (Brock, 2005, p. 92) no matter how hopeless or helpless I may feel at a moment in time.

**Sarah:** The philosopher Michel Foucault (1990/1978) talks of power as being "produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (p. 93). This view of power seeks to decentralize hierarchy and acknowledge the ways power works behind and in between. By understanding that power is not an inherently evil force



which seeks to do harm, but rather something that exists because we interact. How do your ideas of spirituality, humanity, and power interact?

**Dara:** I can sum up my thoughts on this by stating that power concedes nothing, but rather it is the person who holds the power that concedes. Therefore, I must ask myself, “Now that I have the power or the perception of power, what will I do with it?” My response is contingent upon how I enact my spirituality and humanity. Therefore, my response is shifting and always in process of becoming.

**Sarah:** I found the quote “Recognizing a student’s unified subjectivities through a pedagogy of integrity, however, can be used to create the conditions necessary for students to reclaim their humanity” (Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, & McLaren, 2009, p. 137) powerful. How do you react?

**Dara:** I struggle with this, particularly in my current work environment, which is a private pluralistic Jewish boarding school. Not to take anything away from Dr. Svi Shapiro who problematizes the moral and spiritual dimensions of education through his lens as white Jewish male, I work in an environment that edifies fragmenting subjectivities of students, faculty, and staff. If I were Jewish, male, heterosexual, and orthodox or conservative, I would readily admit that this work environment “creates the conditions necessary for students to reclaim their humanity.” Instead, I am sad to say the environment only models pluralism in theory, but not in practice. I need to reflect on this more in order to better clarify my positionality.

**Sarah:** Using the spiritual as critical is a new idea for me. The religion I was raised with was not critical and seems to marginalize the critical. How can you address that? Where does this work live? How does it not look like an attack on religion?

**Dara:** This idea of using the spiritual as critical is a new idea for me too, but a journey that I have been on since I started my Ph.D. program which is why Ryoo et al. (2009) article really resonated with me as I prepared to write this paper with you. It connected a lot dots and defined a lot of terms for me. I think the fact that you are questioning the religion you were raised with and how it can accommodate the spiritual as critical says you are on the journey of using the spiritual as critical. Just as I recognize the world as a church, I think the world can be a metaphor for the classroom. I think this is addressed by Ryoo et al. (2009), “Still, we are not limited to the classroom as CSP also embraces spaces outside of the classroom, respecting the knowledge that students gain in their community and world experiences” (p.143). Based on worldwide indigenous philosophies of learning and spiritual connection to the earth (Grande, 2004), CSP is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ methodology, but instead a fluid and constantly growing philosophy for teaching and learning.” This is not an attack on religion because

religion stripped down from its 21st c. accoutrements reflects *agape* as defined in the Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, & McLaren article.

**Sarah:** Radical Love begins with self-acceptance? Are you there?

**Dara:** Honestly, some days I feel more self-acceptance than others. I think radical love involves constantly being able to turn the mirror on oneself. I agree with you and feel our peer writing relationship is but one example of how one engages this process of turning the mirror on oneself.

### *A willingness to turn the mirror on oneself . . .*

**Dara:** The human spiritual side is more important than I think I have ever realized. What informs your spirit? What refreshes it? What brings it down?

**Sarah:** I am interested in how equality/equity, live and let live, respect for our environment, and gender issues are wrapped up within this conversation and the academic sort of overtakes me here. I advocate for the Platinum Rule - treat others the way they want to be treated. This takes the Golden Rule and adds the element of empathy. Not just thinking about how you want to be treated, but a serious consideration of the way others feel, live, and are part of the community.

**Dara:** On p. 133 of the Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, & McLaren piece, they spoke of bodily reactions to oppression. Do you have gut, bodily reactions to oppressive actions? How do you react?

**Sarah:** I had a bodily reaction during a summer youth camp where I was facilitating, a personal one like I had never had before. On “gender night” we were talking back and forth- males to females- and the male privilege expressed, and not acknowledged, was like a slap across my face- a physical touch- the breaking point was when a young man (whom I later learned was one of your students) rationalized away labor pains, and the whole experience of pregnancy stating men had sympathy pains during the labor process. There were not larger connections of the increased health risks during pregnancy, the increased chance of harm by a partner, the way the labor market marginalizes pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, or the way pregnancy has been commodified by the medical and marketing community. He had the right to that personal thought, but the unseen privilege that was manifested was more than I could bear. I had to leave the space and walk it off, before I could come back to hear more. The inability to connect the personal with the structural was completely missed and the whole group lost a chance to learn on a deeper level.

**Dara:** How do your ideas of spirituality, humanity, and power interact?

**Sarah:** I get bogged down in ideas of structural inequalities that keep people from being able to access their spirituality, humanity, and encompassing ideas of power.

**Dara:** I found the quote “Recognizing a student’s unified subjectivities through a pedagogy of integrity, however, can be used to create the conditions necessary for students to reclaim their humanity” (Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, & McLaren, 2009, p. 137) powerful. How do you react?

**Sarah:** It is often hard to recognize people’s “unified subjectivities” because it is easier to see them as one (or two) things. This takes intention and patience. It is contingent on the idea to see them as whole we must see ourselves as whole and be in the process of understanding our becoming in this way. Self-acceptance is crucial!

**Dara:** Using the spiritual as critical is a new idea for me. The religion I was raised with was not critical and seems to marginalize the critical. How can you address that? Where does this work live? How does it not look like an attack on religion?

**Sarah:** To see Critical Spiritual Pedagogy as a tool is something I need to talk about more. Am I resistant because of my views on the patriarchal, controlling ways of religion as defined by my upbringing and narrow focus? I think intention comes in here somewhere but I don’t have that all figured out.

**Dara:** Radical Love begins with self-acceptance? Are you there?

**Sarah:** Self-acceptance is a HUGE part of this and are you ever really there? The process of always becoming is important here because we are in community with others and the community is a living thing that ebbs, flows, and changes, thus there will always be interactions of individuals to challenge and refine our idea of self and thus our self-acceptance.

## Enacting Radical Love: What’s at Stake?

How tragic that the most significant accomplishment of the twenty-first century might very well be remembered as the marriage of Kate Middleton and Prince William. Shouldn’t the most significant twenty-first century accomplishments include the eradication of modern warfare, food insecurity, homelessness, poverty, and the prison industrial complex, along with the creation of sustainable and democratic political and economic structures that ensure educational equity, accessibility, and affordability as well as the elimination of emergent diseases, disparities in healthcare accessibility and delivery, and unmitigated repercussions born from global climate change and ecological hazards on the scale of hurricanes and earthquakes? Recently, Indian environmentalist and human rights activist Dr. Vandana Shiva underscored this reality with the following words:

When we think of wars in our times, our minds turn to Iraq and Afghanistan. But the bigger war is the war against the planet. This war

has its roots in an economy that fails to respect the ecological and ethical limits – limits to inequality, limits to injustice, limits to greed and economic concentration. (Shiva, 2010, p. 1)

This blatant disrespect for ecological and ethical limits is rooted in a culture of carelessness that reached an environmental tipping point on April 20, 2010 with the blowout of the Deepwater Horizon. It is now known that the chain of events leading to this unfortunate occurrence resulted from a series of poor decisions made by companies less concerned about the safety of its employees and the biodiversity of the Gulf of Mexico and more concerned about its bottom line or finishing a project that was over budget and behind schedule. “These include: Halliburton’s decision to cement the well with a mixture it knew to be flawed; BP’s apparent failure to center the well properly; BP’s decision to use seawater instead of heavy drilling mud to fill the well, leaving it vulnerable to an upsurge in gas; BP’s apparent failure to use enough plugs to seal the well; the failure by BP and Transocean to pay close attention to pressure tests showing the well to be unstable” (Editorial, 2010, A28). What this ecological disaster signifies is that global corporations must change their doing business as usual approach and Americans must reexamine their pedagogies of consumption which fuel the extraction and production of nonrenewable energies like coal and oil. Referring to the BP oil spill and Gulf ecological crisis, human rights activist, community organizer, and author of *The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems*, Van Jones states:

If a tiny act based on greed had nonlinear insanely horrible outcomes – a small act based on greed with unbelievable inconceivable catastrophic consequences – which means in a rational universe, in a symmetric universe, if a small act based on greed can do that much harm, then a small act based on love can create completely nonlinear, completely unpredictable, completely unimaginable good outcomes. (Netroots Nation, 2010)

Wishing to underscore Van Jones’ sentiment of “a small act based on love,” if humanity is to realize the “rejection of the oppressive conditions of domination, the establishment of solidarity with others, the existence of meaningful choices in our lives, the recognition of ourselves as historical beings, a developed capacity to speak out when necessary, and well-developed sense of empowerment to create, recreate, and transform our world in the interest of social justice, human rights, and economic democracy (Darder, 2002, p. 54),” then humanity must be demonstrative and intentionally willing to practice radical love – a radical love that places emphasis on loving all and serving all.

The radical love of which we speak is grounded in the in the work of Paulo Freire, who envisages education, “a politicizing (or depoliticizing) institutional process” (Darder, 2002, p. 56) and schools, political sites “enmeshed in the politi-

cal economy of society” (Darder, 2002, p. 56) as the opportune place to do the work required for radical love to take root. As such, “to bring such a perspective to the classroom requires that teachers understand how, as a consequence of cultural, linguistic, and economic subjugation, subordinate populations in this country and abroad have historically been systematically disenfranchised” (Darder, 2002, p. 57). For teachers to embrace radical love in this sense is to embrace “a revolutionary pedagogy [that] discards the uncritical acceptance of the prevailing social order and its structures of capitalist exploitation, and embraces the empowerment of dispossessed populations as the primary purpose of schooling” (Darder, 2002, p. 57). Ideally, radical love has the potential to create a politics of reconstruction that pushes against an economics of destruction that privileges problem-makers (warmongers, polluters, clear cutters, incarcerators, despoilers) over problem solvers (teachers, coaches, counselors, art instructors, solar and wind engineers, organic farmers, permaculturalists). Consequently, radical love aligns with what Jones describes as “the three pillars of “social-uplift environmentalism”: equal protection for all people, equal opportunity for all people, and reverence for all creation (Jones, 2008, p. 77), or a reverential perspective. According to Jones:

The reverence perspective promotes a restorative approach to the economy and to politics. It’s a rearticulation of our better wisdoms, a rearticulation of things that have been part of human consciousness for thousands and thousands of years – indeed, things that have allowed us to be around for those thousands and thousands of years. The ancient understanding of limits and consequences needs to find its way back into modern discourse. But a return to that wisdom requires the deepest possible changes – and those start at a personal level. (Townsend, 2006, p. 66)

This wisdom is inherent in the stewardship practices of Native Americans who model that “We don’t inherit the Earth from our parents; we borrow it from our children. The Earth doesn’t belong to us; we belong to the Earth” (Jones, 2008, p. 76). These are principles that integrate with what Freire characterizes as embracing a “dialectical understanding of our relationship with the world (Darder, 2002, p. 54)” in order to “transform our teaching and learning into revolutionary praxis” (Darder, 2002, p. 54). Indeed, the BP oil spill in Gulf is instructive here.

Dr. Riki Ott advocates an “all hands on deck” (Ott, 2010 & 2009, n.p.) approach that is grounded in this notion of radical love with emphasis on grassroots strategies for resistance and recovery to address long-term ramifications of the BP oil spill and for preventing other disasters. According to Ott, the real crisis that is occurring as a result of the BP oil spill and its aftermath is “a crisis of democracy” wherein corporations become so powerful that our political system isn’t able to rein them in enough to keep such disasters from happening or to hold them accountable when they do (Jarvis, 2010, n.p.). Besides the BP oil spill being an opportune moment for reclaiming power from corporations, Ott also suggests

strategies for impacted communities, governments, and states to employ that will monitor, clean up, and restore marshes and beaches along with protecting public health and worker safety in the hopes of fixing and restoring what Vandana Shiva calls “Earth democracy” (van Gelder & Shiva, 2010, n.p.).

Additionally, Ott proposes that locally impacted communities, governments, and states take immediate steps to train people to facilitate “peer listening circles” (Talvi, 2009, n.p.) to mitigate social and individual disaster trauma and establish seafood monitoring programs. We can utilize our collective knowledge to elevate the voices of those who desire a different future that insists upon people, and not property, ruling, and offers sustainable renewable energy choices. Such acts that emphasize the collective participation of “we”, “us”, and “all Americans” and insist upon the collective consciousness to advocate for transparent transformative change (Ubuntu) constitute enactments of radical love for the restoration of Earth democracy. It also sends the message that future drilling and mining projects that will continue our future dependency on nonrenewable energy sources and devastate the planet will not be tolerated (Banerjee, 2010, n.p.).

Knowing all too well the implication of utilizing collective consciousness to advocate for the restoration of Earth democracy are the indigenous and campesino peoples of Ecuador’s Amazon who, in the aftermath of the BP oil spill, were invited to coastal Louisiana by the United Houma Nation to share lessons they’ve learned in dealing with another U.S. oil disaster – the dumping of toxic waste in the Amazon rainforest by Chevron (formerly Texaco). From 1964 to 1992, Chevron dumped about seventeen million gallons of crude oil and twenty billion gallons of drilling waste water into the Ecuadorian Amazon. The contamination seeped into water supplies, where it killed fish and is blamed for health problems among local residents. At a July 2010 town hall meeting in Dulac, La., the Ecuadorian delegation discussed a report about their experiences which offers advice for holding polluters accountable and planning for long-term recovery after severe environmental contamination (Asamblea de Afectados por Texaco, Amazon Watch, and Rainforest Action Network, 2010). This document has come to serve as manifesto in response to the question, “what can Gulf Coast residents learn from other communities that have suffered the terrible consequences of oil industry recklessness?” Ten key observations emerge from this document:

- Public awareness and support is invaluable
- Corporate polluters will cover up evidence
- Don’t trust the polluter to properly clean up its mess
- Expect public relations campaigns to gloss over impact
- Corporations will use legal maneuvering and political influence to evade liability
- Oil disasters will have long-term impacts
- Beware of hidden and latent environmental impact

- Environmental harm can have long lasting health impacts
- Environmental harm can have long lasting cultural impacts
- Affected communities have the power to demand accountability

Like Ott's suggestions, the observations of this delegation also provide evidence that everyday critical pedagogies do exist. In this way, the willingness of the Ecuadorian delegation to engage in "critical dialogue" (Darder, 2002, p. 61) with members of the United Houma Nation about their experience with the Chevron oil spill along with their willingness model to "social agency" (Darder, 2002, p. 63) as a means of sharing collective knowledge mirrors the way that teachers establish relationships with their peers for similar purposes. Such relationships accommodate an interrogation of political practices that are disempowering and offer effective interventions for disrupting them. "Hence, Freire firmly believed that the political empowerment of teachers functions to nourish and cultivate the seeds of political resistance – a resistance historically linked to a multitude of personal and collective struggles waged around the world" (Darder, 2002, p. 61). Although BP says that it plans to take full responsibility for the damages caused by its spill and restore the Gulf Coast to the way it was before, the experience in the Ecuadorian Amazon shows that oil companies do the right thing only when compelled to do so by a combination of forces (political, financial, media, and grassroots). This will remain the case until a grassroots movement or a paradigm shift changes the terms of the debate. An example of a successful grassroots force is the Earth democracy movement started by Vandana Shiva. Earth democracy seeks to disrupt various forms of fragmentation, fundamentalism and to counter the pervasiveness of hatred, violence, greed, consumerism, and competition that is part of the culture in which we live. Earth democracy provides an alternative worldview in which humans are embedded in the web of life through love, compassion, ecological responsibility, and economic justice. It "is the democracy that is custodian of the living wealth on which people depend" (van Gelder & Shiva, 2002, n.p.). If such a paradigm shift does not occur or a movement does not take root at this critical juncture in human history, then what is the alternative?

A glimpse of choosing not to embrace a worldview guided by love, compassion, ecological responsibility, and economic justice resides in the outcome of the 2010 U.S. midterm elections. "Political demagogues of the far right emerged to fill the void by channeling the anger and insecurity created by empire's program of scarcity, injustice, and exclusion into and an us-versus-them politics that blames particular national, racial, culture, or religious groups" (van Gelder & Shiva, 2002, n.p.). Nowhere was this more prevalent than in the way a manufactured movement like the Tea Party, backed by establishment Republicans cloaked in the accoutrements of the Barry Goldwater legacy, capitalized on public anger, fear, and anti-intellectualism to advance the racist, heterosexist, classist, and hegemonic rhetorical agendas of women like Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, Sharon



Engel, and Christine O'Donnell. Particularly damaging to any hard-fought for social uplift environmental movement, as defined by people like Van Jones and Vandana Shiva, is the anti-intellectualism that is itself a rallying cry for the Tea Party. As an illustration, Minnesota congresswoman Michele Bachmann thought that the movie *Aladdin* promoted witchcraft and insisted global warming wasn't a threat because "carbon dioxide is natural" (Taibbi, 2010, n.p.). O'Donnell's, Engel's, and Palin's public stances as climate-change deniers is not to be underestimated because according to Jones (2010, n.p.), two major battles are critical to both the progressive grassroots movement and the well-being for all American: the fight to maintain social programs and the struggle to save the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from a promised assault by the Republicans who now control the House of Representatives.

Add to this that "in 2008, Sarah Palin took on the role of decider in determining what a real American was. Now she seeks to be the arbiter of what a real feminist is, based solely on the research she's done while looking in the mirror" (Stan, 2010, n.p.) and aligning herself with the Tea Party Movement as one of its self-appointed spokespersons. This is a brand of feminism that does not concern itself with matters of economic justice, ecological responsibility, or reverential love and compassion. The egregiousness of this brand of emblematic feminism is the missing of the point that "feminism isn't simply about being a woman in a position of power. It's [about] battling systemic inequities; it's a social justice movement that believes sexism, racism, and classism exist and interconnect, and that they should be consistently challenged" (Valenti, 2010, n.p.). Neither the right-wing fundamentalism nor the increasing female face of these patriot or militia groups is new.

What is most disturbing is the idea that this brand of political discourse resonates with the ideology of patriarchy as evidenced by the fact that it is backed by mostly men who are white, heterosexual, gainfully employed, and all too eager to espouse nativist anti-immigration rhetoric which is subsumed by "take our country back" narratives, anti-choice politics of "pro-life," the increased frequency of gun lovers holding Second Amendment rallies and showing up armed, and the me-first scorn for social programs. "And escalating violent rhetoric is perhaps the most notable hallmark of the Tea Party with regard to its female leadership. Again Palin is the pacesetter here, telling Twitter followers "Don't retreat, instead –RE-LOAD!" and posting a map with targets on it where Democrats held seats in districts that she and McCain carried in 2008" (Jaffe, 2010, n.p.). In considering the text of the pre- and post-2010 U.S. midterm elections as our world classroom, is this the collective consciousness, devoid of radical love, that is to be understood and embraced by future generations?

For our part, if the answer to this question is a resounding "no", then we must make a Freirean commitment to be "subversive," embrace a "dialectical under-

standing or our relationship with the world” in order to permanently transform it, and be willing to engage conversation with those whom we disagree. Beyond this, as cited in Darder (2002, p. 55), “Freire urged us to construct in schools and communities “advanced forms of social organizations, ones capable of surpassing this articulated chaos of corporate interests that we have called Neoliberalism” like Riki Ott’s Move To Amend, Vandana Shiva’s Navdanya, or Van Jones’ Color of Change, Green for All, or Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. This means making the opportunity at a Girl or Boy Scouts meeting, church youth group meeting, etc. or deliberately planning a lesson in math, English, science, or social studies class to teach and talk about manifestations of hate in society such that individuals reflect on “what is hate?”, grapple with the question “how do I encounter hate?”, and juxtapose this with a peer listening circle exercise for everyone to be in conversation with one another to consider the way in which the “take back our country” rhetoric of the 2010 Tea Party Movement is emblematic of hate speech. Arriving here allows “our students to consider innovative emancipatory directions for integrating this knowledge into their daily lives” (Darder, 2002, p. 57). Indeed, this is an avenue that can begin to create a politics of reconstruction that deepens Earth democracy and breaks the violent and vicious cycles that seek to oppose radical love as an enactment of loving all and serving all.

## The Willingness to Stay Engaged in the Conversation

**Sarah:** I have been thinking about our writing project and the idea of radical love: love all, serve all. In thinking about what radical love looks like and what it is composed of I have come up with:

- service to all
- listening intently
- curiosity about others, the world, and what connects
- empathy for others
- social justice in everything

This was inspired by Mary Frances Agnello on [www.frieproject.org](http://www.frieproject.org) blog who wrote “Critical love was the departure point of the vision of all personal, political, social, economic policy making and grassroots social transformation” What do you think?

**Dara:** Also inspired by Joe Kincheloe (2008) on the Freire Project website who reminds me that intertwined with radical love as loving all and serving all is being cognizant of “the ways we live our roles as educators in everyday circumstances”. This brings me back to this notion of light. There is this song (Raw Artistic Soul & Rucker, 2007) that goes,

Who is gonna’ turn on the light?  
Who is gonna’ carry the light?

No matter how heavy.  
Come on.  
Who is gonna' be the light?  
We need it.  
The light.

Simply, if radical love is the light, then critical pedagogy is the source of its illumination because “critical pedagogy wants to connect education to that feeling, to embolden teachers and students to act in ways that make a difference, and to push humans to new levels of social and cognitive achievement previously deemed impossible” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 4). Critical pedagogy’s brilliance will only shine if we are willing to stay engaged in the often un-discussed and un-analyzed conversations.

## REFERENCES

- Asamblea de Afectados por Texaco, Amazon Watch, and Rainforest Action Network (2010, June). The lasting stain of oil: Cautionary tales and lessons from the Amazon. *Chevron Toxic Campaign for Justice in Ecuador*. Retrieved from <http://chevrontoxico.com/news-and-multimedia/2010/0628-the-lasting-stain-of-oil.html>
- Banerjee, S. (2010). 5 mining projects that could devastate the entire planet. *Alternet*. Retrieved from <http://www.alternet.org/story/148874>
- Burghart, D. & Zeskind, L. (2010). Tea Party nationalism: A critical examination of the Tea Party movement and the size, scope, and focus of its national factions. Kansas City, MO: Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights.
- Cunningham, V. (2004). Radical love. *off our backs*, pp. 36-37.
- Darder, A. (2002). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Editorial: "A Culture of Carelessness" [Editorial]. (2010). *The New York Times*, p. A28. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/15/opinion/15mon2.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/15/opinion/15mon2.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality: An introduction* (Vol. 1 Vintage Books Edition ed.). New York: Random House. (Original work published 1978)
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Giroux, H.A. (2006). *Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, class, and the biopolitics of disposability*. *College Literature*, 33.3, 171-196.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hurston, Z.N. (2000). How it feels to be colored me. In E. Palo Staller and R. Campbell Gibson (Eds.), *Worlds of difference: Inequality in the aging experience* (pp. 95-97). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Jaffe, S. (2010). Why are there so many right-wing extremist women? *Alternet* Retrieved from <http://www.alternet.org/story/148346/>
- Jarvis, B. (2010, August). A crisis of democracy: Real solutions to the BP oil spill. yes! Retrieved from <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/a-crisis-of-democracy-real-solutions-to-the-bp-oil-spill>
- Johnson, A. (2004). Patriarchy, the system: An it, not a he, a them, or an us. In G. Kirk and M. Okazawa-Rey (Eds.), *Women's lives: Multicultural perspectives* (pp. 25-32). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Jones, V. (2008). *The green collar economy: How one solution can fix our two biggest problems*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Kincheloe, J.L. (2008). *Critical pedagogy* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). New York: Peter Lang.

- Kincheloe, J.L. (2008, April 7). Re: Joe Kincheloe's blog: The vicissitudes of critical pedagogy. [Web log message]. Retrieved May 9, 2010, from <http://www.freireproject.org/print/299>
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Berkley, CA: Crossing Press.
- Luke, C. (1992). Feminist politics in radical pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 25-53). New York: Routledge.
- McLaren, P. (2003). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Netroots Nation 2010 Conference Friday, July 23rd 2:00 PM - 3:15 PM. *Deep-water disaster: Response and recovery on the Gulf coast, in conversation with Van Jones* [USTREAM]. Available from <http://www.ustream.tv/record-ed/8459363>
- Ott, R. (2010, June). Re: BP spill: All hands on deck! [Web log message]. Retrieved from [http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/elist/eListRead/bp\\_spill\\_all\\_hands\\_on\\_deck/](http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/elist/eListRead/bp_spill_all_hands_on_deck/)
- Ott, R. (2010, May). All hands on deck: What can you do about the Gulf oil spill? yes! Retrieved from [http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/gulf-oil-leak-all-hands-on-deck?utm\\_source=may10&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=13\\_Ott](http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/gulf-oil-leak-all-hands-on-deck?utm_source=may10&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=13_Ott)
- Potok, M. (2010, Spring). Rage on the right: The year in hate and extremism. *Intelligence Report Issue Number: 137*. Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center.
- Raw Artistic Soul & Rucker, U. (2007). The light. *On The Light* [CD]. Germany: GOGO Music.
- Ryoo, J.J., Crawford, J., Moreno, D., & McLaren, P. (2009). Critical spiritual pedagogy: Reclaiming humanity through a pedagogy of integrity, community, and love. *Power and Education*, 1(1), pp. 132-136.
- Shiva, V. (2010, November). *War on earth*. Paper presented at City of Sydney Peach Prize Lecture, Sydney, Australia.
- Stamets, P. (2010). Fungi perfecti: The petroleum problem. Retrieved from [http://www.fungi.com/mycotech/petroleum\\_problem.html](http://www.fungi.com/mycotech/petroleum_problem.html)
- Stan, A. M. (2010). Sarah Palin's brand of "feminism" more popular with men than women. *Alternet*. Retrieved from <http://www.alternet.org/story/148976/>
- Sturgis, S. (2010, July). Tribes unite to fight BP. *yes!* Retrieved from <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/tribes-unite-to-fight-bp>
- Taibbi, M. (2010, November). Taibbi: The Tea Party moron complex. *Alternet*. Retrieved from <http://www.alternet.org/story/148855/>
- Talvi, S.J.A. (2009, February). Our town vs. Exxon. *In These Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/4245/our\\_town\\_vs\\_exxon/#nowcan](http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/4245/our_town_vs_exxon/#nowcan)
- Townsend, L. (2006, May/June). An interview with Van Jones: A license to be human. *Orion*, 25(3). 62-67.

- Valenti, J. (2010, October) Who stole feminism? *The Nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.thenation.com/article/155109/who-stole-feminism>
- van Gelder, S.R. & Shiva, V. (2002, December). Earth democracy – an interview with Vandana Shiva. *yes!* Retrieved <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/what-would-democracy-look-like/earth-democracy-an-interview-with-vandana-shiva>