"Troublemaking," "Making Trouble," and "Making It" Through Institutionalized Schooling
Critical Pedagogy as a Transformational Exodus

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Abstract

How does institutionalized schooling compromise the social fabric? Many children are learning helplessness and are labeled "troublemakers" as a form of violence that is playing itself out in classrooms across the US. They are becoming "victims" as they are oppressed by the stranglehold of high-stakes testing movements and other rigid, top-down hegemonic structures that fervently strive to dominate, subjugate, and alienate those that supposedly are not equipped to "make it" in the post-modern arena. By the same token, often, those that are "successful" also succumb to acts of violence as they conform or react to oppressive educational practices; thus, this article and educational study reveal the unfolding consequences of this kind of oppression.

Introduction

This study examines the quality of public schooling in primarily low socio-economic status (SES) areas of El Paso, Texas and reflects on the dismal realities established by the hegemonic social order. Consequently, this dynamic reflects poorly on teaching and learning because of the unwarranted violence indirectly enacted against students on a weekly basis. Research gathered for this work is grounded in empirical and longitudinal self-exploratory analysis using quantitative and qualitative methodologies and has been carried out at three different public elementary schools located in this region. This work presents data that addresses state mandated assessment programs, juvenile misdemeanor crime rates, school dropout rates, unemployment and labor data, and incarceration rates for these specific districts. Data gathered reveals a relationship between the school and the judicial system.

According to some scholars there is a school prison pipeline phenomenon where school discipline resembles the realities of adult correctional facilities structures (Laiyee Leung & Wing-lin Lee, 2005; Coggshall, Osher & Colombi, 2013). Christensen, (2012) and Tsai & Scommegna, (2012) explain that although the U.S. is comprised of 5% of the world's population, since 2002 it has the largest world-wide incarcerated population (25%). It is estimated that this reality affects 2.7 million children who may have parents in jail (Christensen, 2012; Tsai and Scommegna, 2012). Studies show that children with incarcerated parents are more likely to be incarcerated themselves in comparison to other children whose parents are not incarcerated.

In El Paso, Texas, many of the crimes committed are attributed to poverty and a lack of employment opportunities. We argue that economic support systems could easily improve and correct some of the dynamics that lead-up to criminal activity. Through the utilization of informal interviews and ongoing critical dialogue with students and teachers we conclude that criminal activity also encompasses the communities' perspectives, reactions, and realities, specifically in relation to education attainment.

This study includes data derived from personal journals collected locally that were kept of real-life accounts, videotapings, and observations of teachers working with students, discussions with teachers, class sessions, children's work, and literature reviews related to the topic. Consequently, as a result of the data collected and analyzed, this article proposes a new vision in the area of public schooling and education in which the application of critical pedagogy can engage and offer a transformative educational exodus for disenfranchised student populations.

The findings from this study offer theoretical and practical insights regarding critical pedagogy. This work advocates for the use of critical pedagogy within education instruction and should be implemented as a catalyst to integrative critical thinking, as well as a means to promote student creativity; additionally, it offers students problem-solving capabilities that they might currently lack. It is argued that implementation of critical pedagogy within an education setting allows for positive outcomes in relation to the students' continued search for self-affirmation and self-determination. By employing this kind of liberatory practice in the classroom, and in the curriculum, the use of a critical pedagogy approach to education encourages teachers and students to raise

individual consciousness, unearth and revise their own prejudices, and, it allows for the designing of lessons and activities that encourage students to become agents of change.

The research questions proposed by this study are as follows:

- How are students from low, socio-economic backgrounds adversely affected by the unleashed violence of a hegemonic social order?

- How can the implementation of critical pedagogy empower students in order to develop self-determination and self-affirmation?

- How can the integration of dialectical praxis offer educators a viable exodus from the entrenchments of oppressive systems?

Study's Context

This study is conducted in the border city of El Paso, Texas where the unemployment rate is significantly greater than the national norm while boasting the sixth lowest per capita income out of 318 metropolitan areas in 2005 (New York Times, May 22, 2005 in Data from the Commerce Department, 2005 and 2002). In 2013 the unemployment rate of El Paso was at 9.8%, one of the highest in the state of Texas (U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Although El Paso is considered the second safest city in the nation (in terms of murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary and motor vehicle theft), the focus of this study is representative of the type of educational and social realities of the U.S./Mexican border that demands further elaboration regarding the definition of violence, which will be done below (Morgan Quitno, 2005).

El Paso's "sister-city" along the U.S. / Mexican border is Ciudad Juarez which is currently considered one of the most violent cities in the world due to a number of significant factors, which include an escalation in violence due to drug wars and drug cartels; the countless serial murders of young female murder victims whose cases are ignored by Mexican media and police officials; as well as the spillover of domestic violence and criminal activity in general. In spite of this reality, thousands of people, many of them children, crossover to El Paso, Texas in order to study at university or public school; shop; seek medical attention; or to visit extended family members that are living in El Paso.

It is noteworthy to consider that El Paso's safety is based on institutionalized surveillance, i.e., cameras are located throughout the city and the city consists of several notable state and national policing forces. Additionally, El Paso also has one of the largest military bases in the world besides other surveillance institutions such as Homeland Security; the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA); the United States Border Patrol; Immigration Naturalization Services (INS); Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), etc. … yet, like most large cities, there exist pockets of higher violence throughout El Paso. Many of our schools in this study are located in these areas.

Data collected for this study is concentrated on the south side of the city where the majority of the population is comprised of underprivileged youth from low socio-

economic backgrounds. The study focuses on students residing in this, primarily, Hispanic community. By describing where these students come from allows for their *operandum* and *modus vivendi* to be revealed, that is, for a connection to be made as to how local working-class culture and customs impact actions and decisions, as well as innate human aspects. In turn, this analysis allows for a deeper understanding of what happens to students because of their schooling experience.

The realities of living in these types of communities, referred to as *barrios* (neighborhoods), demands attention to the education systems and the type of public schools students living in barrios are attending. The demographics for this community indicate that they are comprised of, predominantly, poor housing projects, located directly across from the border highway, not too far from the *colonias* (slums) where many residents lack basic living conditions.

The majority of the population is comprised of Latinos/as, who are Christians, specifically Catholics, and often display shrines of saints, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, or Jesus Christ and popes. On any given day, church bells resonate and *ruteras* (ice cream trucks) *con su musiquita* (whimsical musical tunes) whine throughout the neighborhood. Malnourished dogs passively walk through the streets, occasionally entering the schoolyards, unknowingly prompting important news to some children that there is a loose dog in the vicinity. Like in ghettos and favelas found across the world, community members from these barrios are immediate targets to other socio-cultural aspects of poverty, such as corner bars and *tienditas* (mom-and-pop establishments) where prices on perishables and non-perishables are escalated and "grocery store" walls are plastered with alcohol and tobacco advertisements.

Although El Paso's ethnic cultural and historical heritage is rich and family oriented, besides these types of safe areas, it is not uncommon to find beer cans, cigarette butts, and drug paraphernalia littered throughout, which is especially troubling when they are found around the public school areas. Amongst kind-looking grandmothers, walking their children to school, *borrachos* (drunks) make their presence known as they lean on broken-down, abandoned cars that are scattered throughout the vicinity, or because they have inconveniently fallen asleep in an alley. The rural and urban dichotomy found within El Paso includes landscapes of crop fields heavily sprayed with pesticides; oil refineries with discharging smokestacks and littered chemical waste from decades ago, and border traffic filling the air with exhaust, resulting in an increasing number of asthma and allergy problems among the population.

Economically, North America Free trade Agreement (NAFTA) has left its mark on the city's local industry. A considerable amount of El Pasoans were left unemployed with the relocation of factories to Juárez, Mexico and other Emerging Economic Countries (EEC's). NAFTA resulted in the locally well-known *maquiladoras* (which mass-produce manufacturing parts or other products in Mexico to be assembled in the U.S. as a cheaper labor venue) that brought much needed work to Mexicans while leaving Texans on the other side of Mexico without factory jobs. Consequently, this crisscross economic process has preyed upon the non-unionized Mexican national female-dominated workforces, who have become targets of mass killings in Ciudad Juárez. All these factors have culminated into a socio-cultural and economic dynamic that reproduces harmful ramifications to the most vulnerable members of society, women and children.

Many of these people become easy targets and victims of this industry as they lack viable alternatives and possess lower levels of quality education. Within this context, this is another form of marginalization and violence.

Violence, Consequences and Its Definition

In El Paso it is undeniable that many children experience and learn violence outside the boundaries of the educational system. It is quite obvious that children see thousands of violent images played out through television and virtual games, as well as in other modes of technological communication or media. As a consequence, some children struggle in making a distinction between fantasy and reality. In addition, children also experience violence at home and in the community like in many ghetto and favelas. Such environments have high incidence rates of battered women and child abuse. To deny these types of violence, and others, would be to blind oneself from the reality of a large percentage of global communities.

Some children show up to school with visible signs of physical abuse, and school officials, many times, are inundated with children who are emotionally abused as well. It is rather evident to those of us who work closely with students. A clear case of such abuse is the case of a seven-year-old boy who came into one of the researcher's classrooms limping as a result of a kick delivered from his *abuelito borracho* (drunken grandfather) in his groin area. He couldn't walk, run, or even sit for quite some time. He'd fall asleep regularly and when the teacher asked him why he was falling asleep in class, he explained that he'd sleep on the floor, which caused him great discomfort.

Jessie's grandparents were trying to take care of four grandkids while the mom spent her time in a jail cell. She had been placed there for possession and use of drugs and for dragging Jesse's three-year old sister by the hair through the front lawn. His other sister tried to commit suicide more than twice in school. It is obvious that this is not a violence that the school perpetrates, but the question at hand is, "what does the educational structure do to assist these respective students? Many times, the answer to that question is not enough.

From a progressive anthropological perspective, do educational structures protect the children's ontological well-being, that is, the positive traits that humans are born with and are culturally molded by society and other humans, which should be its primary concern, or, does it harm it further through requesting that all children perform and act the same way when dynamics for such students are so different from those of others?" Even though we consciously recognize the societal violence as exemplified above, our study is limited specifically to how it manifests itself within the confines of the school structures, in particular to express overt and covert forms of violence.

These two forms of violence, overt and covert, are occurring within the school context, that is, within the actual school environment. On one hand, in a *covert* form of violence students seem to react to hegemonic school structures by "making trouble" for the schooling system; conversely, in an *overt* form of violence students end up being labeled "troublemakers" and "socially deviant". This new reality is creating an educational environment that must be researched and addressed further as it affects

education nationally, and will continue to do so as current economic structures and social programs alter living dynamics for the underprivileged and marginalized.

Schools, nationwide, are also burdened by standardized tests, further placing underserved and misunderstood "troublemakers" in vulnerable and in failing positions. This leads into a technocratic, and dangerous, implementation of vouchers and charter schooling, which supports a neoliberal agenda to privatize public schools. This ideology, with its pitfalls and repercussions as reflected in schools, infringes on children's wholesomeness, constituting an unwarranted, and undeserved, form of violence.

Students who don't conform and succeed according to institutional standards are considered to be a deficit and a liability to the school and, often times, are labeled and tracked as "making trouble" for the system. This domesticating structure is driven by the results of high-stakes testing. Schools that don't satisfy the state's benchmarks are penalized with probationary measures and the possibility, or exist in a threatened state of being closed. In turn, these students are blamed for the schools failure, which impedes them from having success. Even those students that "make it" as dictated by the system, raise a paradoxical concern, do they really make it? Is the violence of poverty another catalyst that in turn threatens the plight of marginalized communities?

As such, poverty is a form of violence attributed as a result of existing structures that prevents humans from maximizing their full physical, emotional, and mental capacities and talents. It strips away individual elements of dignity and opportunity by unjustly establishing disadvantages, a harsh reality, lack of resources, and an overall, unhealthy environment. Many students come to school already violated by harrowing situations that can lead them into lives of desperation and criminality--then to embellish that existence, such students, once again, are violated in schools by oppressive systems that practice authoritarian abuse, place needless academic restrictions on them, labels, tracks, and promotes a cultural infringement on others that fail to fit into their educational, and personal, ideologies. Furthermore, the education system, as we currently know it, is a structure that adheres to a systemically damaging standardized testing scheme that favors the mainstream population.

According to Freire, (2000) violence is a situation where the oppressor prevents the oppressed from engaging in the process of questioning. Consequences of acts of violence alienate human beings from their own decision-making and turn them into objects of manipulation. Within the context of this article, violence is defined as a situation in which one's emotional and spiritual well-being is disregarded and belligerently robbed.

Illegal entry by institutional norms into one's psyche, infringes upon, overwhelms, and negatively alters students' search for consciousness, agency, and self-determination. This unjust situation defies their ontological way of being, strips their inner sense of identity, historical awareness, and cultural capital. This violence in the border region of El Paso/Juarez permeates the social interaction that takes place in public spheres, which emerges, and can negatively evolve, within the school system. The violence is mirrored through complacence, resistance, disdain, apathy, and antagonistic behavior. This causes people to lose their sense of interconnectedness and belonging, pushing some to become gang members; it invokes engagement in criminal activity,

and/or attributes further to high drop-out rates from marginalized groups, especially within the male population.

This dilemma contributes to an educational brain-drain of sorts and impacts the "literacy outcome" that at one time placed the US at the forefront of progress globally, but now positions them in a rank of mediocrity on a global scale (New York Times, in Ventura 2005). One example of violence perpetuated by illiteracy is the suffocation of consciousness and human expressiveness, which consistently deprives marginalized groups from avenues of literacy. Within this context, this form of violence limits students capacity to write about their reading or understanding of the world so that they can rethink their organizational reading of it, that is, their personal understanding of a world order and their role in it (Freire, 2000).

This widespread failure situated in our public schools leaves individuals stripped of hope and dignity and academically unprepared to return to a regular educational program because at a very fundamental level, public schools do not respect the rights of our youths. This creates a dynamic that makes marginalized students more susceptible to criminal behavior. Within the current educational paradigm, which is focused on test scores that translates into a one size fits all curriculum, 80% of students are left disenfranchised and denied of essential frameworks that could lead them to success (Campbell, 2005). The violence perpetrated in the educational system sets the stage for social deviance conducive to more extreme acts of violence.

Historically, in general, populations from lower SES have had to fend for themselves and survive great antagonism and adversity in order to "make it"; in many instances, without fully understanding the political and ideological forces that are in place. This has affected them as a collective group. For instance, the results of the 2004 presidential election in the U.S., in which G.W. Bush contested initial election results, impacted the country and the world, making everyone feel more vulnerable and in greater liability and susceptible to right-wing ideological violence at home and abroad.

The irony is that the poorest states are often the most politically conservative and religiously fundamentalist ones, consisting of populations with high rates of religious fanaticism and populations reflecting lower levels of education. Government within such states and their political ideologies and platforms, accordingly, are notorious for assisting the wealthy as opposed to the poor. Yet, the populations in these areas believe that they voted for leaders that best represented them. These "otherized" populations working in minimum-wage occupations, are left to fend for themselves in precarious situations due to lack of quality health care due to budget cuts to Medicaid and other public services. This form of demonization of the "others" coincides with a pro-business neoliberal agenda that offers the wealthy a plethora of economic opportunities due to low corporate taxes; a red carpet treatment that views corporations as the key to wronging all of society's ills. Similar ideologies materialize in classrooms due to widespread cutbacks to public education, as the "others" are denied access to counselors and specialists skilled in second language pedagogies while at the same time unfairly subjected to tests designed and marketed by corporate giants. Hence, it should be no surprise that schools in wealthy districts are not impacted in the same destructive ways as those in poor ones due to the tightening of state budgets. Nonetheless, elected officials convince the "others" that these

cuts will spur hard work and sacrifice in society and schools with "success" being the result.

This is a naïve and rather limiting and it is a deceitful ideological illusion, as it is recognized that elected officials are placed in positions of authority and power by unrelenting corporate power brokers, which in turn holds them accountable to their interests, leaving the needs of the poor behind. Millions of people, especially, the poorest, have been denied access to resources and have been subjugated to this type of ideological manipulative violence promulgated by mass media communications and organized religion. The poorest of communities are inundated with corner stores replete with "comida chatarra" (junk food) and a consumer culture that places profits and branding over people, as healthy alternatives are scarce and oftentimes more expensive than the "chatarra." While access to these types of unhealthy "resources" run amok in these communities in service to the said power brokers, cases of diabetes, obesity, and other maladies spike to unprecedented levels for the poor. These same victims are also led to believe that a blind devotion to the church will miraculously offer them the vehicle to rise above poverty and in turn acquire the necessities to dutifully participate in the "religion" of corporate culture and its offerings.

Some cities, as in the case of El Paso, Texas, are actively challenging this kind of conservative agenda by voting Democrat and organizing protests against standardized testing, the brutal serial killings of women in Juarez, Mexico, and other relevant socio-cultural causes. Despite the tyrannical tactics of some of the US administration, critical activists and the El Paso/Juarez border population are combating this mentality espoused through the right-wing's ideological dominance of repressive institutions, which dictate the "norm" that maintains citizens under their control (Rossatto, in O'Donnell, Pruyn and Chavez, 2004).

Militarization and Its' Impact

As previously mentioned, Fort Bliss is one of the largest military bases in the world located in the El Paso region. This military base has increased the number of soldiers by fifty percent over the last six years, which in turn has provoked tension and distress amongst the population, as schools become overcrowded (Blumenthal, 2005). Since 2006 this military base has increased in the number of soldiers to a total of 30,500 (Aguirre, 2013).

The military's overpowering/dominant control has served as an impetus for communal cultural conflicts because the values of the Latino culture possess characteristics quite distinct from that of the military. As the military presses to satisfy quotas to replenish the troops overseas, low-income populations, like in El Paso, can become easy targets as Latinos, Blacks, and poor whites are manipulated by the military's right-wing ideologies and its faulty financial illusions. The military entices lower socio-economic communities with support for college, housing/mortgage loan assistance, healthcare, and such; it can become a vehicle for recruitment. This recruitment in local high schools in the poorer area of the city is a type of soft violence enacted by recruiters who are given lists of "struggling" students not deemed equipped for the rigors of post-secondary education, but indeed fit for the rigors of strengthening the grip of the empire.

The presence of the vast military base coupled with the incessant marketing of luring students of color into the military in schools has great potential to provide a toxic synergy with violent repercussions. At the same time many of the El Paso "Barrio" members opted for the military in the 1950's and 60's and in doing so, it allowed for some economic mobility; however, tensions continued between Mexican-Americans and other racial groups. Within such a scenario, "troublemakers" ended up going to war, instead of staying in the Barrio.

In spite of this, a large majority of El Pasoans continue to be from lower socio-economic backgrounds, both state and nationwide. As an alternative for upward mobility, the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) has been instrumental in creating positive change, *when* community members opt for the education route. UTEP in 2013 was awarded the number one university in the United States where students who graduated from university do improve their economic status due, not only because of the quality of programs, but more importantly because of the great level of poverty, the university route appears to serve as a genuine means to improve the socio-economic condition of community members. Our work leads us to recognize that although poverty continues to stymie the community, and the individual; "troublemakers" emerge within such a context and inadequate educational experiences.

"Troublemaking, Making Trouble, and Making It"

After daily journal data had been collected by three public school teachers in El Paso, it was transcribed and decoded. The quantitative and qualitative data findings were combined and main patterns emerged and will be discussed further. As a consequence of those data findings, this article argues that pressures imposed by the hegemonic structures (empire) have a major impact on students' schooling experience. Among other outcomes, this study's findings reveal three distinctive patterns that indicate a distortion of students' ontological conditioning. These results arise as a direct relation to the educational system and its ideological confinements that label these students through discourse, practices, attitudes, and policies. In turn, the study utilizes the same vernacular to describe these phenomena as social constructs, specifically, they manifest as main patterns: "troublemaking, making trouble, and making it."

These three trends, illustrated in the following diagram, show a clash between students and school structure. This illustration represents how students come to school with their individual identities and with eagerness to learn; however, as they continue to experience the institutionalization of schooling, their development as a whole and their individual perceptions of the world and learning are affected. Subsequently, students become disengaged with education as it disturbs their innate eagerness to learn and limits their civic engagement capacity. Many students react negatively to education and resist schooling; hence, lower college enrollment numbers for minority populations, which reproduces the argument that schools have a tendency to reproduce society at large.
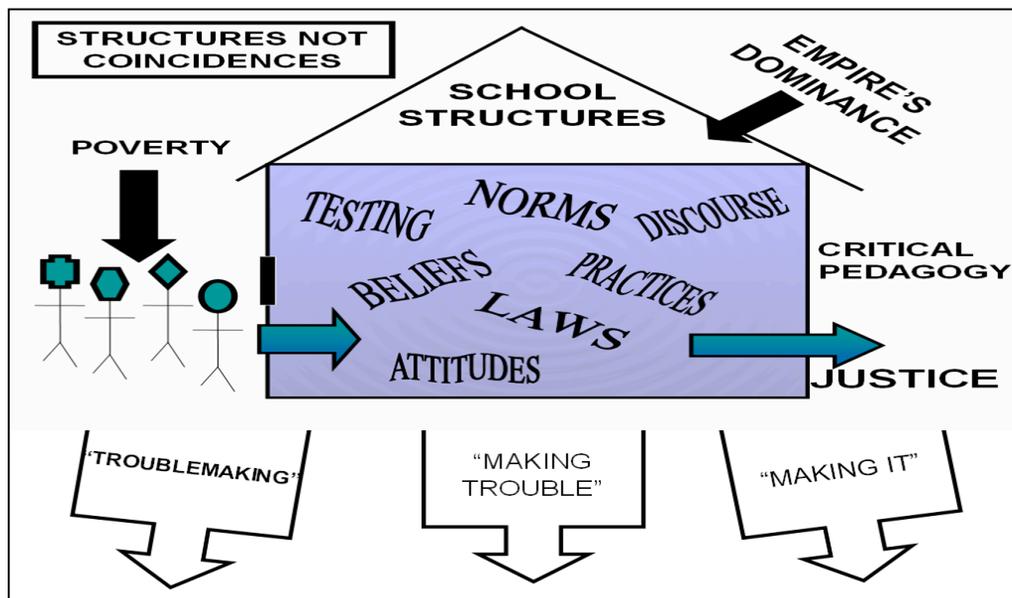
Figure 1. "Troublemaking", "Making Trouble", and "Making It"

In the diagram above the empire's dominance reveals that structures, not coincidences, control and build a predicament of schooling outcomes, which are contrary to the potential liberating possibilities of critical pedagogy.

Troublemaking

"Troublemaking" refers to the most obvious public school by-product. Students who are labeled as such by schools constantly get reprimanded by their teachers because they "misbehave." They perceive their learning experiences as irrelevant and meaningless due to the disconnectedness between their life experiences and school practices. Schooling is driven by a white supremacist perspective, a de-contextualized curriculum, highly questionable education and political policy, and unethical practices designed to mold students according to federal, state, court, and district mandates.

Because of disciplinary policies that rank and punish students according to prescriptive scales of misconduct, this procedure can lead to a wide range of overt antagonistic behaviors on behalf of the student. This can be as simple as not following a given instruction or can be as outrageous as student-initiated acts of violence against other students and/or teachers. This dynamic creates a potentially dangerous predicament that can escalate into drastic stages of violence. Therefore, top-down structures precipitate and contribute to the intensification of overt violence; however, students who engage in hostile behaviors must also be considered complicit, since their reaction and retaliation are equivalent to the empire's predatory culture (McLaren, 1995; Giroux, 2009).

This overt form of violence is representative of particular behavior patterns on a part of the students which include "the stare" portrayed negatively through hostile and predatory body language and, orally, through behavior such as talking back to the teacher or the use of inappropriate, offensive language; or by students behaving in a hostile way

with other children; being spiteful; displaying a demeanor that is deemed as disrespectful; throwing furniture; kicking objects or others; destroying school property; yelling; making inappropriate noises; and through actual physical engagement with others or with objects, such as hitting or punching walls.

Other behaviors manifested as a consequence of "overt violence" include the shrugging of the shoulders; slouched body stance; constant fidgeting; blank stares; frowning; crying; silence, when asked a question; cruising the halls for a daily stroll to the bathroom, water fountain, or nurse's office; as well as by students self-removal from social and physical classroom environments in order to shelter themselves from what they perceive to be harmful, unfair, and disengaging situations. Some students even joke with the teacher, or others, in order to focus attention away from themselves, yet get in trouble for it. These children are noted as class clowns because they are behaving "inappropriately" when teachers and administrators should be able to recognize that these are physical actions that require their attention and addressing via a more in-depth, one-on-one situation. One example of this overarching category is illustrated in the following incident that is based on true events:

> …it was 8:45 a.m. as I entered the third grade classroom on test taking day, I was instructed by administration to administer that 'unruly' class." Johnny was standing in front of the classroom shoving a desk across the room and yelling, Por favor déjeme en paz! Por el amor de Dios. (For the love of God, please leave me alone!).

The teacher (T) *Ms. Valles* was yelling back at him at the top of her lungs:

> T: ¡*Ya mi hijito,* ya *te dije* que *tu vas a tomar la prueba*! (Okay my little son, I already told you that you will take the test!)
>
> S: ¡*Yo no, ya le dije!* ¡*Yo ya la tomé ayer!* (*No I'm not. I already told you!* I took the test yesterday!)
>
> T: ¡*No es cierto Johnny!* ¡*Vete de aquí, y ve pregúntale a la otra maestra si tiene tu prueba!* (That is not true Johnny! Get away from here and go ask the other teacher if she has your test!**)**
>
> S: ¡*No yo no voy a ir!* (No**,** I am not going!)

> Johnny's face was red. He had a distressing dark look in his eyes as he stared at the teacher and his forehead had a defined frown. The rest of the class looked scared. Some students switched their stare from Ms. Valles to Johnny, but their bodies seemed frozen. Johnny would readily be considered defiant and be labeled a "troublemaker." He was yelling at the teacher, which could be considered disrespectful. He spends most of his time in the office reprimanded and often suspended.

This conduct constitutes reactions that mirror the emotional abuse perpetrated by many adults in positions of power and authority who scream, demand, insult, label, and exclude these students; which are practices that reflect the schooling system, and, behaviors found within society at large. The majority of teachers come from a working class background where they experienced oppression and continue to be subjugated by

the top-down model they work in. Thus, when many of them move into a position of power and privilege as teachers, they often become the oppressor. Because the oppressed wants what the oppressor has, they become desensitized about their own, and other's, humanity and reproduce the same cyclical pattern from the past (Anyon, 1980; Freire, 2000).

Schools resemble a kind of factory model, where a Balkanized schooling process takes place, and those who won't perform as expected are considered misfits. This represents a problem since those kept behind tend to "get into trouble" and become "troublemakers" and have disciplinary issues. Frequently, they leave school prematurely. Even though schools often manipulate statistics to significantly reduce the dropout rate, McNeil (in Valenzuela, 2005) reveals that the state of Texas, on the one hand, utilizes a variety of different techniques to exclude dropouts from the school population's enrollment figures and discusses how many of those who drop out are potential candidates to serve time in prison or in the juvenile detention system.

This same system is referred to by Campbell (2005) who indicates that 50 percent of the referrals to disciplinary and remedial programs are for persistent misbehavior, like forgetting school assignments, loitering in the halls, truancy and showing disrespect. Studies show that these students are being prepped for incarceration by the very same system inherently responsible for educating them. We argue, as supported by work done from Campbell, (2005), that there is a pattern between school failure and prisons which is established by practices such as school suspensions, juvenile detentions, separate resource and/or lower track classrooms and alternative educational program placements. According to Kaplan, Schiraldi & Ziedenberg (2000), statistical rates based on millions of "at-risk" third graders (students that "fail" to pass the state standardized test) are used as the source to predict future jail cells needed; and when it comes to incarcerating youth, Texas just earned the problematic distinction of having the largest prison population in the country (163,190), surpassing the prison population of California (163,067), which has 13 million more citizens than Texas. The Lone Star State has more than 700,000 of its citizens under criminal justice control. If Texas were a country, it would have the highest incarceration rate in the world, easily surpassing the United States and Russia, and, seven times that of the next biggest prison system in China.

The "at-risk" labeling becomes a predicament, as students eventually feel disenchanted with school and dropout at alarming rates, thus being "left behind." In a study conducted by John Hopkins University ("Locating the Drop-Out Crisis"), El Paso public schools were referred to as "drop out factories" due to the fact that Texas schools failed to graduate 40 percent or more of their freshmen in four years in the graduating classes of 2004 to 2006. El Paso had 8 of their public schools listed in the study report (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Acosta, 2007).

McNeil (in Valenzuela, 2005) reveals that in 2000 and 2001 the El Paso Independent School District graduated only 61% of the overall school population, due in part to the federal mandates of standardized testing, which further isolates students from their peers and "pushes" them to disengage from schooling. In 2009-2010, 6400 borderland students dropped out of school (Jimenez, 2011).

Although it appears that in recent years dropout rates have diminished, in contrast, the corruption rates and the manipulation of numbers has increased. In fact, a federal judge sentenced a former superintendent of the El Paso Independent School District to more than three years in prison as a consequence of corruption. He participated in a conspiracy to improve the district's high-stakes tests scores by removing low-performing students from classrooms and was also convicted of embezzling large amounts of funds from a no bid contract to produce school materials (Llorca, 2010). This was national news, followed by similar corruption charges in Louisiana, and in other American cities. One can deduce from these kinds of events that these mandates contribute to devastating results for all those that participate in the system regardless of background. In the greater El Paso region, such as Socorro, 48 percent of people 25 and older have not graduated from high school, according to the 2005-2009 American Community Survey. In other local communities, such as Fabens, San Elizario and Tornillo, the rate is even higher. Accordingly, it is estimated that approximately 58 percent of adults are dropouts (Flores, 2011). Surprisingly, schools are rewarded monetarily for identifying students as "at-risk;" however, according to McNeil, the high stakes testing directives encourage school districts to waste money on test prep material instead of utilizing it on more high quality resources. This contributes to a bland curriculum that neither challenges nor animates students. An artificial generic standardized formula is used as an operational tool to produce the same "product," as if one is referring to an inanimate object and not a human being.

Wiggins, (1998) suggests the opposite, noting that the objective of assessment ought to be to educate and improve student performance, not merely to audit it. In addition, he states that US schools spend well over 100 million dollars on commercial standardized tests each year, money that could be more effectively utilized to improve student performance at low socio-economic levels. To be clear, stat-mandated testing has become a money-making machine for publishers and test preparation businesses.

Among the most competitive publishing companies are CTB/McGraw-Hill, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and Pearson—a British multinational corporation. Pearson is the largest one serving this testing market since the year 2000. Currently it has partnered with 18 states in the U.S. to produce pricey testing materials. Its contract in Texas was worth $500 million. It is the world's largest education company and book publisher, with revenue of more than $9 billion annually (Figueroa, 2013). This horrendous practice in earnings continues today. These companies are playing monopoly with people's futures and promoting predatory market driven practices on the schooling systems, which in turn affects teaching practices and students when content quality is problematic, which it is.

Within this context, parents at times feel inadequate or ill-prepared to face-up to repressive systems when dealing with "troublemakers." Many parents are left defenseless in these punishment-focused programs, or intimidated to the point that they do not speak out for fear of being considered "troublemakers" themselves by the governmental institutions. These governmental institutions are respected entities constructed by those in positions of power, which are usually comprised principally of white patriarchs who established a hegemonic order to ensure the prosperity of their empire.

In turn, not only are the children violated by the system, but many parents are also left feeling hopeless, disenfranchised, controlled, and even marginalized. For example,

many of these parents dropped-out of school themselves. Many times, within this context, such parents have a limited ability in understanding their children's struggles in today's new classroom environment, which is a result of limited, or lack of, schooling and language barriers.

It is crucial to question the "trouble making" construct, which begs the question, where exactly is the violence located within educational systems today? The school experience fails to embrace the student's reality, in fact, the public school system offers awkward, or insignificant learning experiences. This type of repressive educational system contributes to a problematic and highly questionable practice. Many times this dynamic resorts in verbal abuse between students and teachers, and teachers and students, with teachers ruthlessly abusing their position of authority through the subjugation of students.

It is rather revealing that the educational structure and marginalized students are overtly implicated in this unrelenting turmoil. On the other hand, students, too, play an integral role as well by violently confronting, reacting, and retaliating against this oppressive system and others in and out of this system. Within this context, to illustrate the impact and the severity of this and the accompanying implications, highlighted below are relevant data that succinctly support this argument.

According to Martinez, A., Bryan, B., Bryl, J. (2001) the *Profile of Referrals* document in Selected Juvenile Probation Departments in Texas, El Paso had the highest percentage of A & B misdemeanor offense referrals (68%- equivalent to 2,031) reported in Texas. In addition, El Paso reported the highest percentage of violent offenses (28%) in Texas. Moreover, El Paso County reported 33% of the highest percentage of dispositions that were dropped or dismissed among 17 departments in the study, which was due to the overloaded court system in the city.

When comparing Dallas and El Paso Juvenile Probation Departments both have the highest percentage of juveniles to defer prosecution (29%), yet, it is noticeable that Dallas is touted as the fifth "most unsafe" city in the US, whereas El Paso is considered one of the safest cities, in spite of its high rate of misdemeanor crime rate (Morgan Quitno, 2004). This fact should call into question how young males are effecting society now, and forces educators, law enforcement, and politicians to consider what El Paso's crime rate will be like in five to ten years from now.

Males between the ages of 15-16 comprise 45% of total referrals (24,891 out of 55,254 statewide) to the Juvenile Probation Department for non-felony offenses. *Automatic Restriction to Access of Records System*, that is, policy*,* does not permit any non-governmental entity to have access to any juvenile criminal record statistics after 2001. Nevertheless, according to the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (2011), when comparing El Paso to Dallas in 2009, overall, violent felony report percentages were very close. The difference in child referrals for misdemeanors in both cities was noted at 1%. Consequently, although crime rates for the city of El Paso are generally relatively low when compared to the national rate; juvenile misdemeanor crime rates are very high when compared to big cities like Dallas.

Making Trouble

In contrast to the first description of overt violence, "making trouble" is a more covert dissimilarity between the student and the system even though both patterns are outcomes precipitated by the aforementioned structures. In it we find those students who are struggling "at-risk" learners who don't fit into the "dominates" notions of success. These learners are unable to meet the high demands of a meritocratic and standardized technocratic system. A subtle form of violence takes possession of their inherent ontological human, which attributes, negatively influences and hinders students' plight in their search for consciousness and agency. We argue that students start off as human agents curious to get to know the *words and the world* and end up as objects of a dehumanizing system (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

During the course of our research we have observed that regardless of the challenging circumstances present in these school communities, as discussed earlier, many students also possess a sense of self that is positive, they have a sense of belonging, and a resilient cultural identity. By the same token, it is also quite evident that the empire controls the masses, instilling a naïve belief that schooling is an opportunity for upward mobility. It is with this expectation that children first come to school. Initially, students have a spark in their eyes that is waiting to be ignited, they enter into the classroom with a wealth of hope, innocence, and a carefree spirit. They know how to speak, laugh, and play. They are full of communal and familial experiences derived from local culture that is based on religion, mass-media communications, social interactions, and a sense of self derived from their territorial reality that they want to share with others.

Many students come to school with youthful exuberance; however, many of them lose their enthusiasm as schools fail to embrace their aspirations and struggles, or accept their cultural and linguist diversity. In contrast to troublemakers who display overt reactions, these students repress their displeasure and consequently make trouble for the system. Thus, the "making trouble" pattern exemplifies a form of "cool" violence that is covert and socially legitimized (McLaren, Leonardo & Allen, in Spina, 2000).

As opposed to "troublemaker" students who exercise a hostile, active role. Within this framework, the "making trouble" students portray a role of passivity or resistance in a dormant way. Violence in this context becomes a silent consciousness of sorts that students subjectively internalize, affecting their sense of self and identity. It distorts their capability to maintain their innate sense of self-determination, as teachers suppress their ability to think critically, utilize creativity, evaluate a situation, and problem solve.

As a result of this repressive framework, it emerged from our study's findings that many of these students are negatively labeled as "struggling" learners, "at-risk", and/or recommended for remediation due to low academic performance, or, most disturbingly, placed needlessly into special education. Although these types of classifications can describe troublemakers as well, we refer to those students who make trouble as an educational challenge to the system.

Assessments such as TAKS/STAAR, Tejas Lee, TPRI, ITBS, and NCLB standardizations have been used to group students, erroneously expecting that all students will perform equally. When students don't perform as expected they are drilled; coached

with test skills; bribed; kept longer hours after school; given more homework that takes more hours to complete; in other words, the test becomes the curriculum.

At the same time many teachers are ill-prepared to deal with such students as they have been pressured to deliver *packaged* learning as mandated by the hierarchy's harsh policies. Caine & Caine, (2001) assert that teaching has become a sort of assembly line in that activities can be monitored and controlled as a result of integrating prescriptive programs, such as "Success for All" or "Open Court." Moreover, many teachers that possess a dynamic pedagogical vision of schooling are forced to comply with the standardized system, which in turn builds a demoralizing predicament amongst them. They actively resist these sterile contexts and end up leaving the profession as they can successfully utilize their creative abilities in other fields.

As a consequence of state-mandated testing, some teachers have become negatively influenced. They may be prompted to cheat and perform poorly in the classroom, due to pressures associated with achieving appropriate test scores and fear retaliation. Moreover, the state aggravates this situation by implementing a zero tolerance policy to punish this kind of misconduct, in spite of the fact that teachers and administrators must assimilate to mainstream expectations, despite the fact they are working with non-mainstream students. Within this predatory context, students are victimized by being denied meaningful learning experiences that prevents them from "reading the world," as well as developing their potentials and widening their sense of self-determination to be agents of historical change.

The public schools perceive and define these students as misfits, because they don't accomplish what the educational system has imposed upon them. According to Valdez, (1996) it is a fact that kids that come from poor SES environments have done poorly in school; however, it is not the poverty that keeps them from being successful-- rather, it is the school structure that prevents them from succeeding. They are making trouble within the hegemonic structure because they don't identify with the system that has been implemented and therefore, they defy the dominant ideology.

Students are considered "at-risk" because they come from low SES backgrounds. Schools benefit from this kind of detrimental labeling as they receive local, state, and federal funding for both, students coming from low-socio economic backgrounds and those that are "not making it," as if money alone is what makes the difference in the learning experience. Since the majority of teachers (many "Making-it" graduates) come from the same backgrounds as the students, they subconsciously tend to reproduce what they are used to; by practicing poor quality pedagogy that keeps these students in a subaltern position.

Schools offer programs such as remediation, response to intervention, and alternative schooling as a way of rectifying the predicament students are placed into. Nonetheless, these kinds of programs not only track students, but teachers as well. Since the most qualified teachers often choose the best teaching positions with less challenging behavior problems. Thus, much of the remedial programs, end up being taught by ill-prepared, or ill-equipped, teachers, who often fail to bring these students to upper track positions. This is indicative of a neoliberal ideology whose subversive intentions are to demoralize public schools in order to privatize them. Students placed into such a context

and predicament end up resisting and reacting in counterproductive ways. In short, if they learn anything, it is to reject the system, and any form of higher education.

Students who participate within a "low" social class schooling context are often under surveillance and kept under a constricted disciplinary modified structure that reproduces intergenerational stratification. Christensen, (2012) explains that the school-to-prison pipeline doesn't just begin with cops in the hallways and zero-tolerance discipline policies. It begins when teachers fail to create a curriculum and a pedagogy that empowers and connects with students daily life experiences, which should be one that takes them seriously as intellectuals; one that makes it clear that our students know we care about them. It must be a system that gives students the chance to channel their pain and defiance in productive ways as opposed to just "making trouble" for the schooling system. In conjunction with the "making trouble" student profile described above, one of our researchers noted the following episode to illustrate this form of covert violence:

Iliana was a fourth grade student, reading at a kinder level, who recently arrived from Juarez, Mexico. Iliana and her teacher entered the classroom of one of our researchers--a reading specialist, who was engaged in a lesson with her respective group of students. By not performing at the school's expectation level for reading, Iliana "made trouble" for the teacher from the moment she entered school. The teacher was ill-prepared to meet the academic needs the student brought with her to the classroom. The teacher's bias and lack of sound pedagogical reasoning became quite evident when she stated to the reading specialist in an irritated, degrading manner in front of Iliana and the other students the following:

I have a new student here named Iliana. I think she's retarded or something because she doesn't know anything. I think you're going to have to take her so that maybe she'll learn something.

After careful examination of the student's reading abilities, Iliana began to visit the reading specialist's classroom consistently. Despite her difficulties, she was always enthusiastic about learning. The specialist learned more about Iliana's background and her struggles and assisted her by implementing research-based strategies for two months and observed significant improvements overall.

Iliana's home environment was rather unsettling as her mother decided to stay in Juarez and left her and her two siblings at the neighbor's house, a neighbor who was already overloaded taking care of three of her own children. Iliana's older sister was a freshman and her brother was a third grader. When their mother returned from Juarez after a two month absence, she withdrew Iliana and her sister from school, informing one of the teachers that she was doing it because she wanted them with her in Juarez. On the other hand she said the only child she wanted to keep in school was the son because "el tiene cerebro" (he is actually smart) and can maybe do something with himself. But she was not going to take her two daughters back to school, because they had no brains. She would "prostitute them" instead, which would provide them a better return in the long run. She withdrew the girls from school and took them to Juarez.

This particular example illustrates how a teacher labels a student in a detrimental way because Iliana didn't fit the "expected" mold that the other children in the classroom did. The teacher had no idea how to approach this challenge due to limited pedagogical

understanding. The unethical and disturbing remark made by the home room teacher also reinforced something that the mother was already, consciously and subconsciously, instilling into Iliana and her sister in an even worse way. Thus, these two derogatory attempts against Iliana hinder her chances of "making it." In addition, this episode also reveals how patriarchy is internalized within the mother's self-perception as she relegated the girls to a dehumanized state, while the boy was elevated to a higher status in her eyes. Iliana was not necessarily defying or opposing the system she was just a bystander who caused "trouble" for the system because she could not fit into the mainstream model of education. The student was able to be successful, but the school system failed to meet her academic and emotional needs.

The majority of students in some of the classrooms researched experienced similar incidences and displayed patterns similar to those seem in Iliana. This was just one example that we have documented amongst a plethora of other similar incidents our researchers have witnessed during the span of the investigation, tragically confirming for many of our researchers this disparagement perpetrated by the public school system in El Paso.

Another example of the "making trouble" pattern is embodied in the following as documented by another researcher: Roberto is a ten year-old third grader who has continuously "failed" the standardized test, approximately, five times over the duration of two years. He has attended all tutoring available to him before and after school since the first grade. Roberto has attended summer school for three years, and has had daily forty-five minute sessions with the literacy leader for three years. He has also been tested for special education, but did not qualify. Like many other students in similar quandaries, Roberto is frustrated.

Mr. Ramirez, his teacher for the past two years, keeps complaining that Roberto is lazy and just doesn't want to do anything anymore and that Roberto has given up. On many occasions, people who pass by can witness Mr. Ramirez yelling at Roberto in the hallway as Roberto stands flat against the wall staring at him with a blank expression. This child has withstood shame while the students in last year's class laughed at him for not passing the test. He is constantly belittled by the teacher who obviously thinks that he "will change his behavior" by yelling at him in front of adults and children that walk down the hall.

Roberto's final report card was made available to our researcher, who noticed that bright red numbers and letters occupied almost every space representing all of his "failing grades" and his "unacceptable behavior." His passing grades were in black ink, but they didn't stand out like the red ones.

This particular case illustrates how educators and, eventually, students publicly demoralized him and objectified him through ridiculing and preying on his vulnerability and weaknesses, in spite of the school's continued attempts at remediation. In turn, the education system consistently failed to effectively assist him to succeed while dis-inflating the progression of his identity-building, and affecting his future potential. Unfortunately these procedures would certainly lead to psychological and emotional scars for Roberto, which prompts us to ask, where is the necessary positive reinforcement and pedagogical link that he needs to become engaged in the learning experience? Roberto's

and Iliana's story exemplify what many other students are experiencing, instead, they reveal the infusion of institutional violence which lingers within the American public school educational system and has become another, more troubling, form of education.

Likewise, many other aspects of the institutionalization of education confirm how this pattern of "making trouble" encompasses the schooling context. For instance, as the year comes to an end, many educational decisions for children are made according to their yearly performance. The "Promotion/Retention" committee spends about 35 hours reviewing white, pink, blue, and white forms (each color indicating the grade level and program placement decision).

Three different programs are available to students for remediation in the summer. The first of these services is for kindergarten students who are not yet "ready" or "have all the skills deemed to make them successful" first graders. They also have to be designated as Limited English Proficient (LEP) to qualify for the program, which means that most students in the monolingual classes will be denied the opportunity. All students in the bilingual classes that are referred by the teacher are eligible. These students go to school during the summer for four weeks from 8:30 to 3:30 for extra intervention.

The second program is available to students who have a grade point average (GPA) between 56-69 percent in the core subjects (Reading/Language or Math). These students attend summer school from 8:00 to 12:00 at another campus where the teacher-to-student ratio is more than 15:1. In this remediation program, the students are supposed to "catch up" with the rest of the students in their grade level. In the final program, the "Strengthening Program", students' are taught at their respective campuses. The eligibility criteria for this program requires that students need to have a yearly average in the core areas of 70-79, or that the student has failed the standardized test (Grades 3-5), or have been labeled "at-risk" by the Texas Primary Inventory/Tejas Lee (TPRI) in grades K-3.

There were 175 referrals in 2005, which reflected the fact that 53% of the student body had been referred to one of three programs. This number practically doubled from the 2003-04 school year. When the committee reviewed further the information presented regarding students that were referred to as "at-risk" by the TPRI/Tejas Lee from K-3rd grade, the results were shocking. Out of 184 students tested, 121 were designated as at-risk, according to state guidelines. The school receives funding for every student that gets identified as such. Being that 66% of students were labeled as "at-risk", it is evident that the school will receive a sufficient allotment of funds to "help" these students "perform better." This is a pattern that keeps repeating itself year after year.

After the committee finished grouping the students according to the criteria set forth by the school district, as we described above, 84 out of the 175 referrals were offered the Strengthening Program. The remaining students were placed appropriately in the Summer School Program, or were denied program entry, or were sent to the Kinder Program if age appropriate.

When the Strengthening Program was planned, funding was insufficient for the amount of students referred. There were only enough funds available to hire six teachers, which makes the ratio 14:1. Since the number of students per grade was not proportional to the number of teachers hired, the students were not going to be placed in the classroom

according to instructional needs, language, or grade level. On the contrary, they were going to be comprised of bilingual and monolingual students from all grade levels represented. Unfortunately the school was only granted adequate funding for ten days of intervention. As a result, all the planning and classifications had very little positive benefit and limited opportunities for improvement of students' academic performance.

This data is useful in examining the overall educational structure and its failure to meet the needs of students. Is it possible that more than half of these respective school's students have "learning problems" that need to be "fixed?" Why wasn't there enough funding to help these students? Why did all these students end up in this predicament? We can only conclude that students are left at the mercy of a marginalized existence and are being forced to fend for themselves without effective measures in place on behalf of the institution. Notably, such students are from marginalized populations that consist mainly of low-SES backgrounds, or are from non-mainstream populations.

Students do not get bad grades or fail tests just because they want to or because they love to attend tutoring and summer school. They are simply trying to reach that bar that, supposedly, serves as proof that students are "making it," but that elusive goal is not appropriately raised for the needs of such populations, but instead serves as a reminder of the unrealistic heights set for many that is based on a mainstream agenda. Meanwhile, public schools keep practicing, drilling, and striving incessantly, falsely hoping for the "miracle" to happen, when in reality "making it" is a false illusion created by the hegemonic system, which will allow for further discussion and analysis in the following section.

Making It

According to our findings, the previous two patterns of violence are the most visible in the schooling experience. Nevertheless, besides troublemaking and making trouble, there are those who opt to "play the game" as dictated by the system's prescribed notion of success and thus are "making it" in the "educational" process. They were not "troublemakers" nor did they make trouble for the institution. On the contrary, they adjust to the school's expectations, either out of fear of not measuring up or because they want to clear the hurdles of a test driven culture (Pinar, 2004). However, upon further research and analysis, their achievement becomes problematic as demonstrated by statistics revealing that minorities and impoverished populations are left behind in great numbers without even finishing high school.

"Making it" in this context is a result of a subtle form of violence that subtracts identity and agency from students (Valenzuela, 1999). This case represents a state of being, where students are forced to digest a curriculum that negates their personal identity, interests, culture, and language. As a result, this type of oppression domesticates students and makes them into compartmentalized entities who must work their way through a deliberately created mechanical objectified system. It violates a students' sense of empowerment by preventing them from becoming active agents of history and transformative intellectual citizens; in short, it keeps them apart from a dialectical praxis that propels humans to change their repressive conditions.

When students need to give up their cultural and racial ethnic identity just "to make it," it is a high price to pay. Fordhand (1986) refers to this experience as a racelessness phenomenon where students have to shadow their own heritage, rather than be proud of it. In its place, they are relegated to the interests of the hegemonic system, which deceptively provides a glimmer of hope at a young age but fizzles out as time goes by.

It is a false illusion to believe that success achieved at the elementary level can be a precursor to "making it." Fine (1991) interprets the high school students silencing attitudes and high drop-out rates as negative consequences of prior schooling experience that avoids naming and talking about risky subjects and difficult topics. Within this context, fueled by a hidden curriculum that seeks to "train, construct, and normalize" *(De Lissovoy, 2011, p.6)*, students internalize the idea that to be a good student is to be a quiet and docile student. Fine further explains that at an adult age, the "success" of achieving the "American dream," is deceptive. Straight "A" students have high paying jobs, but experience more emotional and relationship problems. On the other hand, students who dropped-out of school have low skill and low paying jobs, but less emotional problems Thus, being submissive to the system proved damaging to students as they were denied empowerment and opportunities to become healthy contributors to society. Did "playing the game" assist them in becoming successful students, or did it only prove to be a detrimental phase in their life. The following provides an insightful example of this trend that has become quite prevalent in our schools.

One of our researchers was participating in a vertical alignment process that focused on offering students a more connected experience through their elementary, junior high, and high school careers. It consisted of disaggregating testing data from each elementary school and following it to the corresponding middle school and high school. Repeatedly the scores for the particular subject reviewed showed great accomplishment during the elementary level, yet the scores for the same subject matter in the middle and high school level took a drastic nosedive. In sum, the appearance of success in the elementary schools was evident, but only in the short run.

It was clear that in the long run students lacked a solid knowledge base to carry them through the later years of middle and high school, because of a test driven curriculum and instruction devoted to the meaningless memorization of information that will be on a high-stakes state-mandated test. Lacking, were critical thinking skills and higher level processing skills. As such, high stakes testing movements end up being subtractive instead of additive to children's learning abilities (Valenzuela, 2005). It interrupts their ability to grow academically and intellectually because it forces teachers to step away from teaching over-all, to teaching for the test. Not only does it force many to despise this standardized scheme of education, but it also restrains their ability to enjoy learning, and it limits student's ability and desire to discover knowledge individually or collectively. Without a doubt, this system robs children of a quality education, instead, negatively contributing to their cognitive, emotional, and sometimes physical withdrawal from the educational process (Valenzuela, 2005).

Upon further investigation of those who had experienced success in schooling, the question of quality instruction required addressing. In his book: *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations & Attainment In A Low-Income Neighborhood,* MacLeod (1987) points out

that many children from the aforementioned fail and "go nowhere" in life. The populations that were adhering to the status quo did as they were told and were successful in school. Unfortunately, once leaving the educational institution, many did not "go anywhere" because the quality of the education was so low, and there was no longer a mechanism to direct them in life, which is something that is initiated by the "self" if the necessary intellectual structures have been appropriately set-up by the learning experience.

Even after graduating it wouldn't have helped them to be successful according to international comparisons in Ventura's (2005) article, *America by the numbers: No. 1*? He states that the U.S. ranked 28th out of 40 countries in mathematical literacy; and 49th worldwide in literacy; therefore, clearing the hurdles, as advocated by the US standardization model, which in reality, left students unprepared to tackle real world experiences when compared with students from other countries. As a result of this watered down curriculum, students encountered a glass ceiling of sorts, an obstacle of-sorts that prevents them from having authentic success in those situations that demand realistic and practical applications of knowledge.

Along these same lines, Rossatto (2005) affirms that this pattern is relevant among students "making it" who can also be identified as exhibiting blind and resilient attitudes. As Rossatto explains, such students socially construct a naïve embracement of meritocratic ideologies that inhibits their ability to develop a sense of self-determination and collective struggle to change their reality. It immerses them in a climate that annihilates their intellectual potentials. They are unwittingly assimilated into a hegemonic hierarchy of privileges, where success is contingent upon adherence to standards and expectations that are outside of students' control. From a resilient standpoint, students who conform to the normative alienating social order reproduce the hegemonic configuration; due to the fact that they see this as a means of achieving a desired individualistic goal.

Within this context schools don't take responsibility for their deficiency, rather, the pressure is placed upon the students, who must make the school look good by placing well in the state assessment ranking system. Teachers exacerbate this situation and prefer to maintain a "denial" attitude to avoid conflict with colleagues, and, for fear of being reprimanded by administration if assessment results are not up to standards. This creates an unhealthy schooling environment that has become one that is filled with tension and friction between teachers and administrators as they blame each other for an outcome of failure. More important, the rupturing of cultural identity leaves a permanent psychological trauma, which is something, many times, experienced by oppressed populations who seemingly have made it in spite of all forms of subjugation (Macedo, 2003).

This "unhealthy schooling environment" was documented by one of our researchers, as on numerous occasions the state assessment was used as a tool to condition students into believing coercion was the norm that was supposed to play out during testing season. The day before the "big day," the cheerleaders from the neighborhood high school were brought in to perform a pep rally for those students in the testing grades (3rd through 5th). The chants all positioned the test as an opponent to be overcome through hard work; it had all the vestiges of a masculine-fueled sports event

with lives on the line. The "life" on the line was the school's exemplary rating (the highest based on previous test results) that would only be maintained through another stellar effort on behalf of students. The hidden curriculum they were being exposed to was training them to passively conform to a competitive agenda that likened their education to the results of a "game" to be won or lost, with the repercussions being that there would be future coercive events of this type if the "game" was won. In a school comprised of 99% Latino students, this competitive agenda presented great risks of rupturing the cultural identities of these bicultural/bilingual children.

The same researcher documented on numerous occasions verbal barrages of coercive threats by the principal over the school loud speaker. The threats, only intended for students in testing grades, were heard by the entire school and consisted of not-so-friendly reminders to those students who had been instructed to spend 5 hours on Saturdays in a test preparation "boot camp." These reminders and other aggressive displays of competitive rage by the principal all revolved around overcoming the test and became part of the daily fabric of this respective school. The principal was like that coach you feared and would only be satisfied based on student performance on game (test) day. "Making it" in this toxic environment would give students pizza parties, more brazen pep rallies, and gold stars, while at the same time stripping students of any vestige of agency and cultural identity.

Synopsis of the Three Patterns

"Troublemaking" within the context of this investigation reveals that students' overt violence against an oppressive schooling system, which is juxtaposed by the "making trouble" pattern form of covert violence, takes away from a student's ability to develop their talents, thus, "failing" the system. This outcome also serves the best interests of the hegemonic structure, as the neoliberal ideology to privatize education becomes the driving hidden agenda; therefore, "making it" within this framework is a form of violence that subtracts from students' identity and proves to be an elusive result since students end-up being ill prepared to face the challenges of the real world.

Why is this educational system continuing to fail these children? Isn't it crucial to educate a new generation of youth who can critically interject fresh perspectives and make a meaningful contribution to society? The following section will address some of these issues and expand on the ideological and political aspects that explain this scenario.

The Empire's Grip on Non-White Immigrants

Working in this region along the U.S- Mexican borderland forces us to position into context the fact that a majority of the population served are immigrants, migrants, or illegal residents. To best understand how and why certain minority groups experience impoverishment, it is important to examine their struggle. According to Soros, (2005) African and South American developing countries are exploited by competing oil and mining companies for their natural resources. They take advantage of the situation by destabilizing governments through political and economic manipulation; thus, leaving millions of people in harsh conditions of poverty who are then forced to immigrate to prosperous countries in an attempt to escape the empire's unleashed expansion.

In El Paso the majority of the population is comprised of Latino/as working class peoples, many whom have crossed the border, or, the border has crossed them (Texas used to belong to Mexico). New immigrants commonly have been marginalized and displaced by their country of origin, then upon arrival in the U.S., undergo a new form of oppression and displacement. The U.S. system often discriminates, demonizes, and dehumanizes Latinos/as in general with labels such as "aliens", (as if they are from another planet), "minorities," (which indicates that they are already less than others) "wetbacks," (a derogatory intentional attempt to racially insult Mexicans or border crossers) or "illegals" (meaning that they are, right-off the bat, in tension with American law). As a result of the difficulty related to "making it" and adjusting to the demands of U.S. white hegemony, Latino/a population are usually placed into a cultural identity conflict. Those most severely affected are youth, who, historically, have endured a racial struggle in schooling. Educational institutions, most of the time, contribute to the hegemonic order, because they replicate hegemony, thus, making it crucial to know and understand how it is manifested.

Throughout history, education has been limited to privileged elites. Even when schooling began to branch out to females and nonwhites, stipulations existed as to who was taught and what was learned, as well as where they would learn. For the most part, education was defined by an imperialist right-wing agenda. They created the norms and standards that were used to control and alienate impoverished populations to maintain them in subaltern roles, because such peoples are required for the labor positions and those positions no one else wants (Null, 2004). The goal was to educate such peoples, but not too much.

These structures have been implemented, maintained, and sustained by politicians and state agencies that dictate school policies such as testing and funding and alienate those they "intend" to assist. In conjunction with this top down business model of schools, Kohn (2004) asserts that textbook and test companies, in reality, are run by the very same owners who also support the politicians. The companies benefit financially while the students suffer due to academic deprivation. Educators further perpetuate this exploitive trend by operating a standardized model of low-quality curriculum, assuming every student learns similarly, and ignoring divergent needs of individual students and schools. This exemplifies the neo-liberal ideology practice, which attempts to demoralize public schools in order to privatize them, producing societal conditions that maintain and legitimize blatant acts of dehumanization. Neoliberalism is the dominant ideology governing most of the politics and economy worldwide today, as a market competition driven system to "equalize the plain field." A lie, because the "big fish often eats the small fish," just as the big corporations and the "1%" top elites their financial support to elect politicians who in turn work at their interest, leaving the big masses in poverty to fend for themselves.

Dominant Ideologies in Higher Echelons of Educational Institutions

A one-sided hegemonic ideological mentality dominates schooling practices. For instance, on one particular occasion school parents were not welcomed as a sign at the school entrance said, "Parents, wait for your children outside in the parking lot." At the

same time, the principal and vice-principal were invited to speak in a classroom of new teachers, and they stated emphatically that the way to solve the problem with some hyper-children and confrontational parents was to medicate them. This quick-fix mentality reveals how school administrators' ideological beliefs and *operandum vivendis* are based on problematic pragmatic practices that can violate the rights of vulnerable and defenseless students, and their parents.

When educators from a local university met with a group of El Paso school principals to inquire about how to improve the quality of teacher preparation, their response was overwhelmingly in favor of classroom management, as if their main concern was student control. Obviously this strategy is a characteristic of sound pedagogy; however, an overemphasis on it illustrates how these principals' limited their understanding of current learning dynamics and stressed how they fail to recognize that oppressive views can affect the quality of educational praxis. This mentality is a part of a systematic way of thinking about education that is learned from the higher echelons of educational institutions, which are also dominated by the hegemonic social order. When this method is socially legitimized in order to maintain a dominant stratification that favors a few on top, then, just by being born into this world is a form of privilege that one can inherit from hegemony, while others cannot.

Knowingly or unknowingly, policy makers, administrators, and instructional leaders internalize ideologies learned from these pre-established dominant systems as they continue to feed off of these types of hegemonic educational discourses. On the other hand, when students are enthusiastic and engaged in authentic learning experiences, teachers rarely need to utilize classroom management and discipline. In order to combat oppressive ideologies and its repercussion we propose as a viable instrument, the integration of critical pedagogy in the classroom.

Transformative Exodus through Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is the art of teaching and learning in a manner that deconstructs problematic hegemonic structures. It is accomplished through dialogue and dialectical practices where teachers and students recreate new alternatives that are more in tune with social justice and equality. The latest reinvention of critical pedagogy also incorporates feminist and critical race theory to ultimately promote racial and gender democracy by deconstructing whiteness and patriarchy hegemonies (Rossatto, Allen, & Pruyn, 2005).

We argue that by developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, within the teaching and learning process, critical pedagogy seeks to positively foster students' self-determination. As a result, students learn to question the reality they live in. Subsequently, they undergo a "transformative exodus" by finding a "way out" of ideological confinements and by gaining a collective consciousness that steps them away from current oppressive conditions. Through this process, a realization is gleaned that history is not static, or absolute, and that it can be transformed to become a more just and liberating reality. Moreover, they come to recognize their role within that process.

Critical pedagogy opens-up endless possibilities for classroom teachers. It taps directly into humanness. It is the bridge that carries them to the place where teachers are most needed: the lives of students. Students' potentials remain imprisoned and their

voices muted by prevalent hegemonic practices that exist in almost every classroom today. Instruction is driven by the empire's artificial curriculum that has almost no real-life connection to the students' lives. It is up to educators to awaken the silenced voices, and to skillfully discover and untangle the repressed potential they all carry within them. The following section discusses the context of our researchers' classrooms and how critical pedagogy was applied into everyday practices in order to liberate students from the system's oppressive nature.

One of the researchers taught in a fourth grade bilingual classroom comprised of fifteen Mexican-American students whose first language was Spanish. As an attempt to practice decolonizing pedagogy and curricula, the focus of instruction had been to liberate these children from the domestication of the past by teaching them to deconstruct their realities and to address their feelings regarding macro and micro injustices. Students became conscious of the importance of the duality between the schools, coupled with the one that they inhabit in their personal living spaces, as both aspects were utilized in the classroom curriculum. The researcher immersed students in a critical investigation of the war in Iraq, as both the teacher and students engaged in writing poetry based on powerful images of the war. The culmination of this poetic exploration was highlighted by family members and graduate students attending and contributing to a critically imbued poetry slam that empowered the students to talk back to the war in Iraq.

Additionally, students were active in research that permitted them to become participants within their individual learning experience, while also maintaining identification with their native language and culture so as to not succumb to the dominant attitudes and ideologies of the empire's dominance. This "research" was built around a unit entitled "mi comunidad" (my community), and was instrumental in exposing students to their micro-realities; a data collection map-making community walk, interviews and presentations with neighborhood elders, and a letter exchange with a school on the "other side" in Juárez, Mexico. Students were able to deconstruct a community reality of blight and decay through their maps, revealing a plethora of abandoned buildings, pawn shops, and local "tiendítas" with advertisements for cheap alcohol. Their community elders sharing of community epistemologies and experiences "en español" enlivened an overflowing classroom while solidarity with the school in Juárez made powerful impressions on students' sense of location on the border. This powerful community link allowed students to feel connected to their culture and prevented alienation and isolation, which is something that is frequently a "by product" of what Freire, (2000) calls the *banking* method of education, which is another form of violence, as the students become objects of the learning experience. Through this method students are talked "to" and "deposited" with information by the teacher through a one-way exchange; there is no opportunity for students to engage "with" each other in transformative dialogue. It also should be emphasized that resistance to change has been inevitable as former procedures and practices are still ingrained in the students' educational repertoire from past experiences.

The focus then is to deliver instruction using texts that relate to the students everyday realities. It promotes literacy as a means of transmitting the unknown to the known and it encourages students to become aware of their life, and, it places value on their personal experiences, as they are significant and valid like everyone else's. This, in

turn, fuels the creation of a community of solidarity and becomes the foundation for the transformative exodus to take place in. Students, as participants on the journey, embark on an unlearning of the empire's status quo and its ideologies. Students then relearn new ways to regain their humanity. Students are prompted to think critically, and to act upon new knowledge generated within the application of critical pedagogy. As discussed below, students learn to claim their own voices and stand up for themselves.

In El Paso, during the high-stakes testing season in April, emotions run high, and students and teachers are nervous. Weather conditions for this region usually bring severe winds and blinding sand storms to the area. As a consequence, students were not allowed to play outside for the three testing days, although the weather was calm, pristine, and unlike previous April seasons in which dust storms interrupted life in this quiet community. McNeil (in Valenzuela, 2005) acknowledges that this is a new kind of trend prompted by high-stakes mandates. McNeil (2005) points out that some classes, such as physical education, are often neglected as a result of the tunnel vision promoted by the high stakes testing movement currently in place. After three days of being undeservedly denied physical education due to "security measures", the teacher was prompted to discuss with his students the reasoning for their predicament, which lead up to a robust discussion addressing a critical question that affected his students directly.

The following "storm" of opinions, which were supplied by several students in his classroom at the time, reveals the "harsh" vision created in a cynical test happy environment that oppresses and denies students the opportunity to run and breathe fresh air like normal children should be able to do. Three days of being "corralled" into the library like "cattle" in order to watch television so as not to disrupt testing conditions, became the impetus for critical dialogue between the students and the teacher. The students were determined to provide letters of resistance to the administration without being instructed by the respective teacher. Thus, past experiences of being critical about their environment propelled them to take action to combat the "storm" of domestication measures set-up by the respective administration.

Monica wrote in her letter, "Cuando nos ponemos a hacer una prueba del estado nosotros, los niños, no tenemos derecho a jugar, divertirnos, correr y disfrutar este día tan bonito como este" (When they make us take a test we the children have no right to play, have fun, run and enjoy a beautiful day like this one.) Similarly, Antonio passionately stated, "Yo le digo que la mugre prueba nos hace vernos como unas horribles máquinas que obedecen órdenes de esa prueba. (I say that this ugly test makes us look like horrible machines that obey the test's orders.)

Pedro remarked fervently in his letter, Nos sacan como perros inútiles y eso creen que somos. En eso nos han convertido con esa prueba. Yo pienso de que esa prueba es fea, tonta cosa del diablo. (They take us out like no good dogs and that's what they think we are. This is what the test has converted us into. I think this test is an ugly and dumb thing of the devil.)

The teacher proceeded to display the letters of displeasure from his students in the hall with the hope that they would catch the passing eyes of the administration and other students being victimized for the sake of "security measures" instituted in this school. He also took the initiative to prepare a letter and placed copies in various locations in the

school to raise consciousness about what he opined to be an extremely oppressive measure on behalf of the administration.

He writes, "Yesterday was another picture perfect day in El Paso and we witnessed yet again how the high-stakes testing movement oppresses the students at our school. Do we talk of democracy in this school or do we utilize a hegemonic system that objectifies students like objects in a factory?"

The following day the teacher, who was White non-Hispanic, and a firm advocate of critical education was verbally reprimanded by the principal who made it clear that he would talk with the students about their letters and address their feelings of discontentment about losing their "time in the sun." Unfortunately the dialogue never took place and the students were left wondering why their voices went unheeded by the respective administration. At the same time, the teacher recognized how public education systems can impede intellectual growth, civic engagement, and contribute to a communal disconnect between students and authorities.

Freire (2000, 92-93) states that "Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no education." By denying voice to these students they are in turn domesticated into voiceless servants of the high-stakes testing movement. Nonetheless, the critical stance by the teacher and students was one of resistance to the empire's ideological violence, perpetrated against the rights of children in their plight to enjoy the exercise and diversion that is entitled to them as children. Because of examples like this, to truly confront the social injustices that plague our society, schools have an obligation as institutions of socialization to set the stage for the type of discourse necessary to intervene against the violence of the world. It is the discourse provided by critical pedagogy that will facilitate the reorganization of knowledge production necessary to truly benefit humanity.

In sum, as our research succinctly demonstrated through our investigations on the south side of El Paso Texas, violence perpetrated by the school system is not only violence learned by the mass-media, but also violence instituted into schools that are reflective of the type of violence derived from rigid hegemonic structures. This multi-pronged barrage is even more destructive in areas with high levels of poverty and oppression, which was clearly revealed throughout the article's trajectory. A viable option from this dismal state of education is the integration of holistic, liberatory teaching practices in the form of transformative pedagogy. It is a paradigm that foments a critical learning environment that has the potential to combat the empire's unleashed violent manipulation of students in this postmodern reality that we are currently living in.

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Critical Education