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Utopian Pedagogy: Creating Radical Alternatives in the Neoliberal Age[1]

Mark Coté, Richard Day, and Greig de Peuter

INTRODUCTION

How might we, as critical academics, work within, against, and beyond the neoliberal order? How might the progressive intellectual act and be understood today? How can and does the university do more than serve corporate powers and produce docile producer-consumer-citizens? How are people working to develop critical pedagogies appropriate to their local communities? To help us confront these sorts of questions we propose the conceptual tool and creative practice of "utopian pedagogy." We do not use the concept of "utopia" in the sense of rationalistic dreams of a future perfect society. Rather, we mean it to refer to an ethos of experimentation that is oriented toward carving out spaces for resistance and reconstruction here and now. Utopian theory and practice acquire a new relevance as something *other* than and *outside* of the hyper-inclusive logic of neoliberalism. With the untimely concept of utopian pedagogy we hope to contribute to the debate on the current state of higher education, and to circulate struggles that show other educational worlds are not only possible but are already living in our present.[2]

This article seeks to put flesh on our key concept through a discussion of three interlinked themes: universities in the age of neoliberal globalization; non-hegemonic modes of intellectual and political activity; and concrete experiments in utopian pedagogy. From free schools and co-research to open-source media labs and popular theatre, experiments in utopian pedagogy are (re)emerging in various places around the world, in response to an urgent need to critically analyze relations of power around nodal points of race,

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