



## INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR HENRY GIROUX: HOPE AMID THE CRISIS OF NEOLIBERALISM AND THE RISE OF NEOFASCISM - COUNTER-HEGEMONIC PERSPECTIVES FOR DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

Henry Giroux<sup>1</sup>    
Luiz Gustavo Tiroli<sup>2</sup>    
Adriana Regina de Jesus Santos<sup>3</sup>  

### Abstract

The interview with Professor Henry Giroux explores his intellectual journey in the field of critical pedagogy, highlighting his advocacy for democratic education as a tool for social transformation. Renowned for analyzing the impacts of neoliberalism and the rise of neofascism, Giroux proposes a pedagogy of resistance grounded in critical epistemologies and in the role of teachers as agents of change. The conversation delves into strategies to confront authoritarianism, combat inequality, and rebuild democratic projects through education. In this context of global setbacks, the following question arises: how can we continue to cultivate hope as a political and pedagogical act of resistance and the reinvention of democracy?

**Keywords:** Critical pedagogy; Henry Giroux; Neoliberalism; Neofascism; Human rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Honorary Doctorate recipient from Memorial University (Canada), Chapman University (California), University of the West of Scotland, the Center for Latin American Studies in Inclusive Education (CELEI), and Complutense University of Madrid. Professor in the Department of Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, McMaster University. Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Email: girouxh@mcmaster.ca.

<sup>2</sup> PhD candidate in Education at the State University of Londrina (UEL). Bachelor of Laws from the State University of Londrina (UEL). Londrina, Paraná, Brazil. Email: tiroli@uel.br.

<sup>3</sup> PhD in Education from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP). Faculty member at the State University of Londrina (UEL). Londrina, Paraná, Brazil. Email: adrianar@uel.br

**ENTREVISTA COM O PROFESSOR HENRY GIROUX:  
ESPERANÇA EM MEIO À CRISE DO NEOLIBERALISMO E À ASCENSÃO DO  
NEOFASCISMO - PERSPECTIVAS CONTRA-HEGEMÔNICAS PARA A EDUCAÇÃO  
DEMOCRÁTICA**

**Resumo:** A entrevista com o Professor Henry Giroux explora sua trajetória intelectual no campo da pedagogia crítica, destacando sua defesa da educação democrática como ferramenta de transformação social. Reconhecido por analisar os impactos do neoliberalismo e da ascensão do neofascismo, Giroux propõe uma pedagogia da resistência fundamentada em epistemologias críticas e no papel dos professores como agentes de mudança. A conversa aprofunda estratégias para enfrentar o autoritarismo, combater as desigualdades e reconstruir projetos democráticos por meio da educação. Nesse contexto de retrocessos globais, surge a seguinte questão: como podemos continuar cultivando a esperança como um ato político e pedagógico de resistência e reinvenção da democracia?

**Palavras-chave:** Pedagogia crítica; Henry Giroux; Neoliberalismo; Neofascismo; Direitos humanos.

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**Palabras clave:** Pedagogía crítica; Henry Giroux; Neoliberalismo; Neofascismo; Derechos humanos.

## Introduction

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This interview with Professor Henry Giroux, one of the leading theorists of contemporary critical pedagogy and a public intellectual deeply committed to social justice, draws on his extensive academic and activist trajectory, which engages with central issues of education, politics, and culture in the contemporary world. Internationally recognized for seminal works such as *Teachers as Intellectuals*, *Pedagogy of Resistance*, *American Nightmare*, and *The University in Chains*, Giroux has dedicated his intellectual production to a critical analysis of the impacts of neoliberalism, the commodification of education, and the rise of neofascist forces in global politics.

His work is characterized by an uncompromising defense of democratic and emancipatory education, deeply connected to social transformation, emphasizing the role of teachers as essential agents in shaping critical subjects committed to social justice. Through the articulation of critical epistemologies, pedagogy of resistance, and cultural theory, Giroux problematizes contemporary challenges such as rising authoritarianism, the erosion of civil rights, and the intensification of inequalities.

This interview proposes an in-depth dialogue on the theme “Hope Amid the Crisis of Neoliberalism and the Rise of Neofascism: Counter-Hegemonic Perspectives for Democratic Education,” aiming to understand the political, pedagogical, and epistemological strategies that can sustain resistance and the construction of emancipatory alternatives in times of global crisis. Through Professor Giroux's reflections, we will explore possible paths for an education that not only resists authoritarian threats but also fosters critical hope and the reconstruction of democratic projects worldwide.

In a context of profound uncertainties and setbacks, how can we continue to cultivate hope as a political and pedagogical act of resistance and the reinvention of democracy?

### Epistemological Foundations and Influences in the Work of Henry Giroux

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**Interviewers:** Professor Giroux, your work is characterized by a political stance deeply committed to social justice, by the defense of a critical epistemology, and by a pedagogy oriented towards emancipation and resistance. Could you share with us who are the main

authors and theoretical traditions that ground your academic, scientific, and cultural reflection? Furthermore, which contemporary thinkers and intellectual currents do you consider your work engages with or opposes, especially in the current context of global social, political, and educational crises?

**Professor Giroux:** My academic and cultural reflection is deeply rooted in several intellectual traditions and key figures who have shaped my critique of contemporary education, politics, and culture. Central to my work is the influence of Paulo Freire, whose pedagogy of liberation serves as a foundational framework for my understanding of education as a tool for social transformation. In addition to Freire, I draw heavily from Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, which informs my critique of neoliberalism and authoritarianism.

Judith Butler's work on disposability, particularly in relation to neoliberalism and the criminalization of vulnerable populations, is essential for my understanding of how contemporary educational systems and political regimes marginalize certain groups. Her critiques of Israel's war on Gaza and the broader dynamics of state violence resonate deeply with my commitment to an education that resists such dehumanization. bell hooks' focus on feminist and socially engaged education provides a crucial perspective on pedagogy that is rooted in justice, equality, and care.

Zygmunt Bauman's exploration of capitalism, identity, and social theory has been indispensable in understanding the ways in which neoliberalism shapes both individual subjectivity and broader societal structures. Bauman's examination of the liquidity of modern life, where identities and relationships are fluid and precarious, serves as a critical lens for analyzing how neoliberalism has exacerbated social fragmentation and instability. Stanley Aronowitz's pioneering work on critical theory, critical education, ideology, and neoliberalism is a foundational part of my critique of the depoliticization and commodification of education, aligning perfectly with my push for a radical pedagogy that resists neoliberal educational reforms.

The works of Edward Said and Pierre Bourdieu have been pivotal in shaping my understanding of the intersections between culture, power, and education. Said's groundbreaking concept of orientalism illuminated how the West's constructed narratives of the East serve as instruments of control and subjugation. His vision of the public intellectual as a critical voice against these structures of power deeply influenced my approach to education as a site of resistance. In parallel, Bourdieu's exploration of cultural capital and the politics of social and cultural reproduction enriched my understanding of how education functions as a

fundamental battleground for political power. His insights revealed the ways in which schools not only reproduce social inequalities but also offer a unique space where educators can intervene, shaping a more equitable and just society. Together, Said and Bourdieu provided me with the intellectual tools to grasp the profound ways in which education is both a reflection of and a challenge to the political landscape.

In recent years, I have been increasingly indebted to Stuart Hall's work on racism, identity, neoliberalism, and the purpose of cultural studies. Hall's approach to cultural studies—particularly his analysis of how race, class, and identity intersect with neoliberalism—has been critical for understanding the way in which culture functions as a tool of both resistance and oppression. Hall's work on the politics of identity and the relationship between cultural production and power has been particularly relevant to my exploration of how educational institutions reproduce dominant ideologies and values. His focus on the relationship between cultural forms and social structures has provided an important framework for analyzing the ideological function of education in a neoliberal context.

In conjunction with Hall's work, I have also turned to Paul Gilroy's pioneering research on fascism, racism, and cultural politics. Gilroy's critique of the intersections of race and fascism in the modern era, particularly in terms of how cultural politics shape political ideologies, has been instrumental in my own work. Gilroy's contributions on the politics of racial identity and his exploration of the transnational dimensions of race and culture have helped deepen my understanding of how authoritarianism, racism, and cultural politics intersect in the neoliberal age. His focus on cultural memory, diaspora, and the politics of identity has informed my understanding of how education can either challenge or reinforce dominant cultural narratives, particularly those that are shaped by racist and fascist ideologies.

In addition to the work of Gilroy, I also draw from the transformative scholarship of Robin D.G. Kelley and Angela Davis, whose work spans a broad array of social issues, including racism, prison reform, labor struggles, and the assaults on higher education. Kelley's contributions, particularly in his analysis of the Black radical tradition and his critique of the prison-industrial complex, have been invaluable in exploring the intersections of race, class, and state violence. He provides a critical framework for understanding how different systems of oppression—such as racism, capitalism, and imperialism—are interconnected and must be analyzed in their totality. Kelley's work challenges us to think beyond isolated issues and instead examine how various forms of social injustice intersect, emphasizing the need for solidarity across movements for true social change.

Angela Davis, too, offers critical insights into the ways that race, gender, and class inform both state violence and social movements. Her longstanding advocacy for prison abolition and her analysis of the intersections between racism, capitalism, and the criminal justice system have deeply shaped contemporary critiques of state power and repression. Davis's work on labor struggles and her critique of assaults on higher education emphasize the necessity of understanding these issues holistically. She argues for the importance of organizing and resistance across multiple fronts—understanding how struggles for justice in one realm (e.g., racial justice or labor rights) cannot be separated from struggles in others (e.g., educational justice, gender equality, and anti-imperialism). This integrated, comprehensive perspective aligns with my own commitment to connecting diverse social struggles in a way that underscores their mutual interdependence and the need for collective action.

Finally, the Frankfurt School, particularly the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, has been foundational to my work, even before I worked with Paulo Freire. It has been crucial for understanding the cultural and ideological role of education in late-stage capitalism. The concept of the culture industry, which they developed, has been indispensable in analyzing how culture today functions as a mechanism for social control and ideological reproduction, normalizing neoliberal values and authoritarian ideologies. Their updating of Marxist theory, commentaries on authoritarianism, ideology, and technocratic rationality was indispensable for providing me with a theoretical foundation for addressing the politics of education, culture, border crossing, and fascism.

### **The Legacy of Paulo Freire and the Epistemologies of Liberation**

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**Interviewers:** As a Paulo Freire Distinguished Scholar, a title that recognizes your contributions to critical pedagogy, you have emphasized in various publications the central role of liberation epistemologies and critical pedagogy in confronting multiple forms of oppression. Drawing on your dialogue with Paulo Freire, particularly through his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, how do you assess the relevance of Freirean categories in addressing contemporary challenges such as authoritarianism, the culture of fear, and neoliberal education policies?

**Professor Giroux:** Paulo Freire's work remains at the heart of my pedagogical thinking. His commitment to education as a practice of freedom and revolutionary praxis, especially as outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, continues to resonate in contemporary struggles against authoritarianism, neoliberalism, and the culture of fear. In today's context, Freire's notions of dialogue, critical consciousness, and liberation are not only relevant but essential. They challenge the oppression embedded in current educational practices, particularly in a world increasingly governed by neoliberal policies that treat education as a market commodity and reduce individuals to passive consumers. On the educational front, these forces promote standardized testing, dehumanizing performance metrics, and the commodification of knowledge—models that are antithetical to Freirean pedagogy, which demands that education be a practice of critical inquiry and social justice. I was profoundly influenced by Freire's insistence that education is neither a method nor is it neutral. Nor is it merely a tool for raising the critical consciousness of the oppressed, but that it is, at its core, a transformative political and pedagogical project. It is through education that the oppressed come to recognize their own agency, both individually and collectively, enabling them to become active agents of their own liberation and empowerment.

By rooting education in a pedagogy of liberation, his work enabled me to further develop the notion that students needed to be provided with the educational knowledge and skills to critique and resist authoritarian policies and oppressive systems. We must also draw attention to Freire's insistence on the importance of a dialogical relationship between educators and learners. This model directly counters the authoritarian tendencies that seek to impose top-down control over educational content and policy. I have always been taken with Freire's insistence on the political and civic importance of critical literacy. The latter provided the theoretical foundation for connecting matters of critical consciousness, agency, and engaged citizenship. The latter is crucial to understand Freire's work as part of a radical call not for methods but for a project of reconstruction, a pedagogy informed by democratic values, a critique of capitalism, and the call for a future in which democratic socialism comes into being.

## **Teacher Education as Organic Intellectuals**

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**Interviewers:** Professor Giroux, in your book *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* and in your more recent writings, you argue that teacher

education must transcend technicist and instrumentalist models, advocating for the development of a critical teacher intellectuality oriented towards the production of counter-hegemonic knowledge. Considering the current processes of commodification of education, marked by a culture of performativity and the depoliticization of pedagogical practice, what epistemological and methodological ruptures do you consider fundamental for reconfiguring both initial and continuing teacher education in ways that empower teachers as agents of social transformation?

**Professor Giroux:** The role of teachers as organic intellectuals lies at the heart of my vision for education as a transformative force for society. Education, in its most insidious forms, has often been wielded not only as a tool of instrumental training but also as a vehicle for ideological indoctrination. Teacher education must transcend the narrow function of preparing educators to be mere technicians—administrators of classrooms. Instead, it must cultivate critical public or what Gramsci called organic intellectuals, educators capable of engaging with and resisting the hegemonic forces that seek to reshape education according to neoliberal imperatives or, even worse, turn schools today into sites of white Christian propaganda.

At the current historical moment, we face a crucial challenge: to break free from the technicist and authoritarian models of teacher preparation that have come to dominate the educational landscape. These models do more than reduce education to mere vocational training; they transform schools into mechanisms of social control. Banning books, erasing history, and imposing a pedagogy of conformity and submission are not only symptoms of a neoliberal agenda; they are the very foundation upon which authoritarian systems can thrive.

The role of education, once a space for intellectual engagement and critical thought, is now being systematically distorted to serve the interests of power. These trends pave the way for the creation of fascist identities, subjects, and values, all of which thrive on a populace incapable of independent thought or critical questioning. And they do so by eliminating the power that educators have over their classrooms, curricula, and labor.

Teachers, in response, must reclaim their role as active agents of critical pedagogy. They must be empowered to challenge the forces of oppression that shape our educational system and to promote the ideals of democracy and justice. Epistemologically, this requires a rupture with the oppressive models of education that serve the market and expand far-right pedagogical frameworks.

Politically educators must advocate for pedagogies that nurture critical thinking, creativity, and resistance, especially in the face of the pressures to conform to standardized

testing and neoliberal metrics that stifle true intellectual growth. Teachers must be seen as public or organic intellectuals who engage students not as passive recipients of knowledge, but as active participants in the co-creation of meaning, identities, values, and images of the future.

As organic intellectuals, educators must engage with the histories students bring into the classroom, foster spaces for self-narration, and encourage the questioning of commonly accepted assumptions. Through such engagement, educators can lay the groundwork for students to become critical and engaged citizens, individuals who not only understand their world but are also equipped to challenge and transform it in the name of a meaningful and just democracy.

Both Paulo Freire and Edward Said, whose work centered on the pedagogical needs of the oppressed, argued that organic intellectuals must teach students to read critically, to learn from history, to engage with knowledge that was previously hidden from them, and to equip them with the skills and values that amplify both individual and collective agency. For them, the role of the organic intellectual is to question, to speak to a wide audience, to push beyond easy certainties, to serve as a moral witness, and to function in opposition to the injustices perpetuated by gangster capitalism and authoritarian systems.

Teachers, as organic intellectuals, must have a public function, actively participating in the transformation of society in accordance with the principles of socialist democracy. This requires a vision not a methodology as a starting point for what it means to view education as a radical democratizing project.

The urgency of this task is heightened in a moment when education at all levels is under direct assault by authoritarian regimes, whose relentless attacks are dismantling education as a public good. What was once a space for critical inquiry, democratic engagement, and the flourishing of human potential is now being reduced across the globe to an instrument of control.

These regimes seek to turn educational institutions into sites of pedagogical repression—where dissent is silenced, independent thought is crushed, and ideological indoctrination takes root. In this climate, the very essence of education—the nurturing of critical consciousness and the empowerment of individuals to challenge oppressive systems—is at risk of being erased, leaving behind nothing more than a hollow shell of conformity and obedience.

## Pedagogical Neofascism and the Normalization of Symbolic Violence in Schools

**Interviewers:** In your recently published book *Fascism on Trial: Education and the Possibility of Democracy* (2024), co-authored with Anthony R. DiMaggio, you discuss the rise of a pedagogical neofascism characterized by intensified disciplinary control, the criminalization of youth, and the suppression of dissenting voices within schools. Considering these discussions, how do you assess the role of educational practices in denaturalizing symbolic violence and in constructing school spaces capable of resisting the imposition of an authoritarian and hegemonic political culture?

**Professor Giroux:** The rise of pedagogical neofascism is a terrifying development, characterized by the criminalization of youth, the suppression of dissent, and the normalization of violence in educational spaces. Schools today are increasingly sites of punitive discipline rather than spaces of learning. The punitive approach to youth behavior, especially among marginalized groups, student protesters, and international students reflects broader societal trends toward authoritarian control. What we must do is denaturalize this violence by fostering school environments that are inclusive, dialogical, and critical.

Educators have a central role in making visible the symbolic violence embedded in school practices, such as the hidden curriculum, which transmits values of obedience, conformity, and passivity. Equally important is to address and fight for education as a public good that must be defended against the forces of instrumentalism and ideological homogenization. Educational practices must counter these tendencies by promoting democratic engagement, critical reflection, and active resistance. A school capable of resisting authoritarian and hegemonic political cultures is one that teaches students how to interrogate power, engage in collective action, and challenge injustices.

We need to rethink not only what we teach but how we teach, ensuring that schools become sites of critical pedagogy, where dissent is not punished but valued as a vital form of engagement with the world.

## Democratic Education and Civic Courage in the Face of the Global Rise of the Far Right

**Interviewers:** Professor Giroux, you emphasize the need to cultivate civic courage among educators as a response to the advance of authoritarian forces on a global scale. We are living in a troubling scenario, marked by the re-election of Donald Trump in the United States, the lasting impacts of Jair Bolsonaro's government in Brazil, and the consolidation of far-right political projects in different parts of the world. In the face of this context of democratic erosion, the growth of social neofascism, and the intensification of silencing policies and persecution of teachers, what paths do you envision for education to become a space of counter-hegemonic political resistance, the formation of critical subjects, and the defense of democracy and human rights?

**Professor Giroux:** In a time when the rise of far-right movements and the erosion of democratic institutions are pressing concerns, it is essential that education serves as a space of resistance. We must foster civic courage in educators and students, creating environments where political engagement, critical thinking, and a commitment to justice are central to the curriculum. The attack on democracy and human rights, both in the U.S. and globally, is tied to a broader ideological assault on the values of solidarity, equality, and justice. In this context, education must offer more than just academic knowledge or credentials - it must be a powerful engaging, safe and courageous space for the kind of engaged, active citizenship that is required to resist authoritarianism. Educators must model and teach the skills necessary for resisting the rise of fascism and other forms of political oppression, including organizing, advocacy, and solidarity. We must also engage in teaching the history of democratic struggles, ensuring that students understand both the fragility and the resilience of democratic ideals.

## Neoliberalism, Exclusion, and Human Rights: Perspectives for Education in Latin America

**Interviewers:** Professor Giroux, in the Latin American context, historically marked by social inequalities and systematic violations of rights, the effects of neoliberal policies have

deepened processes of exclusion, precarization, and dismantling of public education policies. Considering your critical analysis of neoliberalism and your advocacy for education as a space for civic formation, what are the main challenges and possibilities for consolidating human rights education that resists the market logic and promotes a democratic and emancipatory culture in the schools and universities of the region?

**Professor Giroux:** Latin America has long been a battleground for the struggle for social justice, and the imposition of neoliberal policies has only exacerbated the region's systemic inequalities. Neoliberalism, with its focus on market-driven policies and the privatization of public services, has eroded access to education for many in the region, deepening exclusion and precarization. In this context, the challenge is to reclaim education as a space for civic formation and human rights.

Human rights education must resist the market logic that seeks to reduce education to a commodity and instead promote a vision of education as a practice of social transformation. In Latin America, this means developing educational practices that challenge the historical legacies of colonialism and oppression, capital accumulation, and militarism. Such practices must engage students in critical reflections on power and inequality, and that empower them to fight for justice, equality, and freedom.

At the heart of neoliberal ideology lies the destructive notion that all problems are personal, obscuring the way private struggles are deeply intertwined with broader systemic injustices. This serves as a form of decolonization and depoliticization that must be resisted if we are to confront systemic issues like staggering inequality and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, core pillars of neoliberalism.

The deadly pedagogy of neoliberalism, with its unrelenting embrace of markets, its privatization of every facet of life, its reckless celebration of individualism, its embrace of harsh competition, deregulation, and its erosion of the social state, must be fought at all costs. This ideology, which separates economic activity from social responsibility, is a threat to our collective well-being.

To challenge this, we must build solidarity networks across Latin America—networks that resist the neoliberal agenda and work toward creating a more inclusive, democratic, and emancipatory culture in our schools and universities.

## The Curriculum as a Field of Struggle and a Space for Counter-Hegemonic Resistance

**Interviewers:** Professor Giroux, in your critical analyses of the school curriculum, you point out that it is not merely a neutral set of content but an ideological field where power relations and social control are configured. Considering your concept of curriculum as a cultural and political practice, how do you assess the importance of developing curricula that promote critical and emancipatory pedagogy? What strategies can educators adopt to resist hegemonic curricula that reproduce inequalities and to build curricular practices that empower the formation of subjects engaged in social transformation?

**Professor Giroux:** The curriculum is never neutral. It is a field of ideological struggle where power relations are reflected and reproduced. A curriculum that does not challenge the dominant social order is complicit in maintaining it. In my work, I emphasize the importance of developing curricula that promote critical, emancipatory pedagogy, which encourages students to question the status quo and engage in the work of social transformation. The hegemonic curriculum—often framed as objective and universal—often reinforces inequalities by omitting alternative histories and perspectives, especially those of marginalized communities. Educators must resist these hegemonic forces by creating curricula that highlight resistance, social justice, and the lived experiences of those excluded from mainstream narratives. This can be achieved by integrating critical pedagogy, anti-colonial education, and decolonial perspectives into the curriculum. Educators should also encourage students to think critically about the power structures that shape their world and equip them with the tools to challenge those structures.

## The Hidden Curriculum and the Construction of Pedagogical Resistance

**Interviewers:** Returning to the discussion of the curriculum as a cultural and political practice, as you have emphasized, the concept of the hidden curriculum reveals the implicit ways in which values, norms, and social hierarchies are transmitted in schools, reproducing inequalities and exclusions without being explicitly recognized. Considering this invisible

dimension of the curriculum, what pedagogical and political strategies do you believe can help educators uncover and challenge the hidden curriculum, promoting a critical and emancipatory education?

**Professor Giroux:** The hidden curriculum is a potent and insidious force that shapes the values, power relations, and social hierarchies embedded within educational systems—often without being recognized or questioned. It operates as a politics of erasure, subtly normalizing dominant ideologies and reinforcing the status quo by privileging official knowledge and silencing alternative perspectives. This curriculum perpetuates inequality by teaching students not just what to know, but also where they stand in the social order, shaping their understanding of power, authority, and worth. Unveiling and challenging this hidden curriculum is essential to cultivating a pedagogy of resistance. This demands that educators critically engage with how schooling upholds social hierarchies and normalizes oppression, creating spaces for students to question dominant narratives and the values that undergird them. Only by making the hidden curriculum visible and subjecting it to rigorous analysis can we begin to dismantle its pervasive influence on the educational process and empower students to challenge the structures that define their lives.

### **Hope as the Driving Force of Resistance and Emancipatory Education**

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**Interviewers:** Finally, Professor Giroux, in the face of the multiple challenges confronting education, democracy, and human rights today — including the rise of authoritarian forces, growing inequalities, and the increasing commodification of knowledge — what is your perspective on the role of critical hope as a driving force for social transformation? What message would you like to share with educators, students, and activists committed to human emancipation and the building of a more just and democratic society?

**Professor Giroux:** Critical hope, both individual and social, is an essential element of both resistance and emancipatory education. In the face of systemic injustice, neoliberal policies, and the rise of authoritarianism, it is easy to succumb to despair. But militant and engaged form of hope is not a passive form of optimism; it is an active, grounded belief in the possibility of social change, even in the face of overwhelming odds. This hope is not based on naive expectations but on the recognition that change is possible through collective struggle,

critical pedagogy, and the building of alternative, democratic institutions. It is crucial to remember that without hope there is no agency and without agency there is no hope. For educators, students, and activists committed to human emancipation, my message is clear: we must imagine and struggle for a future that does not reflect the horrors of the present; we must continue to fight for a more just and democratic world, recognizing that the work of resistance and social transformation is ongoing and often difficult. However, it is through this struggle—through the teaching of critical, emancipatory pedagogy—that we can foster the hope needed to build a future grounded in justice, equality, and human dignity.

**CRediT**

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