

**A Critique of Critical Thinking:  
Towards a Critical Integral Pedagogy of Fearlessness**

**R. Michael Fisher**

The context of a post-9/11 era has placed a burden on critical



## **Introduction**

### **Locating the Inquiry**

Theoretically and historically, any discussion of









threatens to undermine societies around the world. Burnout of paranoid risk aversion, an obsession with health and arbitrary standards of "correctness," fear of living leads to the refusal of risk as an inevitable and, indeed, bracing part of life as well as a petulant denial that accidents do happen and that products and lifestyles cannot be made completely safe. Inherent in the fear of living





Recently, some critical pedagogues, more or less, have adopted this *Love vs. fear* paradigm (e.g., Fisher, 2010, p. 39; hooks,

rhetoric above. And, equally, this essay challenges what "critical" means today, especially in a post-9/11 era where the paradigm of fear (i.e., culture of fear) is hegemonic and saturated as postmodern "liquid fear" (Bauman, 2006).

Massumi (1993), writing eight years before 9/11, perceptively grasped the saturation and its

from which I begin critical inqu

stomach, limbs, and your being. For many today, it is an obnoxious term, representing "someone presuming to be more advanced and legitimated to criticize me." Our species easily experiences hurt, and resultant fear, even rebellion, with being judged critically (as in criticism), especially if it is unfair and delimiting to one's freedom. Being criticized by others is a hard road to negotiate for most humans. Was it useful? Was it not? Imagine over your life-time experiences of being criticized and criticizing.

Now, imagine a new term, *critique*. This term was introduced,



training over the years. Think how *it* (critical thinking) never seemed to admit its exhaustion or its conservative<sup>xix</sup> rooted enmeshment in

right and wrong would be indistinguishable if logic is no longer





but also limitations, even pathologies, of critical thinking as we've known it. Now, imagine, even critical inquiry is not enough—not for



deconstruction of a pedagogy of fear and the reconstruction of a critical pedagogy of fearlessness for the 21st century? Let's start somewhere. There are multiple pivot points, and you are always invited to find your own. I offer here one fearanalysis begging the

may throw at him. Fanon was, in his own words, calling for all humanity to take up the struggle, ev

Beyond critical thinking, beyond critical theory and pedagogy, this essay points to a something else, yet undefined or fully known, in the liminal intuitive region of thinking—ascribing (imagining) itself beyond the grips of excess capitalization and commodification of fear, becoming 'fear'? How would we know when critical thinking is not merely serving this 'Fear' Matrix? Why should educators care?

Why should fear and Education get so much focus? I think Palmer (1997, n.p.) said it well, "Education's nemesis is not ignorance but fear. Fear gives ignorance its power." In my view, that is a call for a fearanalysis of Education. I have studied this relationship (for example, Fisher, 2003a) with an emphasis on how

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(1995) that we need a radical pedagogy as cultural politics that goes beyond "the discourse of critique." Where ought we begin, in a post-9/11 world, in a culture of fear, in a 'Fear' Matrix—in order to



## **Outline for a Pedagogy of Fearlessness: An Integral Approach**

We need to "transform critical pedagogy" as McLaren (1995c) argued, but he, like most critical pedagogues, calls for a replacement in the form of "pedagogy of hope" (p. 79) in opposition

around "fearless" with such ease as it is done in Russell, or Fanon, or

maturity than others, depending on unique individuals and their environments. Similarly, people will have developed FMSs in different clusters in order to manage fear (and 'fear') in their lives. Collective groups likewise, will have clusters of most used FMSs. For example, the American administration's response (*via* president G. W. Bush, Jr. et al.)

*fearlessness*, (6) *fearless* (Figure 1). These forms correspond somewhat to the nine fear management systems. They were derived by me in a massive critical study (critical discourse analysis) of the texts and discourses of thousands of individuals and groups over a 25 year span of collecting what people and traditions say about *fear* and how best to manage<sup>xxxiii</sup> it (and ourselves). I then used that fearanalysis and formatted it with Spiral Dynamics integral theory of











to live fearlessly: know your risk, know what is normal for you, make healthy lifestyle choices." Based on an integral theory of fearlessness, such a discourse (FME) by this organization is hardly qualified to assert that merely following these three keys would lead to "fearless" (FMS-9). There are thousands of examples of this partial and mis-



holon can respond to deeper or higher worlds, because its translation processes transcend and include those of its subholons. (p. 59)

Yet, Wilber, and integral theory of development, also tells us that *dissociations*, rather than *differentiations* in growth can occur in both horizontal and vertical processes, causing pathologies.<sup>x1</sup> Far too complex to excavate more of Wilber's theory



FMSs. This is an integral equivalent of intractable conflict due to "Culture Wars" (what I have sometimes called 'Fear' Wars; see Fisher, 2006, p. 59).

It ought to be evident now that anyone who suggests we can transform from a paradigm (and pedagogy) of fear to one of Love (hope) is taking an ethical position. What I have attempted to show is that it is not that simple, it isn't just about making a choice (or willing it) either, although that can help. The developmental, recovery,



we need fearless children indeed, but they will not appear without a







day when I, and/or others, can write about some of the ideas here with more empirical rigor and applications. That said, I feel it is a strong piece, and some of the best writing I've done. We'll see what you think, and that's an invitation to further dialogue.

As for new findings from this writing inquiry, the most outstanding was how I realized my notion of "transformation" and "transformative learning" has to change now. The critical fearlessness pedagogy unfolding in the essay was ahead of me. I was trying to catch up to it. I don't think I ever fully did, but it left its traces. My position now is to not use "transformative learning" or "transformational education" as labels. I believe they are dubious and presumptuous. That's new. I used to cherish them and locate my work within them.

My new finding is something like this: (1) use critical pedagogy or critical education, (2) "transformative" ought to be used only depicting "stage-shifts" (which are very demanding and also







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development and intelligence, or spur it on to advance in complexity, wisdom and compassion. On a larger evolution of consciousness map, see Ken Wilber's model in the discussion of integral. The existential capacity is essential for anyone to then transcend that level or stage to a more mature transpersonal capacity (this latter, often called "spiritual self" dynamics).

<sup>xii</sup> Elsewhere (Fisher, 2010, pp. xxi

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<sup>xvii</sup> Although there are many theorists in critical theory and postmodern and postcolonial discourse who write about this term, I

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<sup>xxii</sup> Ramsey (2009), p. 573.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid., p. 580. xxii

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modern world that he sees] and foundation upon which we can stand

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<sup>xxviii</sup> *Imaginary* as distinct from (but related to) *imagination*, is the term I prefer throughout. Although many theorists have elaborated meanings for imaginary, to keep this short, I suggest it is the discourse of what can be imagined and as an imaginary discourse, both individual and collective, it therefore asserts (in a Foucauldian sense) direct and indirect power on everything we do in the present, and what we may do in the future because of a more or less restricted imaginary (or social imaginary). I use it as a psychosociopolitical concept, more than a literary one.

<sup>xxix</sup> There are many books on this topic, the best to get started is Gardner (1993).

<sup>xxx</sup> I have primarily relied on the Wilberian synthesis of these developmental research studies and theories (some 200), of which stages and lines (e.g., affective, mo



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in between stages are equally important, to integralists, in the processes of (vertical) transformation.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Some postmodern readers may find my use of *management* disturbing to their sensibility and their value-system, preferring the elimination of "management" of people, of feelings, emotions, and affect. Note, I am using the term as a "process" and not a noun. I understand that concern, as much of what has been called "management" (*for your own good*) by authorities of all kinds, for a long history, is decidedly unhealthy or simply pathological "managerialism" (*a la* Foucault) and not healthy "management." So, I preserve that meaning of management as potentially and naturally quite useful to evolution; and, some may prefer to call the management process a system of

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<sup>xxxv</sup> Since 2010, I've uncovered FMS-6c



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depending on many factors. The analogous terms for this Wilber (2000) uses are "fragmentation, alienation." It is breeding fear ('fear') = fear of other. Wilber is basically a postmodern (integral) thinker, and refuses to dissociate from modernity and its gains like many postmodern thinkers do in their deconstructive criticism. Wilber, using critique, expresses nicely the in



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