

# Critical Pedagogy and Neoliberalism: Concerns with Teaching Self-Regulated Learning

Stephen Vassallo

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**Abstract** In the educational psychology literature, self-regulated learning is associated with empowerment, agency, and democratic participation. Therefore, researchers are dedicated to developing and improving self-regulated learning pedagogy in order to make it widespread. However, drawing from the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire, teaching students to regulate their learning can be tied to a curriculum of obedience, subordination, and oppression. Using Freire's discussion of concepts such as adaptation, prescription, and dependence, I suggest that self-regulated learning: (1) targets individual psychological changes that render individuals adaptable to existing social orders; (2) is guided by a logic to prescribe a certain kind of self; and (3) produces a relationship of dependence as learners depend on teachers for learning the necessary scripts to regulate their learning. This analysis points to ethical complexities related to teaching students to academically self-regulate.

**Keywords** Self-regulated learning · Critical pedagogy · Empowerment · Critical educational · Psychology

## Introduction

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is a socially embedded process by which individuals reflect on and influence psychological and environmental conditions in ways that enable them to meet situational demands (Boekaerts and Cascallar 2006; Zimmerman and Schunk 2011). That is, individuals strategically adjust themselves and their environments in order to achieve their goals. In the educational psychology literature, SRL is almost exclusively associated with empowerment, agency, democratic participation, and personal responsibility (cf. Martin and McLellan 2008). Driven by humanistic concerns, researchers are dedicated to developing and improving SRL pedagogy. However, there is little

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S. Vassallo (✉)  
School of Education, Teaching and Health, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave,  
NW, Washington, DC 20016, USA  
e-mail: vassallo@american.edu

consideration of how SRL is entangled in politics of control, conformity, obedience, and oppression. This lack of attention results from an assumptive context that SRL is neutral, value-free, natural, and beneficial. Therefore, researchers and practitioners may be driven by humanistic concerns to teach students to regulate their academic learning, while ignoring the possibility that SRL is entangled in, what Ayers and Ayers (2011) refer to as, the “hidden curriculum of obedience” (p. 104). Drawing from the educational philosophy of Freire (1987, 2000), it is possible to begin a conversation about how teaching SRL is a feature of such a curriculum. In this analysis, teaching SRL is tied to adaptation, prescription, and relationships of dependence—practices and processes that Freire associates with subordination and domination.

This analysis is important for several reasons. First, SRL is a prominent and foundational part of educational psychology, which has become a necessary feature of teachers’ knowledge base. Research on SRL has expanded greatly since its emergence in the 1980s (Martin and McLellan 2008; Post et al. 2006) and is a staple in educational psychology texts. Second, there is potential for SRL to be widespread in education curricula. SRL pedagogical models are appealing given the growing attention to twenty-first century competencies (21CC). Policy-makers and researchers argue that contemporary educational and economic conditions shift and change rapidly, requiring a specific set of competencies. These include an ability to innovate, problem-solve, self-direct, work with others, and adapt—conditions that require and are aligned with SRL (Järvelä 2011; Wolters 2010; Zimmerman 2002). With the close alignment between 21CC and SRL, teachers may be encouraged or required to adopt SRL pedagogical models. Third, there is also national discourse on personal responsibility and individual accountability that signals a push towards SRL. Between the increase in research, the appeal of SRL for the twenty-first century, and attention in education rhetoric, it is essential that researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers, alike, critically consider diverse interpretations of SRL in order to encourage nuanced conversations and ethically informed practice.

## Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire’s pedagogical philosophy is tied to a democratic view of education. Related to this view, Dewey (1938) posits that the responsibility of a democratic society is to develop in children the ability to question the status quo in order to create better processes and functions within society. To achieve these goals, individuals must perceive the mutability of themselves and their realities—a key starting point for Freire’s philosophy. Freire (2000) states, “[individuals are] unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (p. 92). This view provides the foundation upon which to build a set of perspectives and practices related to the goals of a democratic education, which is to support children’s efforts to shape themselves and their realities in order to mitigate inequality. Critical theorists raise concern that a democratic purpose of schooling seldom informs policy and practice.

A starting point for critical pedagogical theorists is that institutions, such as schools, protect problematic social orders (e.g., Freire 2000; Giroux 2009; McLaren 2007). McLaren (2009) states, “Critical theorists begin with the premise that men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege” (p. 61). From this perspective, particular educational configurations value, validate, and reward certain forms of political, economic, and cultural capital that contribute to producing advantage and disadvantage. Teachers, policies, curricula, and

students, themselves, are implicated in the production and protection of asymmetries and contradictions. Although critical theorists contend that schools protect problematic social orders, they also believe that schools can be sites of possibilities for hope and humanization. As Freire (2000) states:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity [a pedagogy of dehumanization] or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 34)

A primary consideration in this analysis is how SRL fits into these two possibilities. Does teaching students to regulate their learning reflect conformity to an existing order or can teaching SRL be aligned with a practice of freedom? Contrary to the prevailing view within educational psychology, analysis from a Freirian perspective suggests that teaching students to regulate their learning is entangled in practices of conformity to a particular social order.

## Conceptual Foundations

### Dehumanization

Two fundamental notions in Freire's (2000) work are that of the oppressor and the oppressed. Though some identify specific groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, and African Americans, to name a few, as oppressed (Young 1990), Freire is not as specific in naming groups. For him, an oppressor is anybody who denies the humanity of another. Individuals affirm their humanity through participation in the production of themselves and their world in ways that affirm the humanity of others. Thus, one cannot be fully human if their consciousness and action reify social configurations that deny the humanity of others. For this reason, Freire argues that those who oppress are also oppressed. He states, "No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so" (Freire 2000, p. 85).

One way in which humanity is disaffirmed in schooling is through a pedagogical approach Freire (2000) refers to as banking, which as the metaphor suggests is characterized by depositing information into students who are positioned as passive receivers of information. In this pedagogical relationship, knowledge is treated as static, pre-determined, and possessed by an authority (i.e., teacher), who is responsible for bestowing such knowledge upon others (i.e., students). Freire argues that such a relationship is in the interest of oppressors because they can regulate the way the world enters into others. The measure of success is reflected in how well individuals regurgitate that world and adapt themselves to it. Freire (2000) states, "The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better 'fit' for the world...this concept is well suited for the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it" (p. 76). Freire's position is that banking denies the humanity of others by transmitting static knowledge, which serves to render individuals adaptable to a particular social order.

### Adaptation and Integration

As Freire (2000) contends, teachers encourage adaptation when they focus on and attempt to transmit a static form of knowledge to students that is disconnected from the realities of

communities and their struggles. Teachers encourage adaptation when a world is positioned as static and individuals must learn the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to function within that world. Critical of adaptation, Freire (1987) favors a commitment to integration. Freire (1987) states:

Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality. To the extent that man loses his ability to make choices and is subject to the choices of others, to the extent that his decisions are no longer his own because *they result from external prescriptions* [emphasis added], he is no longer integrated... If man is incapable of changing reality, he adjusts himself instead. (p. 4)

If individuals are not shaping their realities, but rather are led to adapt to existing configurations by changing themselves, then their humanity is denied. Freire (1987) pointedly states, “Adaptation...exhibited by man...is symptomatic of his dehumanization” (p. 4). He reasons that the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to a preformulated world, the more easily they can be dominated. Thus, for Freire, adaptation is a mechanism of control, subordination, and domination because the focus of change is on the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation that oppresses them. The distinction between adaptation and integration is essential for Freire’s work and integral for considering ethical complexities related to teaching SRL, as I suggest that SRL aligns more with adaptation than integration.

### Dependence

When knowledge is treated as static, predetermined, and deposited, it not only disaffirms humanity by rendering education a tool for adaptation, it also creates relationships of dependence whereby the oppressed are expected to achieve liberation by becoming dependent on others. That is, if teachers, for example, are thought to possess the types and forms of knowledge that are deemed necessary to “escape” conditions of oppression, then students must depend on teachers to acquire the knowledge for their empowerment. Freire (2000) is highly critical of relationships of dependence, as he argues they subordinate the oppressed and create impossibilities for independence. For the former, there is a lack of confidence in people’s ability to think, want, and know. For the latter, if the oppressed depend on acquiring the knowledge of the oppressor to mitigate oppression, then the seeming achievement of independence from oppression requires dependence. Biesta (2010) captures this nuance:

The one to be emancipated is, after all, dependent upon the intervention of the emancipator, an intervention based upon a knowledge that is fundamentally inaccessible to the one to be emancipated. When there is no intervention, there is, therefore, no emancipation. This raises the question of when this dependency will actually disappear. Is it as soon as emancipation is achieved? Or should the one who is emancipated remain eternally grateful to his or her emancipator for the “gift” of emancipation? (p. 45)

Recognizing this ethical paradox, Freire (2000) states, “...not even the best-intentioned leadership can bestow independence as a gift” (p. 66).

Efforts to bestow independence are considered to be, what Freire (2000) calls, “false charity” or “false generosity” (p. 59). Freire (2000) states:

The generosity of the oppressors is nourished by an unjust order, which must be maintained in order to justify that generosity. Our converts [oppressors who strive to mitigate oppression], on the other hand, truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation. They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust. (p. 60)

While some oppressors may be well intentioned, they see liberation as the transmission of their knowledge to others so that the oppressed can potentially benefit from such an order. Such efforts are false charity because there is a lack of confidence that the oppressed can participate in and guide their own liberation. This lack of confidence justifies the need for prescriptions and the transmission of knowledge. In addition, a social order is affirmed and naturalized; adaptation is encouraged.

### Critical Consciousness

As Freire (1987, 2000) and other critical theorists suggest (Apple 2000; Giroux 2009; Greene 1988; McLaren 2007), there is hope to mitigate oppressive social arrangements and relationships. Power is not limited to the oppressor or structures that support oppressive relationships. Freire (1987) firmly believes that both the oppressors and oppressed have the power to react and resist, which involves critical consciousness. For Freire, critical consciousness is recognizing and resisting oppressive social arrangements in order to avoid (re)inscribing, validating, and (re)producing contradictions and asymmetries. Critical consciousness involves efforts to (re)form social configurations in ways that affirm the humanity of others. Action and reflection, which Freire refers to as *praxis*, are key elements of critical consciousness. In Freire's philosophy, critical consciousness is communal. Individuals are critically conscious to the degree that they construct their reality in solidarity with others for the purposes of transforming their worlds to affirm the humanity of all. In Freire's philosophy, the notion of consciousness, which is often associated with an individual psychological phenomenon, is communal, social, activity-based, and oriented around a social good. This understanding of consciousness is important for considering the ethical complexities of teaching SRL, which tends to reflect a commitment to self-interest, radical individualism, and psychological interiority.

### Dialogue

Freire (1987, 2000) rejects adaptation without integration, transmitting static knowledge, and generating relationships of dependence. Instead, he embraces authentic dialogue with problem-posing pedagogy. Freire's (2000) view of education relies heavily upon the practice and ethic of shared dialogue in the classroom between teachers and students, in which questions or problems emerge via the interaction between classroom participants—a pedagogical commitment described as problem-posing. Presented as an alternative to banking, problem-posing is the questioning of the world. A problem-posing method of education requires dialogue as students and teachers are viewed as partners (both learning from each other), and students' ideas and questions are integral in shaping inquiry. Freire believes that the most important component of dialogue is love and dialogue could not be had without love. Darder (2009) provides a thoughtful consideration of what Freire means

by love. She states that love in his philosophy was not a "...liberal, romanticized, or merely feel-good notion..." (p. 568). Rather, Darder explains that love is the right and duty to fight, to persistently struggle to be human. Through and with love, authentic dialogue is possible in which teachers and students participate in the production of a world that mitigates inequality and affirms the humanity of everybody.

From a Freirian perspective, it is essential that pedagogy be committed to dialogue and love, while avoiding commitments to transmit a static form of knowledge and encourage adaptation to existing norms and structures. Such an education dehumanizes students by invalidating their knowledge and experiences, silencing their voices and decision-making capacities, affirming an oppressive social order, and rendering individuals in the world, not part of its production. Critical pedagogy is committed to affirming humanity of all individuals. This effort is characterized by the logic of integration, which means that through dialogue and solidarity, individuals participate in the transformation of their worlds in ways that mitigate oppression and discrimination. These are the tenets used to consider Freire's pedagogical philosophy in relation to the ethics of teaching SRL.

### **Self-Regulated Learning from a Freirian Perspective**

SRL and critical pedagogy are associated with broad educational goals of empowerment, freedom, liberation, and democratic participation. Despite these commonalities, these vast literatures are seldom merged. In the effort to merge them, there are some guiding questions: (1) to what degree is SRL tied to the transformation of social reality for the purposes of mitigating inequality and discrimination; (2) what changes in social configurations are made possible through and from SRL, or in other words, does SRL align with the logic of adaptation or integration; and (3) does SRL support efficient and effective transmission of knowledge? While there is potential for variation in responses, there are compelling justifications for viewing SRL as competing and incompatible with Freire's educational philosophy. I suggest that teaching SRL encourages adaptation, prescription, and dependency. SRL pedagogy targets personal change that renders individuals amenable to existing social orders. Teaching SRL is prescriptive because there are homogenized and preformulated ways of being, knowing, and doing. Although suggesting incompatibility by themselves, the first two charges are especially problematic given the alignment between neoliberalism and SRL. Teaching students to self-regulate their learning aligns with the neoliberal logic to produce adaptable, self-interested, responsibility-burdened individuals so they can operate within environments that are characterized by choice, competition, and personalized learning. Inscripting this kind of subjectivity is connected to dependency in two ways. First, individuals are dependent on, what Rose (1999) refers to as, "engineers of the soul" to produce oneself as self-regulated (p. 6). Second, producing self-regulated individuals creates a dependency on situational demands to institute personal changes.

Incompatibility: Adaptation, Prescription, and Dependence

*Adaptation: Transforming the World?*

Freire's (2000) concern that adaptation is a process that generates conformity and obedience to an existing social order has particular relevance for SRL. It is not uncommon for the notion of adaptation to be associated with SRL (e.g., Boekaerts and Corno 2005;

Hadwin and Oshige 2011; McCaslin and Burross 2011; Post et al. 2006; Schunk and Zimmerman 1997; Zimmerman 2002). Boekaerts and Corno (2005) state, “All theorists assume that students...*adapt their thoughts, feelings, and actions* [emphasis added] as needed to affect their learning and motivation” (p. 201). As these authors state, educational psychologists associate SRL with the adaptation of personal variables. Describing their developmental model, Schunk and Zimmerman (1997) argue that individuals are not self-regulating unless they adaptively use previously learned strategies to meet new situational demands. Although the emphasis on adapting personal variables is central, researchers also suggest that SRL involves environmental changes (Bandura 2001; McCaslin and Burross 2011; Schunk and Zimmerman 1997).

In addition to planning, managing time, concentrating on instruction, organizing, rehearsing, and coding information strategically, Schunk and Zimmerman (1997) argue that successful adaptation includes establishing productive work environments and using social resources effectively. Other ways to influence the environment include, but are not limited to, asking teachers questions (e.g., Newman 2002), selecting non-distracting peers with whom to collaborate (e.g., Zimmerman 2002), choosing models to emulate (Martinez-Pons 2002), and undertaking challenging activities (e.g., Bandura 2001). It is important to note here that the environmental changes that educational psychologists discuss are those that support the achievement of personal learning goals.

Questions about what environments are and how they change is integral for considering critical pedagogical implications of teaching SRL. Not unlike in the SRL literature, the broad notion of adaptation in educational psychology connotes both psychological and environmental changes (Piaget 1952; Vidal 1994). However, there is not always agreement about what environmental changes mean. Adaptation can involve a change in mental schemes or a change in external information to conform to schema (Piaget, trans. Piaget 1952; Vidal 1994; von Glasersfeld 1996). From this view, as Jardine (2010) suggests, environments are not “ready-made” organizations that are imposed on a “passive organism-subject” (p. 133). In other words, the environment is not a static preontological entity. Thus, adaptation involves modifying environments by using psychological schema to impose certain structures of its own. Viewing the environment as a perception and schematic production, which stems from a radical constructivist perspective (von Glasersfeld 1996), endorses the assumption that individuals have the psychological means and mechanisms to transform their worlds.

Others within educational psychology view environments and environmental formations differently. Sociocultural-oriented SRL researchers view environments as social, evolving, and co-constituted (Hadwin and Oshige 2011; McCaslin and Burross 2011). McCaslin and Burross (2011) explain:

cultural influences set norms and challenges that define what is *probable* for persons and social and cultural institutions. *Probable is malleable* [emphasis added] nonetheless because personal and social influences can resist or work to change cultural norms and expectations. (p. 327)

Although cultural and institutional forces shape environments, the logic underpinning this perspective is that individuals can participate with others to transform those contexts, which are viewed as emergent, dynamic, and malleable. From a sociocultural perspective, adaptation is not individuals changing themselves to “fit” an environment, but acting and interacting with others to give form to it. Hadwin and Oshige (2011) acknowledge this point and state that the “notion of adaptive learning extends beyond individual self-regulation and instead to the community of practice—the way learning communities adapt

and evolve as personal, social, and cultural influences come together” (p. 249). The emphasis on participation and malleability for environmental configurations brings SRL close to resembling integration.

However, although it makes sense to view environments as co-constituted and malleable, critical pedagogues are skeptical that all environments are infinitely malleable, constituted in a dialogic way, and independent of the workings of power (Apple 2006; Freire 1987; McLaren 2007). A key assumption of critical pedagogical philosophy is that there are structures independent of one’s production and constitution of them, and that such structures operate to reproduce inequality by protecting dominant interests. There are existing orders that are protected by school administrators, teachers, curricula, policy (both local and national), and even some parents and students themselves, that shape possibilities and potentialities for environmental configurations. McCaslin and Burross (2011) acknowledge this point by stating, “No source of influence—personal, social, and cultural—is equally distributed. One result, then, is differential opportunity for culturally valued, socially validated, personally desirable adaptive learning” (p. 327). Although some sociocultural researchers emphasize the malleability and co-constitution of environments, aligning in part with the logic of integration, they ignore the power dynamic in that constitution.

Schooling environments are political and ideological places that protect certain structures, ones that are not easy to change. For example, neoliberal logic continues to transform schooling in particular ways that are protected by policies, values, and culture. Neoliberalism is an economic logic that is underpinned by the idea that the best way to ensure prosperity and equal opportunity is to transform all economic and social arrangements to operate as if there were a free market. Therefore, guided by an ethic of efficiency and productivity, schools seek to optimize choice, support competition, and cultivate the necessary competencies to function within neoliberal environments, which include adaptability, flexibility, initiative, and creativity. Neoliberal reform is associated with a number of specific policies, practices, and models of education. Both products and byproducts of neoliberal reform shape schooling and produce particular pedagogical structures that are difficult to change because of the various organizational, corporate, legislative, cultural, and individual forces that protect it.

Among the many problematic policies (e.g., see Lakes and Carter 2011), neoliberalism endorses pervasive and intensely consequential high-stakes standardized testing. Interested in supporting students’ school success, some researchers focus on improving performance on standardized assessments by implementing self-regulatory interventions (Miller et al. 2009). In this regard, SRL validates the legitimacy of standardized assessments, which becomes a source for prompting personal change. Neoliberalism also endorses a social efficiency model of education. The simple premise of this model is that society has different needs and schools should prepare individuals with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to fill those needs. Notwithstanding efforts to homogenize education through the production of national standards, individuals are exposed to curricula, both hidden and explicit, that prepare them to fill roles that correspond to their existing class background (e.g., Anyon 1981; Apple 1980; Bernstein 1971; Gorlewski 2011; Journell 2011; Willis 1977). For example, some researchers observe that schools serving children from working-class backgrounds focus on obedience, monetary incentives, and rote thinking. Whereas, schools serving individuals from middle- and upper-class backgrounds focus on preparing students to be managers by cultivating problem-solving skills and creativity. Given the persistence of these curricula differences, adaptation resembles a mechanism to efficiently and effectively reproduce a social and economic order by enlisting individuals in their



voluntary participation in the reproduction of class-based norms and practices. Being an adaptable, self-regulated learner can mean that one is manageable and easily inserted into a particular structure, not being part of its transformation.

In thinking about adaptation and SRL, it is important to consider what is supposed to change, what can change, what kind of change is possible, and whose voices inform those changes. The adaptable self-regulated learner is one who can monitor, evaluate, and change, if necessary, personal variables to meet situational demands. Environmental changes are included in SRL, but reflect modest and self-interested ones. The changes that SRL researchers discuss may support adaptation to neoliberal educational structures, rendering individuals better test-takers and efficient workers. Self-regulated environmental modifications are not explicitly directed at mitigating inequalities. Although adaptation (without integration) itself is a problem for Freire, being adaptable is especially problematic within a world increasingly shaped by neoliberalism. Neoliberal schooling environments are implicated in eroding democratic citizenship, producing an intense self-interest, rendering education as an economic instrument, and reproducing inequality (Apple 2006; Biesta 2009; Lakes and Carter 2011; Rose 1998). Without attention to ideological underpinnings and stubbornness of educational environments, SRL researchers may mistake adaptation for integration.

#### *Prescription: Neoliberal Subjectivity and SRL*

Another issue with adaptability, especially as it pertains to functioning within neoliberal environments, is that it requires a specific kind of self, one that proponents of both SRL and neoliberalism naturalize. There have been century-long debates about what the self is, how it develops, and what role it plays in perception, action, and knowing. In contemporary sociocultural theorizing, Martin and Sugarman (2001) argue that the self is a kind of understanding that is embedded in particular historical, social, and cultural circumstances. The self is not a priori, but emerges as individuals relate to others, and reflect on those relations, which are embedded in particular times and places. From this perspective, the self is mutable, dynamic, and historically constituted. Teaching SRL involves constituting a particular kind of self, one that aligns with neoliberal subjectivity and middle-class conventions of selfhood. In this regard, teaching SRL involves prescribing culturally and ideologically specific ways to be, think, and act. Freire (1987) is critical of practices of prescription in general because they involve predetermined endpoints, knowledge transmission, and docility. Prescribing selfhood that mirrors neoliberal logic is specifically problematic from a Freirian pedagogical philosophy.

Explicit and broad historical analyses have not been conducted on the kinds of self and personhood that underpin SRL pedagogy. However, Martin (2007) provides a framework and essential starting point for such explorations. He discusses three types of self within educational psychology: scientific self, expressive self, and communal self. The scientific self is so termed because it is committed to the control over thoughts and behaviors through careful calculation, evaluation, and monitoring of thoughts, behaviors, and outcomes in order to be efficient and productive. This self is called expressive because it is guided by a commitment to identify, validate, develop, and express psychological states. The expressive self is defined by an imperative to identify the uniqueness and importance of emotional experiences. The scientific and expressive selves are foundational for SRL, which emphasizes personal control, self-knowledge, efficiency, and productivity for SRL. These selves, which Martin (2007) argues dominate educational psychology, are rational,

componential, controllable, knowable, interior, and oriented towards personal development. In addition, the selves of SRL are not unlike neoliberal subjectivity (Apple 2006; Rose 1998).

The neoliberal subject is a rational competitor in the marketplace, driven by self-interest and betterment as pursued and rationalized through an economic logic of productivity and efficiency. The neoliberal self strives for autonomy, fulfillment, and meaning by strategically deliberating over choices that can optimize personal value. Life outcomes are treated as a matter of personal responsibility and one's life is a project that is never complete. The neoliberal self is active, calculating, and continuously striving for betterment. Such a self is projected into the future and strategic control is exercised to shape the self into whatever it wants to be.

Researchers suggest that different cultural groups inscribe selves that are fundamentally at odds with the self of SRL and neoliberalism. Working class selfhood comes close to resembling the communal self. Martin (2007) characterizes the communal self as embedded within a time and place. It is a relational self. Unlike the scientific and expressive selves, the communal self is not committed to an ethic of self-study and self-improvement. Psychological states are not featured as the source and cause of activity and outcomes. Working-class selfhood does not arguably resemble the ideal communal self. However, there are features of this brand of selfhood that come closer to the communal self than to the other two selves. Researchers argue that in working-class environments the self is socially mediated and part of a collective identity (Jackson et al. 2000; Kusserow 2004; Lareau 2003; Schutz 2008). As Schutz (2008) contends, individuals from working-class backgrounds are likely to express selfhood in terms of collective struggle. Kusserow (2004) adds that working-class selfhood is not organized around a commitment to understand, study, and identify psychological states as sources of action.

On the other hand, Schutz (2008) argues that middle-class families celebrate children's unique characteristics and capabilities, helping them develop a sense of themselves as discrete individuals. In addition, he contends that middle-class children learn at an early age to monitor themselves and use techniques of surveillance to achieve personal learning goals. This self is constructed in relation to a number of psychological features, such as intentions, attitudes, strengths, weaknesses, and beliefs. Middle-class selfhood is characterized by a composite of psychological features that must be monitored and controlled. Weininger and Lareau (2009) argue that middle-class guardians work closely with children to develop their dispositions and skills for this type of self-management. Middle-class selfhood is individualistic (e.g., Eckert 1989), pushy (e.g., Walkerdine 2003), and entitled (e.g., Lareau 2003).

The working-class self stands in contrast to the kind of self that underpins SRL. However, there is overlap between middle-class selfhood, SRL, and neoliberalism. This brief overview points to the possibilities that teaching SRL involves prescribing a particular kind of self that endorses neoliberalism and validates middle-class conventions. Additional support for this point is detected in the discourse related to those behaviors and thought processes that are considered adaptive self-regulation. For example, help-seeking is identified as an important strategy for SRL (e.g., Bandura 2001; Hole and Crozier 2007; Newman 2002; Puustinen et al. 2008). Bandura (2001) argues that individuals cannot control every part of a social context, and therefore, must use others for the purpose of achieving personal goals. Bandura uses the notion of proxy agency to describe this process, whereas many SRL researchers use help-seeking.

Help-seeking involves particular ways of thinking, dispositions for negotiation, rational deliberations, and perceptions. Newman (2002) explains:

When students monitor their academic performance, show awareness of difficulty they cannot overcome on their own, and exhibit the wherewithal and self-determination to remedy that difficulty by requesting assistance from a more knowledgeable individual, they are exhibiting mature, strategic behavior. (p. 132)

Puustinen et al. (2008) add:

Self-regulated learners—and help-seekers—do not ask for help needlessly when they are capable of solving the problem by themselves...they confine their questions to just those hints and explanations needed to allow them to finish performing the task on their own. (pp. 161–162)

From these descriptions, to effectively help-seek, individuals must: (1) work independently by exhausting all their resources to complete a task; (2) recognize the limitations in personal knowledge, skill, and efficacy to complete the task; (3) ask certain questions that serve only to facilitate progress towards task completion; and (4) interact and negotiate with individuals who are seen as having the resources to complete the task. Students must seek help only after extensive thought and reflection (requiring self-knowledge and commitments to reflection and evaluation) and for the purpose of independently completing tasks.

This portrait of the self-regulated learner strongly reflects the neoliberal mandate to make individuals responsible for their own life projects by not only relying on independent personal changes, but also by using others as instruments to attain a personal goal. Help-seeking is also tied to the mandate to be productive and execute a plan of action. Furthermore, the representation of help-seeking in the SRL literature is entangled in class-based norms. Researchers observe differences in help-seeking behaviors and dispositions across children from middle- and working-class backgrounds (Calarco 2011; Lareau 2003; Streib 2011; Weininger and Lareau 2009). Middle-class children are described as comfortable interacting with adults as equals, operating with a sense of entitlement, possessing verbal agility, and having a psychologically informed personal learning profile. On the other hand, Lareau (2003) argues that children from working-class backgrounds are less likely to negotiate with adults, operate with a sense of entitlement, and shape external conditions to meet learning needs. Working-class children are less likely to argue with adults and more likely to silently comply with external demands than middle-class children (Weininger and Lareau 2009). According to Calarco (2011), when working-class students seek help, they do so in subtle ways, such as sitting back in their chairs. She contends that working-class students are less likely to approach the teacher for help than their middle-class counterparts. Further, Streib (2011) observes that working-class children use fewer words when talking with adults, do not use language to call attention to themselves, and do not talk to adults as they talk to each other.

Like the requirements for selfhood, there are specific kinds of behaviors, ones that map onto middle-class conventions and align with the logic of neoliberalism, that count as adaptive SRL. Therefore, teaching SRL can normalize, homogenize, and naturalize the features of personhood that are culturally and ideologically narrow. Apple (2006) argues that, "...the educational task...is to change people's understanding of themselves as members of collective groups. Instead, to support a market economy we need to encourage everyone to think of themselves as individuals who always act in ways that maximize their own interests" (p. 23). That is, teaching SRL encourages individuals to think of themselves as: (1) radically internalized, self-interested, and individualistic; (2) tied instrumentally to oneself and others; (3) committed to self-enhancement; and (4) disconnected from the

kinds of communal involvements that engender strong moral and social ties. In this regard, teaching SRL can be restrictive of ontological possibilities, and can be implicated in invalidating, marginalizing, and pathologizing communal identities.

*Dependence: Engineers of the Soul and Environmental Prompts*

Developing SRL is associated with agency and empowerment because individuals, through their own strategic skill and choices, can operate independent of environmental determination and mitigate limitations that result from behavioral and psychological factors. However, these assumptions come into question by considering the relationships of dependence involved with teaching SRL. Freire (2000) is highly critical of a liberatory goal that is achieved through the production of relationships of dependence. Of course, it is difficult to imagine a pedagogical relationship that does not require dependence of some sort, even in Freire's pedagogical philosophy. As Schutz (2000) contends, even the most individualistic and communal strategies for freedom and empowerment involve learned social practices. There are specific kinds of dependency that are encouraged in SRL pedagogy that warrant attention, especially because educational psychologists treat SRL as unequivocally an expression of human agency and proactive engagement.

Teaching students to regulate their learning involves generating an explicit and sustained attention to environmental configurations as prompts for action and to serve as a compass to evaluate personal adaptations. Being adaptable requires dependency on one's construction of the external world and a commitment to meet situational demands. This relationship is not autonomous. Using the notion of flexible, which is not unlike adaptable, Fendler (2001) explains:

the definition of flexible has come to mean response-ready and response-able; and the definition of *freedom* has come to mean the capacity and responsibility for self discipline. Obviously, response-ready cannot be an autonomous state; there must be a 'stimulus' to prompt the response. In current discourses, however, the stimuli are also flexible, meaning various and changing. There is no fixed or specified source or pattern of stimuli; if there were, the corresponding subject would not have to be response-ready, just obedient to some designated authority. (p. 122)

Fendler recognizes that environments change, making it necessary for adaptable people to remain attuned to environmental configurations. The fact that environments and responses to them vary is not a condition for autonomy: environmental cues prompt responses and environmental consequences of those responses provide the compass to evaluate choices and actions. If adaptations were not made in relation to cues and configurations, then responses may seem maladaptive, incoherent, inefficient, and willy-nilly. For this reason, Dilts (2011) argues that the adaptable person is precisely one who is manageable. He argues:

[the person] who responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment, appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications *artificially introduced* [emphasis added] into the environment.... (Dilts 2011, pp. 270–271)

The key term in this quotation is "artificial." Dilts suggests that authorities no longer have to govern individuals directly. Rather, they can shift and structure environments to govern from a distance, allowing for the perceived self-determination of actions, thoughts, and changes. The idea is that if individuals are self-regulating learners who adapt to situational

demands, then possibilities for governance occurs by modifying environments. Of course, this works only if individuals are attuned to environmental configurations and can perform appropriate responses to meet, or exceed, situational demands.

Educational psychologists distinguish between adaptive and maladaptive SRL (Boekaerts and Corno 2005). Maladaptive SRL can be those thoughts, behaviors, self-perceptions, emotions, and aspirations that compete with being efficient, productive, responsible, and competitive. Individuals must learn to be adaptive, as opposed to maladaptive, by relying on, what Rose (1999) refers to as, “engineers of the soul” (p. 6). Engineers of the souls are those authorities who serve to support individual’s effort to attain a particular goal, which is institutionally, socially, or politically endorsed. Psychologists, and those who operate with psychological discourse, are engineers of the soul who use the “psy” disciplines to work with individuals to make them visible and calculable in order to support their efforts to be become what they want to be. As Walkerdine (2003) argues, the adaptable person is “propped up and supported by a whole array of psychological support, most particularly forms of counseling and therapy” (p. 241). The point is that with guidance from others, individuals must learn to be adaptable and learn to adapt in ways that support the efficient and productive pursuit of a goal that supports an institutional, political, and social aim.

Researchers argue that all individuals attempt to regulate their learning and that SRL is a universal human feature. Yet, they also contend that not all individuals regulate themselves in the same way, for the same frequency, towards the same ends or in the same contexts. Though all individuals are believed to attempt to regulate their learning, and are capable of doing so, there are certain thought processes and behaviors that have been correlated with effective SRL. Researchers think of SRL differences in terms of qualities and quantities (Boekaerts and Cascallar 2006; Boekaerts and Corno 2005; Zimmerman 2000). Although researchers acknowledge that the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive can be interpreted differently depending on students’ goals (Boekaerts and Cascallar 2006; Boekaerts and Corno 2005), specific strategies, behaviors, and personhood are considered to be supportive of adaptive SRL. Therefore, SRL pedagogical interventions are geared towards promoting adaptability and the necessary psychological mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of one’s adaptation.

Teachers are trained to do less direct transmission of knowledge by supporting the development of personalized scripts so that students can direct themselves. In this regard, there appears to be an alignment with SRL pedagogical models and Freire’s philosophy, as he is highly critical of the transmission model of education. However, it is questionable whether or not SRL pedagogical models endorse transmission and if SRL environments invite true self-determination.

For example, Martin and McLellan (2008) state:

When students are initially learning to self-regulate, teachers must provide antecedent strategies that clearly explain outcomes, use examples and non-examples of problem-solving behaviors (i.e., persistence or improvement) ... as well as outcome behaviors (i.e., achievement or performance) and self-monitoring accuracy. Even when researchers and teachers recognize the degree of external control typically required to stimulate students’ self-regulation and attempt to reduce such supports, they most often compensate for any decrements in direct teacher instruction by strengthening self-regulatory structures in the curriculum offered. (p. 445)

The authors suggest that prescribing behaviors and thought processes includes and extends beyond teachers coaching their students. It includes shaping curricula and intervening in order to ensure students are regulating themselves in adaptable ways. A key concern is that

teaching students to regulate their learning either through direct instruction or environmental structuring is underpinned by an effort to homogenize behavioral and psychological scripts so that individuals can guide themselves in the self-directed transmission of institutionally-sanctioned knowledge. Reducing the direct transmission of knowledge in favor of supporting the development of psychological and behavioral scripts so that students can self-direct their learning only relocates the source of knowledge transmission. A student directing learning does not contradict a transmission model of education.

### Conceptual Compatibility: Instrumentalism and Similarity

The majority of this analysis is focused on the points of incompatibility between the aim of teaching SRL and Freire's pedagogical philosophy. However, there are possible ways to construct this relationship as compatible. One way is to view teaching SRL as instrumental to supporting integration. The assumption underpinning this possibility is that SRL can lead to the production of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to strategically participate in the transformation of reality. As long as SRL is not guided by self-interested goals, teaching students to self-regulate can be instrumental to the goals of critical pedagogy. Another possible way to conceptualize the compatibility is to view SRL as synonymous with critical consciousness. Educational psychologists view self-regulated learners as agentic and empowered because they learn how to create the effects they want. Again, as long as those effects are not self-betterment, but fixed on transforming the world to mitigate inequality, teaching SRL can be conceptually aligned with efforts to foster critical consciousness. Considering these possibilities for compatibility, the major concern with teaching SRL may be the ends towards which SRL is directed.

#### *Instrumentalism: Teaching SRL to Support Integration*

Critical theorists suggest that studying skills and discipline are important elements in empowerment and emancipation (Duncan-Andrade 2010; McLaren 2007; Trend 1994). Writing a letter to Freire, Duncan-Andrade (2010) associates studying with revolutionary duty. His argument rests on a quotation by Freire:

A text to be read is a text to be studied. A text to be studied is a text to be interpreted. We cannot interpret a text if we read it without paying attention, without curiosity; if we stop reading at the first difficulty....If a text is difficult, you insist on understanding it....To study demands discipline. To study is not easy, because to study is to create and re-create and not to repeat what others say. To study is a revolutionary duty. (p. 167)

For studying, Duncan-Andrade identifies a number of characteristics of SRL. These include persistence in the face of challenge, sustained attention, and discipline. In this regard, SRL seems to support critical engagement with texts by serving as a means to study, understand, and recreate texts. Trend (1994) makes a similar argument in his discussion of what he describes as the new media literacy movement. He argues that critically reading texts is not about consuming a message, but about examining dominant readings, issues of positionality, and ideological underpinnings. Trend contends that reading texts in this way "can be improved with study and that these skills can be taught to children regardless of age or grade level" (p. 235).

Duncan-Andrade (2010) and Trend (1994) are clear that discipline, skill, and persistence for understanding texts are important for critically engaging with texts. SRL seems to

have a reasonable alignment with this agenda and can be instrumental practices freedom. However, there are a few concerns. As Martin (2004) contends, improving studying strategies hardly equates to civic virtue, democratic engagement, and strong communal ties. SRL is often treated as a means to pursue self-interested goals with little recourse to the contradictions and asymmetries within social arrangements. McLaren (2007) states, “Critical pedagogy eschews any approach to pedagogy that would reduce it to the teaching of narrow thinking-skills in isolation from the contentious debates and contexts in which such skills are employed” (p. 31). Teaching students to effectively self-regulate their learning so they can increase their personal value and contribute to an economic system also competes with Freire’s critical philosophy. According to McLaren, teaching SRL without attention to the contexts in which SRL is employed can further subordinate individuals.

Like McLaren (2007), Martin (2004) leaves open the possibility for harnessing SRL for different ends. He states:

...while such innovations [development of knowledge about self-regulation] are certainly not irrelevant to the education of citizens and the improvement of human life in general, *they do not, by themselves* [emphasis added], warrant claims to the effect that psychology in education has improved our conceptions of personhood and civic life. (Martin 2004, p. 186)

Though Martin recognizes the limitations of focusing solely on teaching SRL, he does not entirely disregard its usefulness. These researchers, who operate from vastly different philosophical traditions, converge on the possibility that SRL can be integrated into an educational goal that is tied to the mitigation of injustice. Although this possibility makes sense, SRL too often is discussed in terms of individual goal pursuit and adaptability to contextual demands. SRL is not mobilized to consider the asymmetries and contradictions in curricula, nor is it mobilized in reflexive ways. SRL reflects what Duncan-Andrade (2010) calls learning to earn (the pursuit of knowledge for personal gain and learning to function well within a capitalist structure), a commitment in contradistinction to learning for freedom (challenging the prevailing logic of injustice and creating a new social order). It is not just the ends towards which SRL is directed that call into question the compatibility between teaching SRL and critical pedagogy. It is also the homogeneity and prescription of selfhood that is endorsed in SRL pedagogy, as well as the commitments to efficiency and productivity, which are foundational neoliberal commitments that are dehumanizing.

### *Conceptual Overlap*

Although it is reasonable to instrumentally tie SRL to a critical pedagogical agenda, it is also possible to detect a conceptual alignment between the self-regulated learner and critically conscious individual. Most educators see their task not simply as that of modifying or conditioning the behavior of their students. Instead, they want their students to become independent and autonomous, to be able to think for themselves, to make their own judgments and draw their own conclusions. Educational psychologists wholeheartedly associate SRL with these pedagogical goals. As Lapan, Kardash and Turner (Lapan et al. 2002) state, “self-regulated learners do more than just passively consume information that has been presented to them by others” (p. 258). Zimmerman (2000) contends that self-regulated individuals perceive themselves as capable of exerting the will and skill to affect the outcomes of their lives. As part of this perceived agency for SRL, individuals learn the

way the environment affects thinking and behavior, and therefore, can develop the tools to control the environment to support the pursuit and attainment of goals. Researchers reason that part of the humanistic quality of heightened self-control comes from the increased degree of responsibility and control of actions. Roeser and Peck (2009) state, “the cultivation of awareness and willful self-regulation are preconditions for deep learning, freedom of thought, creativity, harmonious social relationships, and myriad forms of personal and social renewal” (p. 119).

SRL carries with it connotations of social emancipation and social betterment. If the social world is oppressive, then understanding the ways individuals are influenced in such a system will help to free oneself from that system, and potentially change it. The problem with this understanding, however, connects to widespread pedagogical interventions of SRL, which can render social emancipation a result of several deposits in which individuals construe themselves in certain ways and appropriate cognitive and behavioral scripts. Another issue with viewing SRL as emancipation is that it ignores the role of context in determining “emancipation.” For example, in neoliberal environments, individuals can count as emancipated if they appropriate neoliberal selfhood and experience success as defined in neoliberal terms: economic value, efficiency, innovation, and productivity. SRL narrows possibilities for what can count as emancipation and how to pursue it. Although a conceptual alignment can be detected, the underlying assumptions and commitments in the discourse of SRL are not adequate to sustain this alignment.

## Conclusion

The emancipatory impetus is particularly prominent in critical traditions and approaches where the aim of education is conceived as emancipating students from oppressive practices and structures in the name of social justice and human freedom (Biesta 2010). The discourse of SRL is also tied to this educational agenda, as it has been tied to economic emancipation, democratic participation, and empowerment. However, when considered from a Freirian perspective, the discourse of SRL is aligned with the logic of adaptation, prescription, and dependency—three processes and practices of which Freire is highly critical. From a Freirian perspective, therefore, SRL can be construed as complicity and obedience to neoliberal governance in Western societies. This consideration of SRL pedagogy has important implications, as researchers and teachers treat SRL as a neutral, value-free form of engagement that supports student success and emancipation. From this reading of SRL, efforts to teach SRL can be seen as a way to produce narrow and normative ways of engagement that affirm problematic pedagogical arrangements.

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